Extravagant Generosity

1 Chronicles 29:1-18

Pastor Mark Kremer

Eight years ago this month we started a new chapter, really, in the history of our church. There had been a few years where we had felt like things were kind of stagnant. There was not a real clear vision of where we were going together as a church. We really couldn't bring any more people into the church; there wasn't any room for any more people. The giving was sort of flat and really, with amazing clarity, God began to lay out a vision for the future that was scary and risky and big. It included the auditorium we're sitting in this morning and, at the very same time we're going to build about $14 million worth of facilities here, we're going to send several hundred people to north Lincoln to help plant a new church and also launch a new church planting movement in India and develop leaders regionally. It was big and it was a little scary and a little risky, but it also launched us into realizing that we had not, for many years, done all that we should have been doing to teach people the biblical concepts related to money and possessions and stewardship. And so we began to do that as well at the same time. We hired Brad Brestel to come on our staff to help coach, to help people get their finances and their financial life and their work life in order with what God would have for people to do. And we began to teach regularly, including these two Sundays in January and again in August, on stewardship—what the Bible has to say about money...and of course the Bible has a lot to say about money and finances and possessions.

Well, in those intervening eight years, what God has done is really nothing short of astounding. It really is amazing. I just asked David this week, "What has been the giving of our congregation since that January of 2004?" and he said we've given over $50 million to the kingdom of God, just as a people here through our church. (applause) And I know and we all know that that's not all of it. Millions of dollars have gone to other missionaries and organizations in the community and globally and so the story is even much bigger than that. But many people would look back and say that this was a life-changing moment. It did not only change their giving; it changed their entire life. It changed their business life; it changed their family life. We called it *For This Purpose I Live* and what we learned and discovered and the principles that God taught us in that journey have really, literally transformed our lives from that day to this.

And one of those key truths that was so transforming in my own life—and for hundreds of people in our congregation—is what we want to talk about this morning. And it is the principle, I think, the truth that's behind extravagant generosity and extraordinary vision. It's what causes us to have grand visions for what we can do with our life and what leads to extravagant generosity. And there's no place better to learn this truth or to be reminded of it than to go to probably the biblical example of the largest, most extravagant offering ever taken in the history of the world. So, with that, turn with me to 1 Chronicles, Chapter 29...1st and 2nd Samuel...1st and 2nd Kings...and then you come to 1 Chronicles and chapter 29 is the last chapter in the book of Chronicles.

Now this is the story of David and the nation of Israel. David has been established as the king; the nations that have been harassing them, that once possessed the land that God gave to them, have all been conquered. David has built for himself a grand house in Jerusalem, but David is not sitting back on his hammock on the roof of the palace telling stories about the good old days on the battlefield and all the victories won, and just sort of living in the past and then gloating over all that

has been accomplished. David, we're told back in chapter 17, has a passion, a burning passion in his heart to build a temple for God because, while David is living in a palace, God's place—where He met with His people Israel—was in a tent out in a meadow outside of town. And David said, "That's not right. I want to build a palace that's fitting for my God, for the God of the people of Israel." And so David developed a plan in his mind for one of the grandest buildings ever known to mankind. We call it Solomon's Temple. David went before God and asked God if he could go ahead and build this temple that was in his mind—this vision that he had. But God said to David, "No, I'm not going to let you build that temple. You're a man of war, not a man of peace. But I will let your son build it. But you go ahead and make preparations." And so David spent a good deal of his life and his rule preparing for the building of this grand temple that would be the dwelling place of God, that would represent God's power and majesty and wonder to not only the people of Israel, but to all the nations around—and it was well-known. In fact in chapter 22 and verse 5, as David describes this, he says, "The temple will be *exceedingly magnificent, famous and glorious throughout the lands."* That's how incredibly awesome the temple was to be.

Now David has set aside, we found out in chapter 2, huge quantities—vast quantities—of the nation's resources, almost unfathomable amounts of gold and silver and bronze and steel and stone and wood to build this temple. But it's still not enough. And that's what leads us to chapter 29, and verse 1.

