

Sermon Series: Extraordinary Direction

Sermon Title: The Priority Indicators - Wealth & Generosity

Sermon Text: Proverbs 3:9-10 and 11:24-30

Sermon Presenter: Larry McEwen

Introduction

Today we're going to ask God to give us His extraordinary direction for our lives through our soul's compass the Bible. Our text is Proverbs 3:9-10 and Proverbs 11:24-30 if you would like to follow along. We will look at the priority indicators of wealth and generosity. Let's dive in...

Prov 3:9 Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops;

Prov 3:10 then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

Prov 11:24 One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.

Prov 11:25 A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

Prov 11:26 People curse the man who hoards grain, but blessing crowns him who is willing to sell.

Prov 11:27 He who seeks good finds goodwill, but evil comes to him who searches for it.

Prov 11:28 Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.

Prov 11:29 He who brings trouble on his family will inherit only wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise.

Prov 11:30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.

What are these verses saying? When we honor the Lord with our wealth, He honors us with His blessing! What I'm about to say is simple but profound:

The way we handle our wealth is an indicator of our priorities in life and generosity or lack thereof is where this really shows up!

And before you make a judgment about the message today, let me say this, while the first two verses are referring to the principle of the tithe, this is not a message designed to get you to give more to the church! It is, however, about becoming a radically generous person in every area of your life: possessions, time, talents, attention, and your love. By the end of the message today I pray you will make a re-assessment of your priorities in life and decide that radical generosity, in every area of your life, is one of your goals in life. The first of two indicators we will look at today concerning our priorities is our...

Indicator #1 - Wealth/Finances

Solomon indicates that wealth is a major indicator of our priorities in life. Now you might be tempted to stop me right here and say: Wealth? I'm not wealthy! I barely get by! In fact I'm struggling! So this first point doesn't apply to me! Actually, it does. When we think of wealth we

think of having lots of resources and money compared to those around us. So if you compare yourself with the wealthy people in the most wealthy country in the world, you might end up on the bottom of the list, but if you compare yourself with the majority of people in the rest of the world, or in the developing world, you might be surprised at how wealthy you are. Besides, I think Solomon was referring to our resources, our finances, great or small. When it comes to our wealth and finances we must ask...

Is my priority myself, or God and others?

Prov 3:9 Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops;

We live in this world, but our choices and the way we use our wealth, our resources, should not be dictated to us by the world. We receive our instructions from another kingdom. We need to ask ourselves this question:

Is what I'm spending my money on of eternal value!

I understand we all have bills and things we have to spend money on just to live. But what about our expendable income? And again, I realize you might say: "Expendable income? You've got to be kidding! I don't have any of that!" Maybe you don't, maybe you do, and maybe it comes down to our priorities. What does it mean by firstfruits? Let me share with you an Old Testament Scripture...

Mal 3:10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.

Mal 3:11 I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty.

This comes down to a matter of trust in The Lord to keep His promises to provide for us! The principle of the tithe was given to us to learn how to trust God. He gives us 100% and we give back 10% as a way of thanking Him for what He has given us and as a way of trusting Him to provide for us. J.C. Penny's founder, J.C. Penny, had a goal in life. It was not to be richer. It was to get to a place where his financial pie would look like this...



And praise God he did it! Another man by the name of R.G. LeTourneau, one of the greatest inventors in the world who had close to 300 patents, also lived off of 10% and gave 90%. He said this: "It's not how much of my money I give to God, but how much of His money I keep for myself." Now I realize that we would probably have to be millionaires to be able to give 90% and live off 10%, so I'm not suggesting we do that. I'm just saying that R.G. LeTourneau and J.C. Penny, both great men of God, were great examples of proper priorities. They lived lives of radical generosity! They discovered they couldn't outgive God! They had an example they followed in life and it made such a huge impact on their priorities in life! Their example and their secret to success was Jesus Christ and the priorities He had set for them. John tells us this in 1John 3:16-18...

1 John 3:16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

1 John 3:17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

1 John 3:18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

Our priority must be God first, and others second. You don't have to worry about self, because God takes care of those who have given Him first place in their lives! When it comes to our wealth and finances we must ask four questions. The first...

Is my priority one of self-reliance or reliance upon God?

Sometimes we're reluctant to give because we believe it's totally up to us to provide for ourselves and our family, so we want to make sure there's plenty of back up. The problem is that there's never really enough backup. Now I'm not saying it's wrong to have a savings account, or retirement accounts, but we need to make sure those are not what we're putting our trust in rather than God.

