



Date: May 14, 2017

Title: "Gifted Past, Bold Future, Part 3: Generosity Generates Generosity"

Scripture: Matthew 6: 19-21

Description: Regardless of how anonymously or privately you give, your generosity will have an effect on others.

It happened in a church in the Southeast. Preliminary study said they could raise \$1.8M, but they needed \$3.2M to build their new sanctuary.

There was a lady on the Prayer Team, well known to most of the people in the church. Her name was Regal. She had an infectious enthusiasm about the church and the ways her life had been enriched there. Regal had struggled for much of her life with MS, but she had managed to maintain a modest job, and she was always in church.

As the campaign was picking up its pace, she came and talked to the pastor, "I've never had a large income, but I have always given 10% to the church and now I've been praying about what to give for this campaign. I don't know how I'm going to make an extra gift."

The pastor listened carefully, then responded, "Regal, don't worry about this. You don't have to give to this campaign. You already practice such faithful generosity. We understand not everyone will be able to give an additional gift. We love you and we're glad you're here. Just pray for the campaign and ask God to guide us. Like they say, 'Lord, what do you want to do through me?'"

So Regal prayed. A week or so later, she felt she had an answer. She went to her safe deposit box at the bank to retrieve one of her most prized possessions –her grandmother's antique brooch, given to her when she was 21 years old. She went directly from the bank to the jewelry store to have it appraised and was told it was worth \$1800. She obtained a letter to that effect and then headed for the church.

"Pastor, this is not much but it's what I want to give to this effort. This is my grandmother's brooch. Here is the appraisal letter. I hope you can get \$1800 for it. I want to help."

"Regal, are you sure you want to part with this?" "Yes, it's a gift of my treasure and I want to contribute to this."

So the pastor kept it, but did nothing with the brooch. Word got out, as it does, and people began to talk: "We can't let her give that up! Let's buy it back for her." It started in one weekly Bible Study group and then spread to the adult Sunday School classes. In the end, 258 families "bought back the brooch," giving \$1800 apiece. That brooch turned into \$464,400.

This was in the fall, and as Christmas approached, there was a special service on Sunday evening. At the time for the offering, Regal was called forward and asked to face the congregation. They informed her that everyone in attendance that night had "bought back the brooch" and how her faith had multiplied across the congregation. And they presented her with the brooch in a tender ceremony of gratitude and love.

When the campaign results were announced, the church that was only supposed to raise \$1.8m, had received commitments of \$3,678,000. In the lobby of that sanctuary today there is a small frame with a piece of jewelry inside and the inscription reads 'This building was built with a brooch.'

Generosity generates generosity. In Biblical language, generosity begets generosity. Regardless of how anonymously or privately you contribute, what you give will affect others. Generosity leads to more generosity.

Almost twenty years ago, when we held a capital campaign to build this sanctuary, Debbie and I talked and prayed about our own gift. At that time we were relatively cash poor. But we had a car. A 1968 vintage Mustang convertible. Cherry red. Completely restored. Several years before, when that car had first arrived in my driveway, my son's eyes got wide. "Dad, can I take that car to the prom?" "Certainly," I promised. "I'll be your chauffeur."

"Lay up for yourselves treasures," the scripture says. "...treasures in heaven." That red Mustang was our treasure. When we decided to give it to the church, we both felt good about it. Whatever the car sells for, that goes towards the sanctuary.

The next year, one of the guys in our men's breakfast group presented this gift to me—a cherry-red Mustang convertible, vintage 1965. It has had a prize place on my desk ever since. (Let me assure you, it gets much better gas mileage than the original one!)

Six years later, 2004. The sanctuary had been constructed and we'd been worshiping here several years. I was in my office one afternoon when a gentleman dropped by. "Got a minute, pastor?" he asked. "Sure," I said. "Come on in."

"You remember when you gave your Mustang to the church for the sanctuary fund?" "Of course. You think I'd forget something like that?" "Well, I was impressed by that gift. I've been thinking about it. Could you come outside for a minute?" We walked out to the parking lot, where I saw a Mustang Convertible. Not 1968 red, but 1991, white. He handed me the keys. "It's yours," he said. "I'm not sure the church

can find a use for a Mustang convertible," I said. "Not the church," he explained. "It's yours personally."

"Wait," I protested. "My son is six months away from receiving his learner's permit. With a brand new license in his wallet, I can't have a muscle car like this for him to drive. But how do I tell him he has to ride the school bus while that car is parked in the driveway?"

"As of today, it's your car," he replied. "You do with it whatever you like." And he handed me the keys as he left. I had a lot of fun with that car for six months. My son got to test drive it once, with me riding shotgun. The week he got his license, I sold it.

Generosity generates generosity. We gave away one car; two cars were given to us! By the way, we used the funds from that sale to help someone meet some emergency medical bills. If we kept that money ourselves, it would have felt like we hadn't really participated in the church's dream for this sanctuary and we wanted to be part of this. Besides, generosity generates generosity.

Deb and I don't have a Mustang to contribute to this campaign. (Well, we do, actually—the one that has been on my desk—but we both want to offer more than that.) We have talked about it, in a continuing conversation that's covered both several morning cups of coffee and several evenings. We've settled on an amount that frightens us a little. But the amount is one that also elevates our heartbeat and feels like an adventure. We believe that's the Spirit of God tipping the scale away from fear and towards faith.

Who knows how the story of this gift will end for us several years from now? If it goes like the Mustang story, we may be operating a used car lot! What about you? How will the story of your generosity end? Nobody knows, but with God's Spirit, it will be better than you imagine. Your part is to decide how it will begin.