> **Then King David said to the entire assembly, "My son Solomon, whom alone God has chosen, is still young and inexperienced and the work is great; for the temple is not for man, but for the LORD God."** (*NASB, 1 Chronicles 23:1)

Basically David's saying, "Listen, Solomon's going to need the help of everyone to do this. This is a large, massive project and we're doing this for God. It needs to be done in a way that's fitting for our King and our God and so Solomon needs your help because—this is for God!" Verse 2:

> **"Now with all my ability I have provided for the house of my God the gold for the *things* of gold, and the silver for the *things* of silver, and the bronze for the *things* of bronze, the iron for the *things* of iron, and wood for the *things* of wood, onyx stones and inlaid stones, stones of antimony and stones of various colors, and all kinds of precious stones, and alabaster in abundance."**

He's talking about all these—all of this vast wealth that we heard in more detail about back in chapter twenty-two— that he set aside from the nation's treasury.

> **"Moreover, in my delight in the house of my God, the treasure I have of gold and silver, I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have already provided for the holy temple, *namely*, 3,000 talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and 7,000 talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the buildings; of gold for the *things* of gold and of silver for the *things* of silver, that is, for all the work done by the craftsman.** (Vs. 3-5a)

David is saying, "This is what I'm contributing out of my personal wealth for this project." David led his people by example and the numbers on this are just absolutely staggering. In case you're thinking that 3000 talents of gold is the equivalent of 3000 gold coins, I will tell you right now it is 113 tons of gold, 214 tons of silver, and thousands of tons of iron. That doesn't even add in what was back in chapter 22. From the nation's treasuries there was over 3000 tons of gold. I mean,

you're talking about a staggering amount of gold and silver and precious metals that are given and contributed from David's own personal wealth. Now what would cause someone, who is at the pinnacle of power and prestige, to give away vast quantities of wealth for a project like this—that wasn't for himself? It was for his God! There wasn't going to be any name plaques on the temple saying: David contributed this—no markers—no, nothing. It was all for God and David said, "I have done this with all my ability. First of all I have given it everything I've got," and he said, "It has been a delight and a pleasure. In verse 3...in my pleasure...**in my delight**...this gave David great joy to give like this. What is it that gives people joy and commitment to do something so extravagant, so extraordinary for God? What's the truth that David understood? Well, he challenges the people at the end of verse 5:

> **"Who then is willing to consecrate himself this day to the LORD?"**

Notice there was no high pressure sales pitch here. He didn't say, "Hey, come on now, you've got to get in the game with me." He just said, "Who's willing to join me? Who's willing to consecrate their heart—to set aside their heart—to do as I have done, to be a part of this project?" Verse 6 tells us how they responded:

> **Then the rulers of the fathers' *households*, and the princes of the tribes of Israel, and the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, with the overseers over the king's work, offered willingly; and for the service for the house of God they gave 5,000 talents** [or 188 tons] **and 10,000 darics of gold, and 10,000 talents of silver** [almost 400 tons]**, and 18,000 talents of brass, and 100,000 talents of iron. Whoever possessed *precious* stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the LORD, in care of Jehiel the Gershonite. Then the people rejoiced because they had offered so willingly, for they made their offering to the LORD with a whole heart, and King David also rejoiced greatly.** (Vs. 6-9)

They're having a celebration; they're excited about the fact they have brought vast quantities of their personal wealth to help build this temple for God. What is it that they understood that caused them to be so excited—so willingly, so joyfully to give everything they had to build this project? They gave out of their assets. This wasn't just, *"Hey, what did we make this year*?" This was digging under the floorboards of their tents and their houses to pull out all the assets they'd accumulated over the years and bringing what would today be the equivalent of hundreds of semi-loads of gold and silver. Can you imagine standing there on that day as David's huge quantities of gifts are there and the people's gifts are there and they're standing among millions and millions? In fact, if you take the combined wealth that's mentioned in chapter 22 and these two offerings here together in chapter 29, you have in excess of 200 billion—yes, *billion* as in *Billie*, not *M* as in *Millie*—200 billion dollars in today's value in these precious metals. What would cause people to be so excited about giving that kind of money to the kingdom of God? What is it they understood that so radically made them different from all the other people around them—that would cause such extravagant generosity?

