



GENEROSITY

THE JESUS JOURNEY

Just a few miles away from Jesus' hometown of Nazareth stood a palace erected during his youth. It was one of seven palaces that Herod the Great had built for himself in Palestine. Each palace was bigger than Caesar's one palace in Rome. These government building projects, which also included the highly popular rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, employed thousands of people and most likely kept the business of Jesus' father, Joseph, and most other tradesmen from Nazareth steadily employed throughout Jesus' lifetime. Herod's business savvy afforded him the opportunities to make deals with Caesar that gave assurances for a stabilized region in return for a monopoly of the high-margin spice trade, which moved from east to west through Palestine. The people of Palestine were ruled by a self-absorbed, opulent tyrant. Herod's worldview was for Caesar and self, Rome and riches, here and now. Jesus' worldview centered on God and others, giving and sacrifice, now and eternity. Jesus needed to address these obvious differences and offer a better way to live and lead. This is what great leaders do.¹

Jesus didn't avoid the topic of wealth; instead, he focused on it.

Throughout the three years of his team's leadership development, wealth and possessions were items on Jesus' agenda. When Jesus wished to give clarity to a significant point, he often used a financial illustration. Of all the parables he shared, nearly half were about money or possessions. The Scriptures contain more references to money and possessions than hell, heaven, faith, and prayer combined!²

Why was Jesus so concerned with money? He knew people are often consumed by it. The people of Palestine were living amid financial squalor under Herod's tyrannical rule. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus exposed Herod's worldview by contrasting generosity with greed. He painted a picture of a world blessed by generosity – a picture of needs being met, chains being unshackled, and joy overflowing when people pursue God and His agenda.³

How then do leaders become generous when the culture is so greedy? The answer is to know and follow the way of Jesus. Jesus' life was marked by radical simplicity that gave him freedom from material possessions. Even for non-Christian leaders, simplicity is so freeing. Warren Buffett has lived in the same home for fifty years and has always driven a simple car. Steve Jobs lived in a modest house.

Author Richard Foster outlined some significant steps to cultivate a simple life: buy things for usefulness rather than their status; reject anything that is an addition; develop a habit of giving things away; learn to enjoy things without owning them; create a greater appreciation for the Creator and his creation.⁴

In Jesus' worldview sermon, we see that a simple lifestyle was the key element to Jesus' generous life. Day by day, Jesus renewed his trust in God to provide for his needs, and it freed him to be attentive to the needs of those near him. The foundation of his generosity was his trust in his Father rather than his finances (Matthew 6:33-34).



GENEROSITY

THE JESUS JOURNEY

◀ This worldview sermon was not just a personal challenge, but it was an organizational challenge as well. Jesus had recently selected his core team of twelve leaders, and they faced the brutal fact that their team would be known for its sacrifice and generosity rather than financial gain.

Generosity was a primary focus of the organization that Jesus led. It should be at the center of ours as well. Jesus lived at a time when he saw first-hand the impressive revenue machines of Herod and his sons, yet never chose during the course of his career to leverage Herod's wealth and empire for probable gain. He chose to live with the tension of being generous in a greedy world and to communicate the Biblical purposes for profit. What does it mean to be a good steward of the profit God has given you? As a Christian leader, you live with the tension nearly every day of what/who will be the driving force of your decisions. Be a leader who puts your primary focus on generosity. Be a Lifework leader who develops a corporate culture that is driven by generosity rather than greed, and "seeks the prosperity of the city."⁵

What symbolizes your leadership? Is it a dollar sign or a cross? Would your children and colleagues concur? Jesus hopes that we embody generosity in every aspect of our lives. He developed leaders who cultivated communities and were conduits of God's grace to those in need. He challenged his leaders to ensure the poor were fed and the widows' needs were met. When a married couple was deceptively generous (giving the impression that they were generous) God ended their lives (Acts 5). When the early church demonstrated great generosity, their city flourished (Acts 6). The leaders in the early church knew they were accountable for their generosity. Money provides the opportunity to love others rather than glean selfish gain. The foundation of generosity that Jesus developed was to live simply, be a wise steward of his resources, and trust a generous God to meet his needs. ●

/ 1) For more insight – The Jesus Way, by Eugene Peterson pgs. 201-207 / 2) Source – Crown Financial Ministries (original twelve-week study) / 3) Matthew 5-7 / 4) Celebration of Discipline, by Richard Foster, Chapter 6 / 5) Jeremiah 29:7