

INTRODUCTION

We have declared that 2013 is the Year of Discipleship and our key focus is when Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23) We're examining the five genetic traits of a disciple.

DNA tests have proven conclusive in determining the identity of people, even those who have been dead for many years.

An archeologist went to Vienna to dig up the grave of Ludwig Van Beethoven. When he unearthed the casket and opened it, he found Beethoven holding a copy of the musical score of his famous Fifth Symphony. Beethoven had an eraser in his hand and he was feverishly erasing the musical score. The archaeologist said, "What are you doing?" Beethoven looked up and said, "Why, I'm decomposing."

That's a joke, but it's true that a famous person's grave was just unearthed. Just a few days ago British scientists confirmed the skeleton found buried beneath a car park in London was King Richard III. Richard was killed in battle in the War of the Roses in 1485 and the location of his remains had been a mystery until now. The physical evidence of the curved spine of the skeleton matched descriptions of Richard's scoliosis. But the test that confirmed his identity was DNA. There are two living descendants of Richard's sister, Anne of York, and they provided DNA samples. Then scientist compared their DNA with the mitochondrial DNA from the bones of the skeleton. Bingo. It was a match. DNA can be used to identify a person even hundreds of years after their death.

If someone started digging into your spiritual life, would they discover your spiritual DNA is a match with Jesus Christ? During this series we've examined five genetic markers of a disciple. There's the Gathering Gene: A disciple shows up consistently. There's the Gifted Gene: A disciple serves up sacrificially. There's the Growing Gene: A disciple grows up spiritually. There's also the Group Gene: A disciple links up relationally. Today we're going to talk about the Generosity Gene: A disciple offers up faithfully.

2 Corinthians 9:6-11. "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 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. As it is written: [this is a quote from Psalm 112] 'He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.' 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. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."

We're all very familiar with the U.S. economy because it touches our lives every time we get a paycheck or go shopping. Beyond the U.S. economy there is the global economy. But there is another economy operating in our world—God's economy. It is not subject to the fluctuations of

stock prices or commodities futures. It is as rock solid as God Himself. If you are operating in God's economy you are guaranteed a life of blessing.

I believe there are four pillars to God's economy. They are God's supply, God's design, God's cycle and God's promise. In this message I want to examine all four of these four pillars. If you haven't bought into God's Economy yet, it's time for you to make a radical change and start living a life of generosity.

1. A DIVINE SUPPLY: God is the source of every blessing in your life

So, what is the source of your income? You may want to say it's your job—but God gave you that job. He owns the company. You may think your source of income is the stock market. God owns the stock market.

Speaking of the stock market, it's up now, but it will go back down—and then back up. In fact, I'll give you my take on the fluctuations on the stock market last week: Helium was up; feathers were down; paper was stationery; knives were up sharply; cows steered into a bull market; pencils lost a few points; hiking equipment was trailing; elevators rose, while escalators continued their slow decline; light switches were off; mining equipment hit rock bottom; diapers remained unchanged; The market for raisins dried up; Coca Cola fizzled; Caterpillar stock inched up a bit; balloon prices were inflated; Birds Eye peas split; Black and Decker filed Chapter 11; and Charmin Tissue touched a new bottom.

Paul says God is one who supplies the seeds to the sower. That means every good thing in your life has come as a gift from God. The Bible says in James 1:17 that "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights." The Bible says God owns everything valuable in the universe.

We don't own anything; we only *manage* things for God for a brief period of time. Have you come to a place where you realize God is the source of your money? You might want to disagree with that statement with the response. "I work hard for my money, so hard for the money, so you better treat me right!" Whether you worked for it, won it, found it, or received it as a gift, God is the source of it all.

If you're tempted to think you earned what you have and it's yours to keep, consider this statement from God's Word, "You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth." (Deuteronomy 8:17-18)

I don't own a house; I live in a house that belongs to God. You may think, "Doesn't a mortgage company or a bank really own part of your house?" God owns every bank and mortgage company in the world.