Once again, I realize you may not consider yourself to be among the wealthy, but compared to many in the world, our low income and lower middle income people would be considered wealthy. There are places in the world where people make around \$1.00 a day and things are even more expensive in those places than they are here in the U.S. And here's something to consider: You didn't choose where you would be born and into what circumstances. And your good health and ability to work is something many do not have. And if you put all of your stock into your own ability then you will likely put all your hope in the wealth you've earned and that hope will disappoint you and that wealth will end up being your taskmaster! When someone tells me: "I've earned this and no one helped me! I'm a self-made man or woman," I want to remind them, "you may have worked hard and used your talents, abilities and opportunities, and even grew your talents, abilities and opportunities, but the basic talents, abilities and opportunities were given to you! Our soul compass, the Bible, has a message for all of us..."

1 Tim 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

1 Tim 6:18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

1 Tim 6:19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

I love the end of that verse... "Life that is really life!"

People think that wealth and things will give them life that is really life, but money and wealth cannot give you "life that is really life!" That can only come when your priorities are ordered by your relationship with Jesus Christ and you learn this amazing truth taught by Jesus and quoted by Paul...

Acts 20:35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

You might say, “but Brother Larry, I don’t have much. My situation is very difficult right now and I just cannot give. To give \$20.00 is a stretch for me. I would love to give more! ”Please know this: It’s not the amount, it’s the heart in which it is given! God’s Word puts it this way...

2 Cor 8:12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

There's a second question we must ask when it comes to our wealth and finances...

Is my priority attached to this world or God’s kingdom

The question is, are you looking only to the here and now and what you can gather up in this world, or are you contemplating God’s eternal kingdom? Some people have millions and even billions and are still not satisfied. When you look at Vladimir Putin, who reportedly has many billions, million dollar yachts, and yet he’s willing to go to war and bomb and kill civilians. Either he wants more or he’s going to wretched extremes trying to protect what he has. But I can tell you this, he won’t take any of those worldly possessions with him when he dies. Death is a great equalizer when it comes to the rich and the poor. But for those who die in Christ we know we have eternal treasures!

Listen to these words of wisdom from Jesus...

Mat 6:19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

Mat 6:20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

God’s kingdom is our priority because we know this world is not our eternal home. We are just visitors here, passing through with a purpose. It should be our desire to make this world a better place than we found it. God would have us do all that we can to advance the cause of good, and justice in our world and the way we use our wealth is an indicator of our priorities. But before our giving can ever be right, something else has to be right. When it comes to our wealth and finances we must ask...

Is my heart in the right place or the wrong place?

Jesus said...

Mat 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

You’ve heard the bank phrase, “what’s in your wallet?” My question for you today would be, “what’s in your heart?”

Illustration:

I have some very close friends who live in Haiti. They are from the Netherlands. Els and Stephan Verolet. They are deeply in love with Jesus and the people of Haiti. When the catastrophic earthquake hit Haiti and killed as many as 200,000 people the Dutch government sent a ship to rescue all Dutch citizens. Els and Stephan's reply... "leave Haiti, no way!"

Stephan was the representative for the Nestle cooperation to the Caribbean. He could have lived anywhere in the Caribbean, but chose to live in Haiti because he felt his family could have a greater impact there. Later, he left Nestle and started a company in Haiti. He wanted to put locals to work. This past year, Els was kidnapped and held for ransom. It was a terrible ordeal, however, her release was negotiated and she and Stephan remain in Haiti serving the Lord and making a difference in the lives of people there! Truly some of the most amazing and godly people I know!

Mat 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

What we do with our wealth is an indicator of what's on the inside. What does God really want from you? Your money or your heart? He doesn't need your money but He desires your heart. And how you handle your finances indicates where your heart is. The Prophet Micah said it well...

Micah 6:6 With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

Micah 6:7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

Micah 6:8 He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

When your heart's in the right place, your priorities will follow your heart.

Whether you have a little or a lot, honor God with your wealth. I've said this so many times. It's not wrong to own things, but it's wrong when things own you! Some people have to have the latest and newest model, the most updated, the biggest and the bestest! There's multiple car payments, payments on the house, payments on the home furnishings, payments on the boat, payments on the camper, and all of the other bills as well, and you just might need the two G's, gas and groceries! So many times there's multiple jobs to pay for the multiple payments and there's no longer time for family. Sometimes when I advise the need for de-accumulation, people get defensive. It goes like this: I say... "Maybe you need to sell the camper or the boat!" They say... "but that's for our family time!" I say... "When's the last time you went boating or camping?" They say... "Can't remember, I mean we both work so much!" So many times we are well meaning, but we can easily get our priorities out of whack and when we do our family and our spiritual lives suffer. It used to be called "Keeping up with the Jones!" Once again, it's not that it's wrong to own a new car or boat or camper, but we need to keep things in proper perspective! My wife and I have a nice pickup we bought from her Dad when he decided to just get a car and stop climbing into a pickup truck. We have a truck payment, but It's nice to have a

reliable vehicle to travel to Tennessee to see her dad and our grandkids. And I still have my 1948 Chevy pickup I pulled out of the woods over 35 years ago and I hope to drive it to cruising the coast some day, but it's not my priority in life! My Lord, my family and my ministry take priority over things. Now let's look at the second priority indicator...

