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***Real Life***  
***1 Timothy 6:17-19***

*<sup>17</sup> As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. <sup>18</sup> They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, <sup>19</sup> thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.*

In his book *Enough: Discovering Joy through Simplicity and Generosity*, Pastor Adam Hamilton mentions the most wonderful story about a young man who is changing the world through generosity. Talk about finding some *real life*.

**Jeff Hanson** (born September 30, 1993) is a ***philanthropic artist*** from Overland Park, Kansas. Jeff is visually impaired from an optic nerve tumor associated with a genetic condition called neurofibromatosis.

The tumor caused severe vision loss in 2005, requiring chemotherapy and radiation. Despite his low vision, Jeff sees well enough to continue creating brilliant artwork—a “sight for sore eyes,” he calls it.

You can see or order his amazing and brilliant art online at [www.jeffreyowenhanson.com](http://www.jeffreyowenhanson.com).

It’s amazing.

He loves everything bright and colorful, especially the color purple.

As a response to his disease, Jeff chose to focus on what he ***can do*** rather than what he ***can’t*** do.

Jeff can’t drive a car, but he can effortlessly apply broad strokes of vibrant colors to a canvas to create his signature style.

Life, according to Jeffrey Owen Hanson is about “lessons learned.”

Live life with a ***purpose***, he says.

Don’t let your [disease] define you.

***And be generous---for Generosity*** is contagious.

In fact, the most amazing thing about Jeffrey’s story is his ***generosity***.

He always gives to others first.  
 He gives first proceeds to the Children's Tumor Foundation through his art,  
 And he gives regularly to many other worthy causes.

When Make A Wish helped him meet *Elton John* at a concert,  
 he gave Elton John a \$1000 check for his AIDS foundation  
 that he had earned through his artwork and cards.

A few years ago he started a campaign called "ONE MILLION BY 20!"  
 And at age 19 his artwork had generated \$1 million for charity.  
 A 19 year old nearly blind man gave \$1 million dollars away.

His works hang in the homes of *art collectors* across the globe—  
 and famous celebrities,  
 and many others touched by Jeff's philanthropic soul and unique style.  
 His commissions include paintings for Fortune 500 corporations, hospitals and  
 private collectors.  
 Some people call his approach "*philanthropy-first*". [www. Jeffreyowenhanson.com](http://www.Jeffreyowenhanson.com).

But it's more than philanthropy.  
 Jeff's generosity has inspired many *people to become generous*.  
 He could live his life complaining, or being held back.  
 Instead he freely lives and gives, in generosity.  
 His business model is to give the first of his profits to those in need.  
 And it's a thriving business!

I wonder, what *would our lives be like* if we lived like that?  
 Giving first?  
 Not worrying about what we CAN'T do,  
 But filled with joy and generosity about what we CAN give?

I mean, isn't that *our Christian call*—to give first to God?  
 To tithe from what we have received?  
 To live in joy over our blessings,  
 Instead of worrying or complaining over what we lack?  
 We are called to that REAL life—a life of giving, and generosity.

When we *give the first of what we have* received to God.  
 We thrive, and in the words of Paul in 1 Timothy, we find *real life*.

18 *WE* are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, 19 thus storing up for *OURSELVES* the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that *WE* may take hold of the life that really is life.

What does that *real life* mean to you, when you hear those words?

What does it mean for you to be *rich in good works*?

***Generous, and ready to share?***

What does it mean to you,

***to store up an eternal good foundation*** for the future?

How do *you feel* when you give to God?

When has giving brought you *great joy*?

I know my *heart smiles* at our annual pie auction because I can literally picture the smiling faces and the faith of our kids—all made possible through generosity.

I have cried *tears of joy* when I hear stories about how generosity has changed someone's life—here or around the globe.

***When has giving brought YOU great joy?***

How do you see giving helping you to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ?

When do you see the amazing work God is doing, through our generosity?

How often do we think about giving in relationship to God?

As in, who God is?

Do we see God as the first and best GIVER?

Do we think of ourselves as being made in the image of God---

The greatest GIVER?

Because God is a giver, we are too!

You know, each week, we come to receive the nurture and support from worship, but we also come to ***GIVE OF ourselves***,

all that we have and all that we are, to God.

We ***come to give***, because we have been given so much through Christ.

Romans 12 says that we present ourselves as *living sacrifices* to God.

I really appreciate what ***Tom and Melissa McGillen*** had to say last Sunday

about how we all have something to give,

and sometimes that means ***stretching ourselves***

in giving of our time, talent, and money—

but when we do stretch ourselves,  
that's when we grow, AND that's when the people around us grow!  
***And it all happens when we give.***

Giving is ***who we are*** as Christians.  
And it all stems from the fact that we have this generous God,  
A ***Creator God*** who gives us life.  
A ***Holy Spirit*** who gives us direction.  
A ***Savior God*** who gave his own life for us on the cross.  
***Our own giving---comes out of gratitude*** for those gifts,  
of our amazing and generous God.

We also give because we as Christians believe something very radical.  
Something foreign to the world around us.  
***We believe that everything we have actually belongs to God.***  
We are merely caretakers and ***stewards*** of the gifts of God.

Our human inclination is to have ***pride in*** what we've worked hard for,  
We want to believe that ***all of it is ours***, because we earned it, right?