I don't own a car. I drive a car God owns. I don't own a computer. I use a computer God owns. I don't own my brain; God made it and it belongs to Him. God owns everything, and He has graciously allowed us to manage a portion of it.

So, here's a quick question. You made \$1,000 last week. How much of it belongs to God? If you said \$100 you still don't get it. It ALL belongs to God.

2. A DIVINE DESIGN: God designed you to be a channel of His blessing, not a container

Some people are selfish and stingy and others are generous. Christians don't always have the reputation of being generous. Are you a generous person by nature? A few weeks ago, a Pastor in St. Louis was eating at Applebee's with some friends after church. They asked the server to split the check. Because it was a group of over six an 18% tip was already included.

But this pastor, whose name was Alois Bell, didn't like that so she marked out the tip amount and changed it to zero. Then she left this comment: "I give God 10%, why do you get 18%." Another server in the restaurant saw the receipt and took a picture of it and it went viral. Pastor Bell called the restaurant and demanded the restaurant fire the waitress who had taken the picture. Applebee's fired the employee.

But this picture and the story had generated a firestorm of animosity toward Pastor Bell. She has apologized and admitted that she brought shame and reproach on the name of Christ. But the damage is done.

Talk to servers at restaurants and they'll probably tell you Christians are some of the stingiest tippers they ever serve. Last year a study about tipping was conducted by Michael Lynn at Cornell University. His findings showed Jews and people with no religion tip better than self-identified Christians. They even sometimes joke about the C.A.T.S. who fill their restaurants on Sundays after church. That stands for "Christians Against Tipping Servers."

It's an old joke, but "What's the difference between Christians and canoes? Canoes tip." To make it worse, some Christians don't leave money; instead they leave a cheesy gospel tract, a practice called tipping with a tract. There's nothing wrong with leaving a tract, but leave a big tip with your tract. When the server brings my food I will sometimes mention to them that we're about to pray and is there anything I could pray about for their life or family? Sometimes they just say, "No thanks." At other times, the tears have started to flow as the server tells me something painful happening their lives. So I pray for them while they are usually there joining our prayer. But I always leave a big tip when the meal is over and mention that I'll be praying for him or her.

God designed you to be generous. He made you to be a channel of blessing, not a container. Among waterways, a channel has no other purpose than to connect two other bodies of water. It's not designed to hold water like a reservoir, but to move the water from a source to a destination.

In the same way God designed you to be a channel through which He may bless others. He doesn't want you to receive His blessings and store or hoard them for yourself. He designed you to pass on His blessings to others. Jesus said, "If anyone is thirsty, let Him come to me and drink ...streams of living water will flow from within him." (John 7:37-38)

God designed you in His image. His nature is to give. He gave light to a dark world. He gave life to a clump of clay and called him Adam. He gave variety to the world by creating all the amazing animals. He gave His only begotten Son. God is a giver and that's the way He designed us. The Bible says, "We must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:35)

A&E has a television show called "Hoarders." I don't know that I've ever seen an entire episode, but I've clicked on it while channel surfing. It is both bizarre and sad. Some people have a sickness that causes them to store and hoard everything until they can't even walk through their houses.

Before you are quick to criticize hoarders, you might be the kind of person hoarding dollars or stocks or collectibles. You have devoted your life to storing up more treasures on earth than you could ever spend in one lifetime. Jesus said the problem with storing up treasure on earth is that moth and rust can destroy them, and thieves can steal them. There's a better place to store your treasure—and that's in heaven. You store your treasures in heaven when you are generous for the cause of heaven: Bringing men and women to faith in Jesus Christ.

3. A DIVINE CYCLE: The more you give away, the more there is to give away

The early church was generous. We read in Acts 4:34-35, "There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need."

But lest you think this early church was perfect, they had those who were truly generous, but there also some who were greedy, but wanted to appear as generous.

