

Hurts So Good: Radical Generosity with Time
Luke 10:25-37

We're looking at the subject of radical generosity, and the concept here is that the Gospel leads us to be radically generous in every aspect of our lives, and that radical generosity is always costly. Again, no one sets out to be radically generous...that is not something that we can do in our flesh or even want to do. The notion here is that our hearts are transformed by the radical grace of God through the sacrifice of Jesus, and as a result, over time, we become those who live sacrificially in all the various currencies of our life. By currencies I mean those mediums of exchanging value such as our wealth, our time, our personal space, our hospitality, our grace for other people, and so on.

Last week we looked at the currency of hospitality, and how Jesus teaches us to open our living spaces and our resources to strangers and to treat those strangers like family. Christ calls us to invite people into our lives who cannot repay us or benefit us in any way because Jesus made it possible for us to be welcomed in when we were estranged from God through His death on the cross.

This morning we will take a brief look at what it means to be radically generous in the currency of time. Our text will be Luke 10:25-37:

25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 27 And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." 28 And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." 29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 And the next day he took out two denarii[a] and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' 36 Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

My message will fall under three subheadings: 1) Self Justification; 2) The Myth of Busyness and Self-Importance; 3) The Catalyst of Compassion; and 4) Identifying Your Mission.

I. Self-Justification

Perhaps you've noticed that thus far, each sermon in this series has been found in the Gospel of Luke. And perhaps you've also noticed that in each instance, Jesus is dealing with people who are attempting to justify or exalt themselves in some way. In our first message, Jesus was dealing with people who thought they were righteous and yet treated others with contempt. In our second message, Jesus was addressing self-exalting Pharisees who were presumptuously seeking the places of honor.

Here again this morning, Jesus is responding to an “expert in the law”...that is, a seminary professor of sorts, who stands up to put Jesus to the test. He asks Jesus a question that he thinks he already knows the answer to, and Luke lets us know that the man’s intent was not only to “test Jesus” but to “justify himself.”

Now, before we get into Jesus’ response, I’m going to invite you into this story right away. Why? Because most of us are currently having this very conversation with Jesus right now! And here’s how that conversation goes:

“Lord, what am I supposed to be doing with my life? What is it that you want me to do that is pleasing to you and makes a difference in this world?”

To which Jesus responds with the question: “What is written in the Bible? How do you read it?”

And we say, “Well...we’re supposed seek first the Kingdom of God...we’re supposed to love God and love our neighbor...we’re supposed to honor our spouses and pour into our children...we are supposed to play our role in the Body of Christ...we are called to go to the very ends of the earth and make disciples and be your witnesses...we’re supposed to show mercy to widows and orphans and the poor...we’re supposed be salt and light in the world.”

And Jesus says, “Alright, go and do that!”

And then what do we say? Like the teacher of the law here in Luke 10, we seek to justify ourselves...and most of our self-justification in the twenty-first century can be summed up in this one singular statement: “I don’t have time.”

Do you recognize that conversation? I suspect most of us do. We are those who “don’t have time”...we are simply too busy to do what God has called us to do, too busy to do those things that we know we should be doing, too busy for those things we know would make the greatest impact in the world, too busy for those things that would truly grow our faith and grow our most meaningful relationships...we’re simply too busy.

And like the lawyer here in Luke 10, our self-justification is a “drop the mic” moment, right? Just as the lawyer is sure that Jesus would never expect him to love the dreaded enemies of Israel, so we are pretty sure that Jesus will understand that we simply cannot be expected to be generous with our time when we are so dang busy.

So...I’m hoping that you will now hear Jesus teach this story in a new light. Just as Jesus used this story to humble the self-justifying lawyer, hear Jesus teach this same story as a means of addressing our self-justification about how busy we are. It’s a story about the world’s great need, self-justifying busy people, and the power of compassion that unleashes radical generosity.

II. The Myth of Busyness and Self-Importance

The story begins with a tragic event. A man that we know nothing about is beset by robbers on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. We can only assume that the traveler is a Jew since he recently left Jerusalem, and the picture that Jesus paints is one of mortal violence.

The man has been stripped of everything...his possessions, his clothes, and his dignity. He has been brutally beaten, mishandled, and cast aside. He has been left for dead.

Now...as the story begins and we imagine this horrible crime, our hearts feel pity, right? It's the same pity we feel when we learn that children brought into the foster care system often have to spend the night on the floor in the social worker's office because there are no families to take them in. It's the same feeling of pity that touches our heart when we hear about the plight of the homeless, or the thousands of children that die due to wars or starvation every minute around the globe. And our pity leads us to think, "This is a horrible situation, and somebody should do something about it."

Now, Jesus makes sure that we know the facts. First, the need is acute. This man needs immediate help or he will surely die. And second, the need is obvious: he's right there on the road where people are sure to pass by. So now we're ready to hear what comes next.

Jesus states, "Now by chance a priest was going down that road..." As a gifted storyteller, I suspect Jesus paused here for just a second...just long enough for the listeners to feel a sense of relief. Surely a priest would help. I'm sure they were thinking, "That guy was fortunate that a priest just happened to be coming down that road at the precise moment that help was needed. God is good in the way he provides good people to help hurting people in need." But of course, that's not how the story goes at all. Shockingly, Jesus states, "Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side."

Now, we don't know what the priest was thinking. He may have been very busy with very important meetings to attend. He may have been worrying about how a naked, beaten, bloodied man might make him ritually unclean if the man just happened to be dead. Jesus doesn't provide any details regarding why the priest ignored the obvious needs of a dying man...we just know that he did. He saw the man lying there, he crossed over to the other side of the road and passed him by. He did nothing.

To make matters worse, the very same thing happens when the temple worship leader...the Levite...shows up at the scene of the crime. He also does nothing...he simply passes by.

Now, the fact that two men passed by and did nothing to help the beaten, broken, half-dead man is disturbing enough. But knowing that the men were religious men...Jewish men...respected men...men who held important offices...men who thought of themselves as close to God and important in God's work...*these* were the men who did nothing. Well, that's very disappointing to say the least, right? How could they do nothing? How could they not stop and check on the man? Perhaps they were too busy. Perhaps they used the same self-justifying logic that we use every day. They probably thought, "Somebody ought to do something about all these beaten, naked people out here...that's a darn shame. But I've got to go. I've got things to do. I have people waiting for me. This kind of messy work is not my deal. God, send somebody to help that man...but not me."

Perhaps these men fell victim to the myth of busyness and self-importance. The myth of busyness and self-importance goes something like this: *I don't have time to do those things that God wants me to do because I am too busy doing those things I have to do. If I don't do the things I have to do, those people who count on me will lack those things that only I can provide for them.*

Now, why is that a myth? Well, think about it. We only have time because God has given us time, right? I think it's fair to say that God provides us with all the time we need to do those things He has called us to do. And the second part of the myth is also illogical. God is the Provider, not us. The misperception of our own self-importance is like the little boy who doesn't think his dad can mow the yard unless he's out there with his little plastic mower doing his part.

And yet that is how so many of us operate every day. We fill our 24 hours with things we think we "have to do," or the things we really want to do, and then throw up our hands and complain that we have no time to do those things that God has called us to do. And like the men in this story, we often use our sense of religious importance to avoid the divine interruptions that might call us to be radically generous with our time.

Preachers are the worst, by the way! I have made it my business to let the whole world know that I am VERY BUSY writing my sermons on Tuesdays! Unfortunately, my neighbor didn't get the memo, so when he saw my truck in the driveway, he figured I might be available to walk him through the storm that was happening in his life. When I saw his number pop up on my phone, everything in my gut was screaming, "Don't answer. It's Tuesday. You're important...people are counting on you. Staff members can't do their jobs until you do yours. Your family needs you to be done so that you're not working late into the night." We all have a thousand reasons why we don't have time to be interrupted; and make no mistake—radical generosity in the currency of time means being willing to be interrupted.

So, let me ask you: how open are you to being interrupted? How willing are you to sacrifice your plans, your "have to priorities" in order to meet a need that in no way benefits your life or your agenda? How often do you "pass by" obvious, acute need because you have accepted the myth of busyness and self-importance?

I know...that hurts, but you pay me to hurt your feelings, and it only hurts because we all know it's true. God has given us all the time we need to do the things He has called us to do. And we're all a bit like the kid with the plastic lawnmower when it comes to our sense of self-importance. So, what is needed for us to break out of the myth and start living a life of radical generosity with our time?

III. The Catalyst of Compassion

The turning point in this story comes in the most surprising character...a Samaritan. Most of you know that there was tremendous animosity between Jews and Samaritans in the first century. The Samaritans were a people group comprised of Jews who married into Gentile

families back in the days of the Babylonian captivity. They were “half-Jews” who held dissenting views regarding the centrality of the Jewish temple and other religious matters. I encourage you to review my sermon on this text when we went through the Gospel of Luke several years ago because I covered that history in detail. This morning, suffice it to say that the Jewish-Samaritan relationship in the first century was equivalent to modern-day relations between the Jews and the Palestinians. In fact, for our purposes this morning, we would do well to imagine Jesus describing a Good Palestinian...that truly does present the tension in the text.

So, surprisingly, when the Samaritan sees the beaten, naked Jewish man laying on the side of the road, Jesus states, “...when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’”

Did you pick up on the catalyst for radical generosity? Compassion. When the Samaritan saw the man stripped, bloodied, and half-dead, he had compassion. Compassion trumped business. Compassion trumped the traveler’s agenda. Compassion moved the most unexpected person...the non-conforming outsider...the detested one...to willingly be interrupted. And that interruption was costly. Compassion required the Samaritan’s oil, wine, and bandages. Compassion required two days of wages and a promise to cover all the costs associated with the man’s healing and care. And obviously compassion required the traveler’s precious time. While he cared for the half-dead man, other things were not getting done. Money was not being made. Friends were not being met. Family may have wondered why he did not show up on time. Clearly there was a huge sacrifice that the Samaritan absorbed in order to care for the man who was, culturally speaking, his enemy.

Church...can you see it? Do you see the point of this story? Have you found your place in this story? Here’s the deal: you think that I’m suggesting that you are the arrogant, self-justifying lawyer. Or you think that I’m giving you a guilt trip because somehow you are the hard-hearted, self-important priest or Levite. But that’s not who you must identify with in this story.

All of us, every last one of us, are the stripped, naked, half-dead man lying on the side of the road. This is exactly what Paul said in Ephesians 2, “and you were dead in your transgressions...”

Until we identify with the helpless man on the side of the road...until we see ourselves lying there, broken, mishandled, bloodied, and left for dead...we will never understand the nature of radical generosity...nor will we discern the true identity of the Merciful Traveler. Let me give you a hint found in Romans 5:6-10: “For while we were still weak, at just the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since therefore we have now been justified in His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life.”

Church, Jesus is the Good Samaritan that none of us could ever be. He was the detested outsider who sacrificed Himself to bring life and healing to those of us who were his enemies, those of us who were dead in our transgressions. He who held the whole creation together; whose Word sustains all of life and the existence of the universe, was willing to be interrupted...to give of His own blood, to make us alive and to heal our broken souls.

And this is the heart of radical generosity: God's radical grace poured out on those who could never save themselves and could never repay the debt that we owe. As Paul writes in Ephesians 2 God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.

Church, radical generosity of time requires grace. Grace fuels compassion, and compassion fuels action. If you don't know yourself as the half-dead, broken man who was saved by the generous grace of the One who had no obligation to help and yet sacrificed for our healing...you will never have the catalyst of compassion that is necessary to live as a radically generous person, particularly when it comes to your time.

So, what would it look like for you to live a radically generous life in terms of your time? I can't tell you what that looks like for you; but I can tell you what that looks like for me. It looks like answering the phone and giving my neighbor all the time he needs on a Tuesday...on several Tuesdays, and many other days. It looks like staying in the lobby until the last soul has gone, even when my back is aching and my introverted soul is dying for some solitude. It looks like quality time listening to my bride and asking good questions when my flesh wants to veg out and watch a ballgame. It means getting up extra early to get my work done so that I can be at my daughter's game or my son's concert. Anyone who knows me will tell you that I am, by nature, the most selfish person with time that you have ever met—but I'm not who I was. Why? Because when I think about what Jesus did for me...when I remember how Jesus gave up heaven to lift me off that dusty road and bring me back to life at the cost of His perfect blood, the least I can do is be generous with the time God has entrusted to me and show the same kind of sacrificial compassion to others who are in need that Christ showed for me.

How about you? I know you're busy...everybody's busy, but that's hardly the issue here. The question is: are you willing to be interrupted? Do you even see the hurting people, and can you identify with those who have been mishandled and left stranded in life? Can you identify with having nothing left and no hope if someone doesn't come along and save you? Radical generosity is only possible when we understand that we have first been recipients of God's radical grace.

So, let me ask you again...what would radical generosity of your time look like? I hope it means that you will become a person who is willing to be interrupted by the call to be compassionate. I also hope it means you find your mission.

IV. Find Your Mission

In his brilliant book entitled, *When the Game is Over It All Goes Back in the Box*, Pastor John Ortberg devotes an entire chapter describing how we can find our mission in life. On our quest for significance and meaning, we all are desperate to know that our lives count for something more than making a dollar or serving as a taxicab. We will never find the joy our hearts long for until we find our mission, and that mission will clearly require radical generosity in terms of our time, if not every other currency in our lives. So how do we find our mission? Ortberg provides several key insights.

First, your mission starts where you are, not where you think you should be. The priest and the Levite were in a hurry to get to wherever they were going in order to do their religious duties. They missed the ministry that was right in front of them because they assumed that their mission was elsewhere. Don't do that!

In an earlier chapter John tells the story about a boy with Down's Syndrome named Johnny. Johnny bagged groceries at the local grocery store, and one day the manager had a motivational speaker come in to encourage the staff that they could make a difference in the lives of people regardless of their role. Johnny took that to heart, so he asked his dad to help him come up with a lifegiving, encouraging phrase of the day. Once the phrase was identified, Johnny would make a few hundred copies, cut the phrase into small slips of paper, and then place the small slip of paper in the customer's bag. He would stop, look the customer straight in the eye and say, "I've put a great saying in your bag. I hope it helps you have a good day. Thanks for coming here." A month later the store manager called the motivational speaker and said, "You wouldn't believe what happened here. I was making my rounds, and when I got up to the cashiers, the line at Johnny's checkout was three times longer than anyone else's. It went all the way down the frozen food aisle." When she ordered other staff to open more checkout lines, the customers refused to move, opting to wait in order to get Johnny's encouraging phrase of the day!

Anyone can be radically generous with their time if they commit themselves to bless other people where they are.

Next, Ortberg says there are three things your mission will inevitably connect with: your strengths, your weaknesses, and your deepest dissatisfactions.

Whatever signature strengths God has given to you, be it wisdom, courage, kindness, mercy, justice, humility, beauty, or joy...God has given you those strengths to accomplish your ministry. Ortberg writes, "The best life—the meaningful life, being on mission—is when we use our signature strengths in the service of something larger than ourselves."

But God doesn't just use our strengths, He also leverages our weaknesses. God never wastes hurt and adversity. Those areas that have caused us the most struggle are often the areas that God sends us to accomplish our mission. You know this is true. No one is able to help alcoholics more than recovering alcoholics. Chuck Colson was a lawyer and a White House player, but it was not until he was a convict that he was prepared to begin Prison Fellowship. Where have you experienced your greatest failure, your greatest struggle, and your greatest loss? That is the first and most likely place to identify your mission.

Finally, your mission will be connected to those things that trouble you the most. For Moses, it was the oppression of his people. For William Wilberforce, it was institutional slavery. For MLK, it was the evils of racism. When their hearts were broken for those things that break

the heart of God, ordinary believers were empowered to achieve extraordinary accomplishments at great personal expense...because radical generosity is always costly. If you want to identify your mission, spend some time feeding your discontent. Spend some time with the homeless; talk with women who have been trafficked; interview the social workers in the foster care system; talk to women who have had abortions; listen to the stories of people who have experienced racism; and then watch how God uses your broken heart, your signature gifts and your past weaknesses to meet the needs of those people who are in front of you. When you discover the joy of seeing a person lifted off that dusty road and led to a place of healing, you will understand that radical generosity is not something we have to do...it's something we GET to do!

Frederick Buechner said it best: The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

Church, remember God's radical grace for you when you were left for dead...remember the True Samaritan who lifted you off that dusty road and healed you at the cost of His life...and find your mission.

Time is ticking away, and when we breathe our last and stand before God, our regrets won't be about what we did. Our regrets will be about those things we left undone. Be generous...be radically generous. Let's pray.