Indicator #2 - Generosity

generosity |,jenə'rasitē| noun

the quality of being kind and generous: • the quality or fact of being plentiful or large (Oxford)

Whether you are generous or not indicates where your priorities are! As followers of Christ we should desire for generosity to become our M.O. and to even be radical about it.

radical |'radikəl| adjective

1 (esp. of change or action) relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something; far-reaching or thorough

• forming an inherent or fundamental part of the nature of someone or something (Oxford)

Why be radical? Because generosity is “the quality of being kind and generous”, and radical means that it will “form an inherent or fundamental part of the nature of me!” Jesus had it and I want it. Our text gives us a good description of what makes up radical generosity!

Radical Generosity has a Radical Motivation

Prov 11:24 One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.

A person with radical generosity is not motivated by what they will get in return! Radical Generosity does not depend upon return. Radical generosity gives for the pleasure of giving. It gives because it is good to give. It gives because it will help or better someone else's lot in life. It gives when there is no possibility of getting anything back. That's radical. Jesus spoke of radical generosity ...

Luke 6:34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full.

Luke 6:35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

Luke 6:36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

That last verse is the kicker “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” God has been radically generous to us and we are to be radically generous to others. Not just our friends, everyone. Jesus also said...

Luke 6:32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them.

Luke 6:33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that.

I was given a book by one of our former leadership team members called "Mentor Like Jesus." He was mentioned in the book. Kinda cool! Listen to this excerpt from the book by Reggie Campbell..

"About 350 years after Christ, the Roman emperor Julian (AD 332-363) wanted to reinstitute faithfulness to the pagan religions of Rome but struggled because Christians were doing such good things for people, even strangers, that they rendered the Roman gods irrelevant. Wouldn't it be cool to render the pagan gods of the twenty-first century irrelevant by having millions of Christ followers become so genuine in their faith that they changed the world with their kindness, mercy, and generosity?" Regi Campbell

Radical Generosity has a Radical Reward

Prov 11:25 A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

A radically generous person will prosper! This doesn't mean they will get filthy rich in a material kind of way. Oh they will have all they need and more, but this verse goes on to say "he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed." One of the most refreshing rewards of radical generosity is knowing that you have refreshed someone's life! You've helped them in a meaningful way. And you may be called to help those whom the world has forgotten. The writer of Hebrews wrote...

Heb 13:3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

One of the rewards is knowing we have blessed the heart of God! He does not forget the good we've done for others and in fact He takes it personally when we've helped others. One of the greatest ways to love God is to love others by being radically generous. Listen to what our Soul Compass has to say about this...

Heb 6:10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them.

Let's just say you found out about a pressing need someone had and you were able to help. If not in a financial way, maybe in some other capacity, like cooking a meal, sitting with someone who is ill, taking someone on an errand who has no car, or maybe once a month visiting an elderly person at a nursing home. You may never hear it, but there's a chance this could happen...

2 Cor 9:13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

2 Cor 9:14 And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.

2 Cor 9:15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"

Radical Generosity has a Practical Side

Prov 11:26 People curse the man who hoards grain, but blessing crowns him who is willing to sell.

Prov 11:27 He who seeks good finds goodwill, but evil comes to him who searches for it.

The issue back in Biblical times was this; People needed grain to make food, but sometimes a person who had the grain would store it away waiting for the price to pick up even though people were starving. Radical Generosity is not just about giving things away. It's about being fair, honest, and generous in the way you conduct your business. Is the profit motive always your guiding principle or are there higher principles that guide your decisions. Don't get me wrong, it's not wrong to make a profit, but there is the question of fair and right. And maybe we just need to remember this...

Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,

Colossians 3:24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Practically speaking, if you are a business person and you treat people fairly, even generously, you will win their loyalty and repeat business. It just makes sense. I can't tell you the times I've been to a business and have been treated like it was an inconvenience just to be waited on. I'm thinking, seriously, how do you stay in business? Here's some good business advice from our Soul Compass...

