

**MESSAGE: “Giving Life”**

**Texts: Proverbs 22:9; John 10:10b-18**

**Shift #5: From Survival to Generosity**

**Shift: Helping Congregations Back into the Game of Effective Ministry, Phil Maynard**

**Purpose: the purpose of this message is to invite the congregation to encounter the generous healing of Jesus.**

When we are afraid of losing something important to us, we tend to hold on tighter than ever. That is why, for example, national economies tank when consumer confidence is low. People fear loss of capital, so they hold on to what they have and do not spend or invest in speculative business. That is why the teen years of parenting may be especially difficult. The teen wants to expand his or her horizons, and Mom and Dad feel their child slipping away. Instead of talking it through, the parent overcompensates with rules which the youth then resents. ‘Holding on’ is a survival instinct which serves well when a predator threatens, yet not so well when growth is the goal. Without adaptation, we run the risk of destroying the very thing we are trying to preserve.

Sometimes churches go through this too. If attendance, programs or revenue begin to falter, there may be an effort to circle the wagons, freeze spending, curtail programs or cancel mission support. The church may pour its effort into fundraising rather than spiritual growth. There may be a strangle-hold on endowment funds which might be used to create a whole new vision. Sadly, when churches die, they often do so with money in the bank. Such churches did not have a money problem; they had a spiritual problem. Do you remember Jesus’ words in Luke 17? “Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.”

If we wish to have a glorious future, we must learn to give ourselves away in the present. In the words of Missionary Jim Elliot, who gave his life while trying to reach Auca natives of Ecuador with the message of the gospel, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” One of love’s great secrets is this: the more you give, the more you have!

Jesus did not come into this world to help us survive; Jesus came into this world to help us thrive. He phrased it this way, “I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly!” In Jesus, we see what a generous life looks like: hungry people are fed, the sick are made well, transgressors are forgiven, castaways are championed, those who are searching are taught, those who are challenged are comforted, those who are comfortable are challenged, even the dead are raised to life! He gives up lunch to help a Samaritan woman find purpose. He gives up sleep to help a Pharisee find God. He gives up agenda to

spend time with children. He gives up reputation to visit a tax collector in his home. He even gives his life to heal sins against humanity.

Generosity may certainly be sacrificial, but it may also be great fun! When I think of my younger brother Joe, who left this life several years ago, I often picture the beaming smile on his 9-year-old face one Christmas morning when he unwrapped a stereo system I was able to give him. I also saw generosity at work in the tears of gratitude of a young mother who came to our church this past December to pick up Christmas gifts which had been purchased for her children. Generosity is an adventure of joy!

I recently saw the film “Hacksaw Ridge.” It is a brutal film to watch because many of the battle scenes are graphic. The screenplay tells the true story of Desmond Doss who won the Congressional Medal of Honor for rescuing 75 soldiers from the forsaken battle-cliff of Hacksaw Ridge during the seige of Okinawa, despite his refusal to bear arms as a conscientious objector. While engaged in one of his rescue attempts, Doss pours his canteen of water over the injured man’s eyes, cleaning out the mud and battle debris. Believing that he had been blinded, the man is dumfounded to be able to see. Years later, Doss reminisced, “If I had received nothing more than that soldier’s expression when he realized he could see, I would have considered myself well-paid for my efforts.”

We often think of generosity in terms of money, but there are resources more valuable than money. A young contractor named Jack received a call from his mother one night. “Hi Jack,” she began, “I thought you might want to know that Mr. Belser died last night.” Jack hadn’t thought of Mr. Belser in quite awhile, but remembered how grateful he was for all Mr. Belser taught him about carpentry in his shop next door after Jack’s father died. It was Mr. Belser’s influence that helped him discover his life’s work. “I’ll be at the funeral, Mom,” he promised.

Busy as he was, Jack booked a flight and went to the funeral. Mr. Belser had no children or family of his own, so there were not many there. After the funeral, Jack and his Mom visited the Belser workshop. Everything was in its place, except a small gold box that Mr. Belser always kept locked on his desk. Jack had asked to see what it contained countless times. Mr. Belser would not open it, but told him it contained the most valuable thing he possessed. “I guess I’ll never know what it contained,” Jack thought to himself.

Upon his return home, Jack discovered a card that told him a package requiring a signature was available for delivery. He went to the post office next morning to retrieve it, noticing immediately Mr. Belser’s return address. He opened the package, and in his hands he held the gold box with a note which read, “Upon my death, please forward this box and its contents to Jack Bennett. It’s the thing I valued most in my life.” A key was taped to the

**box-lid. Trembling, Jack unlocked the box and found a gold pocket-watch inside. Running his fingers over the finely etched casing, he unlatched the cover. Inside were these words, "Jack. Thanks for your time! Harold Belser." A generous life makes time for others.**

**"Well Steve," I can hear someone ask, "it is all well and good to encourage us to live a life of generosity, but sometimes I don't feel like I have much to give. If only I could have met Jesus face to face with the disciples of his day. If I could have eaten with the 5,000, or received his forgiveness, heard him teach, or been healed of my affliction, then I might have something to give."**

**Here's the thing... Jesus IS here. Today. Right now. And Jesus wants to heal you. Whatever else Communion may be, it is a physical touch of healing from Jesus. "Come to me," he says, "all of you who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Bring to me your burdens: your concern over a diagnosis that has returned, your fear over a loved one with suicidal thoughts, your anxiety over bills too large to pay, your frustration with an addiction that has you trapped, your grief over a loss you cannot accept, your struggle to find placement for a parent with dementia, your hurt from abuse you did not deserve, your fatigue over holding it all together. Bring it all and give it to me," Jesus says, "let me carry it for you. Let me heal your broken heart." Generosity is not just the gifts we give; it is also the hurts we heal.**