Now if reporters had been on the scene that day, they would have said, "You know, hey, there's a charismatic leader, David, and he really got the people excited about this. This is a great, nice, big project and the people got excited about that." Maybe the reporters would have said there was extraordinary prosperity in the land and people were more than happy to give a portion of it away because they were so highly successful. But they would have been a little stumped by the fact that they were so excited about it. Nobody had extracted or extorted it; nobody had twisted their arm;

nobody made them feel guilty. They just joyfully and willingly did that. That had to be a head-scratcher for the reporter from the *Jerusalem Times*. And then he would have been really stunned with what happened next. Verse 10:

> **So David blessed the LORD in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, "Blessed are You, O LORD God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name.** (Vs. 10-13)

Rather than patting themselves on the back, celebrating how great they were, how awesome they were, David immediately says, "We praise God. He's the great one; He's the large one; He's the majestic one; He's the King." And then we get down to the truth that really transformed their entire life as a nation and transformed the lives of people this day, as it relates to generosity. Notice in the middle of verse 11**...indeed everything in the heavens and earth is Yours—Yours is the kingdom!"** That's the first of six times he's going to say that in this prayer—six times in this prayer he's going to say, "Everything belongs to you, God. You own it all." Notice he says very specifically what God owns. He says**...riches and honor come from You.** So both our possessions and our positions come from God. He owns them both. He owns all our possessions. They all belong to Him. The heavens, everything in the heavens—all the galaxies, all the planets, all the stars—God owns all of that. He owns all of earth. He owns everything on the earth—all the mountain ranges, all the rivers, all the streams, all the oceans; God owns all the cities; He owns all the wealth; all the wealth that's in the world, God owns. It's under His dominion. He's the King of it all. And every position that every person has—all the honor that anyone would have—it all comes from God. God is the One who gives all of that. It's all His. He **says...it lies in Your hand**, LORD, **to make great and to strengthen everyone.** In other words, every opportunity that we have to do something significant comes from God. It's a gift from God. There's no such thing as a self-made person. God allows that to happen; God creates the opportunities to become great and He gives the power, it says, in His right hand. It really gives this idea that God has power and riches and possessions that He's giving away—out of His hand He's giving them to people. But they're from Him and they're for Him; they still belong to Him.

So the strength that we have—the talents that we have, the abilities that we have, all of the mental capacity that we have—that strength to accomplish anything, it all comes from God; it all belongs to Him; it's from Him and it's for Him. He's the King over it all; He rules over all. Six times it reminds us of that in this text. That's a life-changing truth—that's life-changing! That's freeing to understand that God owns everything. Now he says, "We praise you, O God, for that." We'd say, "You know, maybe we'd stop today and think: why would we be so excited about the fact that it isn't really ours, that God owns it all? What is it that stirs up such rejoicing, such delight in God's people when they come to realize that God owns it, that they don't own it, it's not theirs?" Well we find that out in the rest of this prayer.

Verse 14: this is where it really becomes staggering.

> **"But who am I** [David says] **and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given**

> **You. For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build You a house for Your holy name, it is from Your hand, and all is Yours. Since I know, O my God, that You try the heart and delight in uprightness, I, in the integrity of my heart, have willingly offered all these *things*; so now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here, make *their* offerings willingly to You.** (Vs. 14-17)