Prov 11:1 The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight.

Prov 11:3 The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.

Radical Generosity looks for ways to give. The integrity of the upright guides them to find ways to help, to serve, to encourage, and to share the blessings of God! And I'm not only talking about giving money or things away. God wants us to be radically generous in every area of our lives. Are you generous with your talents? Are you generous with your time? Are you generous with your knowledge? Are you generous with your encouragement? Are you generous with your service? Are you generous with your kindness? Are you generous with your love? How many hoops does someone have to jump through before they are accepted by you? How many hoops for your children, your spouse, your co-workers. I'm so glad that God doesn't treat me like an

animal in the circus that has to jump through hoops to get a treat. But some of us treat others that way. That shouldn't be. A person who has allowed generosity to become a part of who they are does not get irritated when an interruption of schedule occurs because of someone's need. They see it as a divine interruption. Never forget this truth. When it comes to having an opportunity to help someone, that opportunity may not last. In fact, someone once told a missionary friend of mine who had the chance to help lead a major effort to help people in Haiti after the earthquake of 2010...

"The opportunity of a lifetime only lasts the lifetime of the opportunity!"

Seize the opportunity to be radically generous when God allows the opportunity to come to you. It's called sensitivity to God's Spirit. I'm not talking about enabling people to continue bad behaviors, but helping those truly in need. Let God guide your steps, your actions, your time, and your generosity. Remember, we are but stewards. What we have is not ours, but God's. Don't forget to ask Him how you are to manage His assets. Paul said...

Gal 6:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Gal 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Radical Generosity has a Radical Faith

Prov 11:28 Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.

People who are not radically generous struggle with the concept of faith. They are afraid to be radically generous because they don't want to give away what they trust in! But a person of faith realizes that God is responsible to supply our needs, while we are responsible to be good stewards. Listen to Paul's words to the Corinthians...

2 Cor 9:6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

2 Cor 9:7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

A radically generous person has a radical faith and knows that God would never instruct them to be radically generous if He were not going to meet their needs. Listen as Paul continues to instruct the Corinthian Church...

2 Cor 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

2 Cor 9:9 As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

2 Cor 9:10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

2 Cor 9:11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion...

Radical Faith takes God at His word! It trusts in God's integrity, honesty, and generosity. It trusts God to provide for our needs as we reach out in His name to provide for the needs of others?

Radical Generosity has a Radical Impact

Prov 11:29 He who brings trouble on his family will inherit only wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise.

Prov 11:30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.

The person who is not radically generous, but rather, stingy or greedy, brings trouble to his or her family. On the other hand, the person who lives a life- style of generosity, brings a level of protection to their family. How so you might ask?

A Radically Generous person provides a level of protection to the family from greed, selfishness, and wrong priorities.

A Radically Generous person provides an example to his or her family of the truly important things in life and what brings true fulfillment.

Remember I said a level of protection. Your children or spouse still has the freedom to reject your example, but they will have to do so over the Godly example of a Radically Generous person. Have you ever really looked at this verse? It sounds really cool, but when you look at it closely, it is at first a bit strange. It says "the fruit of the righteous is a tree" Wait a minute. How can the fruit be a tree? Simple, the fruit is a seed, or carries within it the seed. The fruit of the Radically Generous person is righteousness and that righteousness takes root in another person's life and a tree is born. That tree will produce fruits of righteousness that will take root in someone else's life. In fact the second part of that verse is one of my all time favorites. "He who wins souls is wise." A Radically Generous person impacts the world by winning souls. And what does it mean to "win souls"? You live such a radically generous example that others are moved to examine the claims of Christ. They see how radically generous He was towards them, in mercy, forgiveness, love, acceptance, etc. that they decide to follow Jesus and become radically generous in their lives.

You'll leave all your earthly possessions behind when you leave this world no matter how hard you try to hold on to them. Some of those things might be helpful to your children or to others in a material way, but my question is this...Why not leave something behind that will make an eternal difference. Leave behind an example of Radical Generosity. The world will be a better place as a result and you will someday, in heaven, meet some of those souls you won. Souls that were turned on to Jesus and set free from the snares of greed and selfishness found in this old world.

Jesus talked about bearing fruit that will eventually become fruit bearing trees themselves...

John 15:8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Ok, this God who asks me to be Radically Generous, does He practice what He preaches?
I will leave you with a few words of Jesus, that answers your question...

John 15:12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

A radically generous person will be taken care of by God! It's His promise, it's His commitment, it's His covenant, it's His heart! You can't out generosity God!