There was a couple in Acts 5 named Ananias and Sapphira who sold some property as well. Wanting to appear generous, they brought the money to the church. But they only gave a portion of the money; they kept the rest to spend on themselves. Now there wasn't anything wrong with giving half and keeping half. But they lied about it. When asked, they insisted they were donating the full price they had received. This incident reveals that God takes our giving very seriously.

Peter confronted Ananias and gave him a chance to tell the truth. Ananias maintained his lie. Peter said, "Ananias, how is that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." (Acts 5:3-4)

Not long after, both Ananias and his wife died untimely deaths. It's a dangerous thing to lie to God about your offering. Just keep that story in mind when you're reporting your charitable giving on your Income Tax Schedule A over the next few weeks!

A.W. Tozer a modern-day prophet in the 20th century wrote: "There is a disease, which is particularly virulent in this part of the twentieth century. It is called cirrhosis of the giver. It was

actually discovered about 34 A.D. and ran a terminal course in a couple named Ananias and Sapphira. It is an acute condition, which renders the patient's hand immobile, when it attempts to move from the billfold to the offering plate. The remedy is to remove the afflicted person from the house of God, since it is clinically observable that this condition disappears in environments such as golf courses, shopping malls, or restaurants."

Being generous isn't just a good idea. Jesus commanded us to give. Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Luke 6:38)

The same measure you use to give is the measure God uses to give back to you—but because God is bigger than you, His measure is bigger. If you give with a teaspoon, God gives you a teaspoon of blessing, but his spoon is bigger. If you give with a cup, His cup is bigger. If you give with a shovel, He shovels back, and His shovel is larger. If you give with a bucket, His bucket is bigger. If you give with a dump truck, listen for the beep, beep, beep. His dump truck is much larger. So you get to decide which measure God uses by the measure you use!

God has a simple generosity cycle: Give and it will be given to you. God blesses you so you can pass the blessing on to others. When you give it away, He gives you more blessings.

You may be thinking that God hasn't blessed you in a while. Maybe you broke the cycle a while back. If you want to get the cycle going again, start giving again.

4. A DIVINE PROMISE: When you honor God with your income, He will meet all your needs

God has promised He will meet all your needs, not all your desires, but your needs. And we don't need a lot of things. The Bible says if we have food, clothing, and a roof over our heads, we should be content.

The Bible says, "Godliness with contentment is great gain." (1 Timothy 6:6) People live on one of three levels of "enough." First, some live on the "not enough" level. You may think I'm referring to poor people, but your economic level has nothing to do with contentment. A few years ago Bob Costas interviewed Jerry Jones, after he opened the new Texas Cowboys Stadium. In a moment of introspection, Costas asked Jerry Jones what his greatest fear in life was. Without hesitating, Jerry Jones said his biggest fear was running out of money. Let's see, he bought the Cowboys in 1989 for \$150 million and the franchise is worth over \$2 billion today. I think it's safe to say Jerry lives in the "not enough" world. He will never be content.

Many others live at "the just enough" level. They are satisfied with their standard of living. They don't have much, but God is meeting their needs. When I think of contentment I think of the story of the old man, obviously poor, sitting at his table with a loaf of bread and he says, "All this, and Jesus, too!"

But there's another level where many of us live. If you are honest with God you might admit you have "more than enough." You have all your needs being met, and many of your extras and

luxuries are added in as well. If you have more than enough you should be looking for ways to give away more and more. Don't worry about running out; God will meet your needs.

The key is to honor God FIRST instead of giving Him your leftovers. The Bible says, "Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine." (Proverbs 3:9-10)

Here's a financial plan that will allow you have all your needs met, and it will get you in on God's generosity cycle. It's called the 10-10-80 plan. You give God the first 10% of your income. Then you set aside the next 10% for savings so you don't have to borrow for everything you purchase. Then you live on 80% of your take-home pay.

You say, "Pastor, I can't do that. I'm barely making it now." The only way this plan works if for you to reduce your living expenses. If you're living beyond your means, you're already in trouble. To put it another way: If your outgo exceeds your income, then your upkeep will be your downfall. If you can't live by the 10-10-80 plan now, it's time for radical surgery on your expenses. The smartest thing you'll ever do is to put God FIRST in your financial life.