David is literally blown away. He's blown away by the fact that God had given to them—He'd entrusted to them so much. They were so undeserving; they were just wanderers, strangers near shadows. David understood that these were a people who were really nothing in the sight of the world. He went all the way back and he thought about Abraham—just a guy—but God chose Abraham and made a covenant with Abraham and said to Abraham, "I'm going to make out of you a great nation and, through you all the nations of the earth will be blessed." God chose just an ordinary guy—Abraham. And then, as time went on, God made a covenant with Jacob—a man who was not the most honest man, who was not the most upright man. But God chose Jacob and his family—through whom the Messiah would come, the Savior would come, the redeeming of Israel would come. God chose this ordinary man—Jacob—who has less than a stellar character. "Who are we?" David says. "We were in slavery and in bondage in Egypt; we were the heels of the Egyptian people; we were just trapped and enslaved and there was no way out and You, God, brought us out. You redeemed us out of Egypt, and You've led us through the wilderness. With power and might You displaced nations in front of this little band of people that were Your people—that you chose. You displaced the nations and you brought us into this land flowing with milk and honey and You gave us all of this," he says, "all of this You gave to use, to manage and steward on Your behalf and I'm blown away that we, ordinary, small, wandering nomadic people, who are just here for a moment—our life is like a shadow—have the opportunity, having been blessed by You—to be able to give so generously back to You because we're really nothing."

And we know the rest of the story. We fit into this story, don't we? We know, as it describes us in Ephesians, that *we were dead in our trespasses and sin;* we were cut off from the life of God; we separated from Him; we were without hope and without God in the world. In fact Paul quotes from this very verse when he describes our condition. "But God, in His richness and His mercy and His love, He saved us. He transferred us out of the kingdom of darkness; He defeated the evil one by whom we were held captive and enslaved and He brought us and delivered us into the kingdom of light—to the kingdom of His Son." He made us a part of His kingdom and we, like the prodigal son, would have been just happy to live in the Father's house as a servant, just to be out of the kingdom of darkness, out of bondage and slavery to sin and to the evil one. But, no, God did more than that—He adopted us into His family; He made us part of His family forever. Now we are sons of God; we are part of the royal family. We are part of the kingdom; we are heirs of the kingdom that God the Father would give to Jesus Christ who won the victory. And not only that; there is even more. We're not only royal sons and daughters but we have been invited by God to partake in building His kingdom, and He's given us two very specific roles.

One is to manage His resources that He puts in our possession. We're trustees; we're stewards. He gives us all that we have in order to manage those things for the building of His kingdom—for accomplishing His purposes in the world. That's what He invites us into and He also gives us another title: of ambassador, representative. So not only are we His children, not only do we have this incredible story to tell of coming from being no one—cut off from God, without hope—now having hope and life and being royalty and having all the blessings of that, but now we have the

opportunity to make sure that every moment of every single day—every penny that I have, every possession I have, every talent I have—it can be used in a powerful way to build for His kingdom. Everything has purpose and meaning—every single day.

Now just think about that for a minute. God has given to your possession to manage, on His behalf, everything you have. He owns all of your money; He owns your entire retirement account; He owns your savings account; He owns your bank account; He owns all of your assets—they're all His! That's true: He already owns it. We don't need to sign a deed or something and make some kind of decision: "You know, okay God, I'm going to give it to you now." No, He already owns it. When He purchased you, He got the whole thing. He actually owned it before that, but you didn't even realize that. He owns your family; He owns your talents; He owns your career; He owns your cars—both when they're parked and when they're on the road. He owns your marriage. He owns every single thing—both material and immaterial—that you have in your possession. It's His and He's given it to you to steward, to manage, on His behalf. Can you think of anything that's more exciting than that, that adds more value to your life than that, that God has entrusted to you—and with so much that we get to manage and steward—on His behalf? That's life-changing...that's life-changing!

He gives us opportunities; He gives us talents; He gives us abilities and He says, "You're my ambassador; you're my personal representative in this world. In a foreign place, you're the embassy; you're the ambassador; you're my representative; you have a chance to represent the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, to the world all around you—in every sphere where you and I live—every single day of the week.