But this is not the way Christians think.  
This is not the Biblical model.  
Really--- ***God is the one who has helped us*** to have anything at all.  
God is the ***source*** of all that is good.  
We have been able to work, and earn---only by the grace and mercy of God.  
God gave us everything.

So we give because we know ***it's all God's*** resources---  
All of our time, talent, and money.  
So, as faithful people---we want our resources to be used for God's kingdom.

If you were to read the Bible from cover to cover,  
you'd find something powerful about ***worship***.  
A ***main element of worship*** from the beginning when Abraham worshipped God,  
is through ***giving***—our biblical ancestors gave a tenth or a tithe of what they had,  
their crops, their grain, and their livestock.  
And they gave to God ***first***.  
The Bible calls this giving our ***first fruits***,  
meaning it was from the first and the best of the best.  
***Not what was leftover.***

All throughout the Bible, *there is this tradition of giving the very best to God*,  
The best offerings, sacrifices, as well as the best of all  
time, and talent, and resources.

So, isn't this *still important in our worship today?*  
And in our lives of faith?  
Even in our relationships with one another?

Don't we all want to *give of ourselves* to God?  
And give *only the best?*  
When we love someone,  
we want to give them the very best we have to offer, right?  
So do we feel that same way about our relationship with God?

I know that for most people giving God ten percent,  
seems like a *huge sacrifice*—because it is.  
But it's also *NOT a huge sacrifice*.  
It's really just realizing that 10 percent is God's  
And if we give it first we don't even realize what life is like without it.  
And if we give of our first and best,  
That is the path of *joy and gratitude*,  
not fear and worry.

*Fear, and worry*-- can destroy us, right?  
Truth is, we all battle this *fear*.  
We can all be afraid, when it comes to giving.  
It's easy to think, how will we make it, if we give generously?  
But the truth is something the Bible highlights over and over again.  
When we give, there is somehow, some way,  
*More than enough* to sustain us.  
It's that fuzzy math.  
It's that very special and amazing economy of God.

Because the truth is, when we give, *God pours out blessing*.  
Malachi 3:10 says: *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be  
food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will  
not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing  
blessing.*

That God's divine economy we talked about last week.  
When we give, *we are blessed* in ways we can't imagine.

When we give, we receive the *blessing of knowing* that we are living for God, for something bigger and better than ourselves.

*Do you know what cures our fear of giving?*

**GIVING.**

Sounds crazy, but it's so true.

Scared to give?

Give!

There's something powerful about just changing our focus.

Instead of looking at what we might lose.

Instead of fearing the scarcity,

What if our focus became---all that we can do for others through our gifts?

We all know that living for ourselves never brings true happiness.

*Joy comes from giving.*

It's just as Jesus said---it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Can't you think of times when have you experienced that joy?

The *joy of giving, instead of receiving?*

I bet you wouldn't trade that opportunity to give for anything in the world, right?

But you know something else?

Generosity is a lot like love in another way.

Sometimes we *don't always FEEL like giving,*

Just like we don't always feel love.

but when we just love, the love grows within our hearts.

Same with giving.

And when we just give, the joy grows within our hearts!

As the artist Jeffrey Hanson knows so well, generosity is also contagious!

It is *powerful.*

And it can *change the world.*

I know that most of us are fighting *uphill battles* right now.

There are so many people in this church who are *hurting*—  
in body, mind, and spirit.

So many of us have mixed feelings, or are even dreading the holidays—  
when we are expected to be happy, but real life feels otherwise.

Because we are watching loved ones suffer,  
 We miss those who have passed away.  
*We are struggling* through jobs and marriages and parenting,  
 sometimes barely treading water.  
 We all face different trials and tribulations.

Which is exactly why we *need to hear some really good news*  
 And we need to find some really good life—  
 the life that really is life.

We really need to hear about what happens when we give.  
 We need to know that in giving, we can find *JOY!*  
 We need to know that when we *hurt*, we can find life, by *giving!*

*Isn't this why Christmas*, despite how hard it is for so many reasons,  
 Can be a time of joy?  
 When we take that stocking and buy for a needy family?  
 When we give to our favorite charity?  
 When we reach out anonymously to a struggling family?  
 Isn't there something joyful about getting outside our pain?

*Jeffrey Hanson* could dwell on the fact that he can't see.  
 He could get lost in self-pity over things he cannot do—or never experience.  
 Instead he has found joy, and a way *through the suffering*----  
 And that path of joy is through *giving*.  
 Giving brings a *joy* that sustains him through the darkest times.

This is something I've noticed about our *brothers and sisters in Malawi*.  
 They have such joy, from the warm heart of Africa.  
 They may have a different life than we do in America,  
 But they have figured out the key to joy,  
 and I see their joy coming their reliance upon God for  
 every need, and their willingness to share what they have,  
 all out of love and faith in our giving God!

Every single one of us can *make a difference*,  
 It doesn't matter if you live in Oklahoma or Africa—right?  
 All of us who know the living, loving God  
 The Savior Jesus Christ,  
 We can all make a difference, and we can all give—

Because we have all received so abundantly from God!  
That's life---real life.

Friends, hear the *Good News of the Gospel* for us today.

***May we all discover the Joy of generosity.***

*May we all do good, be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, storing up for ourselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that we may take hold of the life that really is life.*

*And for that, all God's people said,*

*Amen.*