

## “Tethered to God”

October 23, 2016

*Defying Gravity* series

How many of you know who this is? **SHOW Lindbergh SLIDE**  
It's Charles Lindbergh - the first person to fly across the Atlantic Ocean from New York to Paris in 1927. His plane, *The Spirit of St. Louis*, was able to make the 33.5 hour trip because Lindbergh was intentional about planning. He was a part of the design team, and he wanted it to be simple.

Lindbergh's plane had just one engine and one seat for one pilot. He went so far as to trim excess paper from navigational charts to save weight, and the plane didn't even have a forward windshield. Lindbergh navigated by using a side window and a small periscope.

Lindbergh did all of this for the Orteig Prize - a \$25,000 prize for the person who was successful at this incredible flight. There were others, but they didn't fare so well. Rene Fonck was a flying ace in World War I and had a big personality. His plane was too large with too many luxuries to actually get off the ground, and in fact, it burst into flames on the runway. Gravity defeated Fonck. He was weighed down.

Charles Levine was a millionaire whose love for drama caused a problem. Levine and his crew didn't function as a team, and so it ended up that his flight never even got off the ground.

Lindbergh was given the nickname “Lucky Lindy” because of his success, but it wasn't luck at all. It was careful planning and being intentional in planning that helped him to succeed. As we're talking about the power of financial gravity in our lives, we need to hear that careful planning and intentionality are both important when it comes to generosity. It doesn't just happen. We have to plan out generosity and be intentional about it.

Last week, I offered you that statistic that about 45% of U.S. citizens give no money to charitable organizations of any kind. I'm sure many wish they did, and probably many want to be generous. But it's easy to get bogged down like those others who wanted the Orteig Prize. Like Fonck, the flying ace, we can get weighed down by our stuff that we can't experience the freedom of generosity.

Or like Levine and his team, there's drama and conflict around financial goals and values - or there's no communication about money in families or marriages. I know the importance of talking about money from my own experience, and I'm grateful that Ivan and I have taken the time to talk about it and understand each other.

And yet, it's a challenge. I've experienced it when I talk to couples who want to be married. We talk about the fact that money and finances are at the #1 source of conflict in marriages is money. Encouraging people to talk about money honestly and make a plan is a part of what I do as a pastor.

If we want to be generous with all of the gifts we have, we must realize that generosity happens by design. To make a real contribution with time or money, we need to think about what we want to accomplish, plan a strategy that fits our other financial and time commitments, and then be courageous and act on it. We must have a clear plan of action.

Tom Berlin contends that there are three parts to nurturing generosity in our lives, and they're practical. The first one is to make a budget and stick to it. Yesterday I sent out a financial planning guide that can help us to make a budget if you don't have one already. A budget helps us to remember that finances matter to God. If faith is central to our lives, we must begin with the portion of our income that we plan to invest in the work of God's Kingdom. We offer our best gifts to God first, not what's leftover. If we're not intentional, we won't do it. Berlin says it this way: "Discipleship cannot begin after the spending ends."

And it's not just about what we give to God. A budget helps us to make sure that we're providing for the needs of ourselves and our families, and that's a biblical mandate. Notice I said "needs" not "wants." When we consider that, we can be generous with our gifts and graces to bless others. When we take the time to plan, it really makes a difference in our relationships. It makes for more healthy marriages and families.

I want you to see this video about a ropes course.

**SHOW "ROPES COURSE" VIDEO**

Notice how the person giving instructions said that you'll always be locked in with the carabiner. If we can compare working with our finances to this ropes course, then a budget is like a carabiner, the metal clip that allows us to engage and disengage as needed. A budget keeps us safely attached because there's a plan. A budget helps us move with confidence toward financial goals. When we meet our basic needs, our money is used in ways in line with God's will. We can break free and find the right balance of financial gravity. We won't be sucked into a black hole to get more and have more, nor will we be unaware of where we stand with income and expenses.

Using a budget helps us to look at the level of spending in each area so that we can balance our resources accordingly. Our generosity to others can't happen by accident, but it does happen when we become serious about being faithful stewards of our income. In good times and when trouble comes, a budget is a safety line.

After a budget, another important step in cultivating generosity is to live simply. “Live within your means” is a phrase we’ve heard. We can only figure out what we have when we make a budget to be clear on our income and expenses.

No matter our income, we can choose to break free from the “more” and “better” and “newest” culture that wants to suck us in. There are many wealthy people who choose to keep it simple. They don’t live in extravagance. They drive used cars. They shop sales and don’t buy the most expensive items. They know difference between needs and wants. They are frugal. They save. They stick to a budget. Keeping it simple is a powerful stand against the culture of more than wants to suck us in.

And yet sometimes we view simplicity as absence - we *don’t* have something or we’re missing something better. Simplicity is difficult because we struggle with the motivation to practice it. We want the stuff that everyone is trying to sell us, and we struggle to remember that it’s not that stuff that will give us a good life. But we all have spaces filled with stuff. We even need storage spaces for everything!

Remember that image of space junk and how it’s grown over the years? Here are a few other images:

**SHOW** Space junk SLIDES - a close up view, a far away view, and actual pieces of space junk that have fallen around the Earth! What’s important to note is that this stuff is no longer useful, and really, it becomes dangerous. Can you imagine a piece of that falling in your yard?

Betty Kinney took this picture in Iceland. **SHOW SLIDE**  
It’s an advertisement about the amount of plastic waste an average Icelander produces each year, which is why you see the plastic and other recycling around here today. How much stuff are we consuming? How can we live more simply? To what are we tethered? To what are we connected?  
For some maybe it’s debt. For others, our stuff. How do we take that step to live more simply and be more tethered to God?

Living simply can offer us great freedom - freedom from the pressures of debt and from the pressure of having more than we need. For many people, living simply isn’t so much about rules and guidelines as it is about discovering what brings fulfillment and joy.

So hear this: we have permission to focus on what brings us real joy and allow this to weed out what brings us less joy. Berlin says, “Simplicity is not about denying yourself. It is about avoiding things that keep you from completing your mission.”

And that’s really what Jesus and Paul are talking about in the Scriptures we read - storing up treasures in heaven and putting our hope in God - not in our finances, being

content with what we have, and standing against the desire to have what's newer and better.

Making a budget, living more simply, and finally setting goals for generosity. It might sound strange, but remember that planning and intentionality are critical to generosity. If we want to participate in the Kingdom of God, then we hear Paul telling Timothy to call the people to do good, to be generous, and to share. What does it look like for you to set a numerical goal for the good you hope to do with your time and money?

This goes back to thinking about God's call on our lives - how do we love and serve God, and where do we find that deep joy? When we're growing in generosity, it's not simply about doing things for God and the church as much as it is becoming a part of what God is doing in the world - participating in God's Kingdom. So it's important to prayerfully consider our goals for what we hope to give to ministries, organizations, and projects to which God is calling us.

I know someone is thinking, "I can't do it. I can't afford it." But I'd encourage you to set a goal that you can reach - whatever income or ability - and see what God will do. Paul says that the outcome of generosity is a good foundation for the future and the opportunity to "take hold of life that is truly life." Paul knows that we can be weighed down by financial gravity if we're not careful. And when that happens, we'll struggle to claim the abundant life that Jesus Christ offers.

Generosity doesn't just happen. Yes, God changes our hearts when we trust God, and a part of that change is becoming more generous. But we also respond and order our lives with generosity as a goal. I encourage you to make a budget and follow it, live more simply, and set goals. Please take the time to complete your Faith Commitment card for 2017. It includes prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. All of them are a vital part of our ministry and mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

May God help us to stay connected and to seek life that is truly life. May God help us to be generous.

Thanks be to God! Amen.