You see, when we grab a hold of this truth—that God owns it all—it radically changes everything. I can stop worrying about whether I have enough or how do I hang onto what I have, as if I somehow possess it and it's mine. I can just say, "God, it's yours. How do you want me to manage it; what do you want me to do with it?" It's why every single time we stand up—typically it's me at the end of the fiscal year, the end of the calendar year—and tell you what our year-end goal is, we only ask you to do one thing. We've never said anything more than this: Just go home and pray about it. Just go home and ask God what to do with His money. That's all you have to do. No arm twisting, no cajoling, no guilt, no shame—you just go ask God what He wants to do with His resources. But that kind of stewardship goes so far beyond just what we give and what we call charitable giving because it would be real easy to say, "Okay, God, You get the ten percent; you get the twenty percent. I'm going to really be generous—I'm going to give you twenty-five percent or thirty percent of my wealth. Okay, that's great, we settled that. God, you want me to give that away." And then somehow we think the other seventy to seventy-five percent is ours to do whatever we want with it—but God owns that too. And that has to be stewarded—that *gets* to be stewarded for His kingdom purposes.

It may be you own a business and you say, "God, what do you want me to do with this business?" God may lead you to add on to that business, to hire more people, to pay your employees better, to serve humanity and mankind and to do something good in the community through your business. That's what God may want you to do with your resources that are tied up in that. You may have talents and abilities. He wants you to pour them out into the world all over this community, all over the world to make a difference. You may decide that in your business, like some people here have said, "We're going to try to be a business that literally changes an industry, that transforms an industry, to be something better than it's been in the past." Maybe that's what God wants you to direct your resources—or His resources—into.

And your talents and your abilities—we're not talking about just what you do at church or what you give to church or what you give to missions. We're talking about the whole kit and kaboodle. We're talking about everything you possess and everything you are and consulting with God every single day and saying, "God, what do you want me to do with this? It's all Yours. I'm willing to do whatever it is You direct me to do with all of this that You have entrusted to me."

Part of what's very sobering or should be very sobering for us is to realize the amount of wealth, the amount of possessions that God has entrusted to us. When you are compared to what most people have in the world, we have been given a staggering amount of resources. I was reminded, as I went through our budget just a few weeks ago, and set out to say, "Okay, God, this is what we want to give this year; we think this is what You want us to give." There was still this entire huge amount of money that I have to steward and I'm responsible to steward it, and steward it well, and it makes me have to think really seriously about a lot of decisions I make. It adds a whole new level of importance to every single thing I do, everything I make, everything I purchase and it causes me to stop and think, "Okay, this is God's. What does He want me to do with it?"

Some of you, your work day-in and day-out revolves around the home. You think, "You know I wash dishes; I make beds; I do laundry," You're not just making beds; your home is not just a place where your family comes and eats and sleeps and watches television and leaves a mess. It's an embassy for the King of Kings and, when you wash dishes, you wash the King's dishes; you make the King's bed—and I'm not talking about your husband. Ladies, if you do that, you make the King's beds; you wash the King's clothes; you garden the King's garden; you mow the King's lawn. Every single thing you and I possess belongs to Him and, if we just would remember that, if we just live and embrace that truth, it literally will transform our lives in such a powerful way that we wouldn't waste a single minute of a single day on anything that's less. Not only does that truth change our life, it means that everything is sacred...everything is sacred! There's no *sacred* and *secular*. Everything is sacred—from the most mundane to the most glamorous, big thing you could think of. It's all sacred—He owns it all! Now that's not a truth that I have to do something with; it's just truth. I have to just believe it and embrace it and, if I do, it transforms my life.

But what do I need to do—just in light of that truth that He does own it all? What do I need to do? Well I think there are two things and we've already hinted at the first. That is that you consult with *the Owner* about everything—consult with the Owner! If we just got in the habit of consulting with the Owner, God, about everything—all the decisions that we have that we get so worried about, that we fuss over and we can't quite figure out—would just become so clear and evident and obvious most of the time. God, what do you want? How do I steward the talents and abilities that I have? Do I go to university; do I get a job; do I get a graduate degree? Okay, God, lead me, guide me—and there's a number of ways God does that. He does it through His Word; He does it through wise counsel of godly people. We bring our whole world into alignment with God's truth. It's why we're doing things like this LifeCheck event next Saturday, where you can come and, in a short period of time, grab a hold of, *"Okay, what does God say about planning for the future? What does God say about saving? What does God say about budgeting? What does God say about my work life?* And we need to try to bring all of our life into alignment with what God wants. That's consulting the Owner. That's our task—just consulting the Owner.

The second thing we need to do is delineated here in verse 18. It's very important. David concludes his prayer by saying:

"O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, our fathers, preserve this forever in the intentions of the heart of Your people, and direct their heart to You;

We must be careful not to forget this truth. It's kind of slippery, isn't it? We live in a world that's all about ownership, all about possession, and so, even though we today say, "Yes, that's right; I agree; I get it; it's about God owning it all," it's kind of slippery—it kind of slips away as you go on through life. We have to find ways to remind ourselves. David prayed, "God, don't ever let us forget that You own it all, that we're just Your managers, Your stewards and Your ambassadors. Don't ever let us forget."

Now I've had the privilege of being part of two really dynamics churches in my adult life—one in Minnesota where my wife and I met—a great church back in 1980. It was one of the most generous churches involved in missions. They gave over a million dollars to missions in 1980—that's thirty years ago—and it was a congregation about the same size as ours. That is astronomical, unbelievable, but you know what happened? They sort of got proud; they got arrogant; they started to think they're somebody. Speaker after speaker would come and tell them how great they were, how awesome they were, and they started to believe it. They hired an arrogant pastor; the arrogant pastor was all about himself and today that church is nothing like what it was. They forgot God owns it all. I don't know what you need to do in your world to remind yourself of this truth that God owns it all. I know, back in Deuteronomy, God told the people to create all kind of markers, to put them in their homes, to put them on their forehead, to put them in different places.

One that stands out in my mind comes from my own childhood. I come from a family with four women and two guys—me and my dad, my mom and three sisters. Dad and I had our own bathroom; no one else went in there—you can understand why. There was a plaque, a painting—a nice framed painting that was hanging over the toilet—in our bathroom. It was a watercolor painting of this fern called the Sprengeri Fern and it said right on the bottom "Sprengeri Fern" and then it had the definition of this fern, this plant. It says "Sprengeri Fern, not a true fern, but a relative of the lily family; looks loveliest in a hanging basket or perched on a pedestal." And why do I know that you might ask? That was in the 1970's. Over thirty-five years ago that hung in a bathroom where only my dad and I saw it regularly—daily, multiple times a day—but it sticks. I'll never forget that; even if I want to try to forget it, I can't forget it. (laughter)

What is it that you need to do? What markers do you need to put up? Do you need to put a sticker in your car, right on the steering wheel, so that every time you get in, say, "God's car"? Would that help? Would it help to put something on the mirror in your bathroom so that every morning when you get up to shave, and you look at yourself in the mirror, you say, "Every talent, every ability, everything you do today belongs to God?" Maybe you need to put a stake out in the front yard of your house—*God's property; enter at risk.* You know—maybe some kind of painting? Maybe there's some artistic thing you can do, just as a marker or reminder that God owns this; it's His; it belongs to Him. I'm going to steward it and manage it and make it count for eternity and count for the Kingdom. Whatever that is, I just would challenge you—because this is slippery truth. Do whatever it takes so that this attitude, this heart, is preserved in you forever—that all the way to your final breath you will have taken seriously this incredible, awesome privilege that God has given to us: to steward the wealth and influence and abilities that He's entrusted to us, to do something with those to make a difference for all eternity and His Kingdom. There's nothing more exciting than that.

As we conclude, I think it's only fitting that we, together, if we affirm this to be true, would stand and read this prayer together as our prayer to God. So I invite you to do that. If this is truth you affirm in your own heart—*God owns it all*—let's read it together. This is a prayer. We declare it to Him, together, out loud, this morning:

> *To you, O God, belong the greatness and the might, the glory, the victory, the majesty, the splendor, yes, everything in heaven, everything on earth, the kingdom—all yours. You've raised Yourself high over all. Riches and glory come from You; You are ruler over all. You hold strength and power in the palm of Your hand to build up and strengthen all. And here we are, God, our God, giving thanks to You, praising Your splendid name: Our Father, who is in Heaven; hallowed be Your Name; Your kingdom come; Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins as we also forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen.*

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Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
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