I once heard Dr. W. A. Criswell tell a story about a young businessman in his church, whom he called Jim. Jim visited Dr. Criswell and asked him to pray for him to succeed in business. After they prayed, Dr. Criswell asked him how much he was making now and the man said, "Forty dollars a week." Dr. Criswell asked him to make a commitment to tithe, so the young man started giving \$4 a week to the Lord's work.

A couple of years later God had blessed Jim and he was making \$500 a week. He visited Dr. Criswell and said, "When I was making \$40 a week it was easy to tithe \$4, but I can't afford to tithe on \$500 a week. Do you think the Lord will release me from my pledge?"

Dr. Criswell said, "Let's pray about it." They got on their knees and Dr. Criswell prayed, "Lord, thank you for blessing Jim. But now, Lord, please reduce Jim's salary back to \$40 a week so he can afford to honor you again. Amen." Of course after the prayer, Jim continued to tithe. Dr. Criswell said Jim became one of the most successful businessmen in Dallas and he never stopped tithing.

J. L. Kraft, the founder of Kraft foods, said: "The only investment I ever made which have paid constantly increasing dividends, is the money I have given to the Lord. Pastors will do their greatest service in leading their men to understand the truth of God concerning the stewardship of time and money."

John D. Rockefeller, a Baptist believer and the founder of Standard Oil once wrote: "I never would have been able to tithe the first million dollars I ever made if I had not tithed my first salary, which was \$1.50 a week."

CONCLUSION

Wendell Gill is the pastor of First Baptist Church, LaPorte, Texas. The church members decided

Pastor Gill had been working too hard, so they gave him and his wife, Cindy, a gift. The church paid for them to go on a relaxing cruise. The only problem was they were on the Carnival Triumph, the cruise ship that lost power recently. Pastor Gill said it was a great three-day cruise that turned into a bad four-day camping trip.

As the full crisis became known, Pastor Gill said it became a tale of two ships. Some people were hostile and acted selfishly. With food and supplies delivered from the Coast Guard and other cruise ships; it was obvious they were never in danger of starving. But Pastor Gill observed that many people were hoarding food and pushed their way to the front of the line. They refused to share their food supplies. Some got into arguments and fights even broke out.

But Pastor Gill said there was another group: There were also many kind and generous passengers. He organized a daily prayer meeting that grew to almost 300 people. They prayed for the safety and health of the passengers and for the family members back on shore. When Pastor Gill noticed many elderly people couldn't relocate their beds to where the air was fresher he organized an effort to move their mattresses from the lower decks. His group freely shared their food and supplies with anyone who didn't seem to have enough.

He said there were many passengers who became sullen and bitter. They isolated themselves and only complained. Then there were others who made the best of the situation and used the time to make new lifelong friends.

So, I'm sure you're glad you weren't on that cruise ship. But how do you think you would have acted or reacted in that situation?

That crippled ship was a microcosm of our society. We're all live in a fallen, sinful, stinking world. It's much like a crippled cruise ship. And some people are selfish hoarders. They want to get all they can, can all they get, and sit on the can, and poison the rest. Their goal in life is to look out for #1.

But when you are a follower of Jesus, you find yourself become more and more generous. You don't hoard God's blessings you share them. Generosity involves passing on to others the blessings God has given you to.

So here are the four pillars of a life of generosity. God's Supply; God's Design; God's Cycle; and God's Promise. Are you operating in God's economy?

Someone sent me the anonymous observation, "First I was dying to finish high school and start college. And then I was dying to finish college and start working. And then I was dying to marry and have children. And then I was dying for my children to grow old enough for school so I could return to work. And then I was dying to retire. And now, I am dying...and suddenly I realize I forgot to live." Real living is found in God's blessing cycle. He gives you to and you give away. He gives you more and you give away more, so that He can give you even more ... this generosity cycle is really a life cycle!

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes