

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *Sharing Generously*
SERIES: *The Art of Contentment*
SCRIPTURES:
SPEAKER: *Shaun Kipe*
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**Credit to Ken Bailey, John Ortberg*

Announcements: Christmas Dinners, Thanksgiving service,

Well good morning, it is so great to worship with you. I hope that you have been challenged but also encouraged by this sermon series on art of contentment (**SERIES TITLE SLIDE**).

Seeking to creatively and intentionally focus our lives on living like Jesus. We've seen that the art of contentment means replacing "I need more" with "I have enough". It's learning the lifestyle of expressing thanks. I hope you took time to express thanks in small and specific ways this past week.

By the way, before we jump into the message this morning, I want to take a few mins to tell you about next week. Next week is a really special Sunday for me and for us as a church. For many years working in youth ministry, around this time of year, we always tried to talk about some of these important Biblical themes (contentment, thankfulness, generosity) and then we always tried to tie these concepts into some real life story or project about people who are actually living out these kinds of themes. We bought cows and chickens for villages in Africa, we skyped a young lady who started a ministry rescuing young women from sex trafficking, several years as many of you know, because you participated with us, we collected coins and visited the Salvation Army Bell ringers. But I just think it is so important to know that there are followers of Jesus, putting concepts like these into practice in real, tangible ways.

So next week we actually have a special guest coming to share with us. Jeremy Willet (**PIC OF JEREMY**). I've gotten Jeremy through my years in youth ministry and he is gonna be here sharing in our services about an incredible experience he undertook this summer. And you just better buckle up, because it is going to challenge. But I think it is also going to encourage and inspire you.

Some of you in here are sponsoring children through programs like World Vision or Compassion International. Jeremy did something similar and then he did something crazy. He realized that it was just so easy to sort of send a check each month. But he wanted his giving to be authentic and sincere. So he got on a plane, and flew to Mozambique and traveled to the small little village where his sponsored child lived, and spent 4 weeks living with his sponsored child. No running water, no electricity. He wanted to experience the life of his sponsored child, what it was like to grow up in that village, what his money was being used for.

1 Minute VIDEO CLIP from Jeremy...

Jeremy is currently on tour with Matt Maher and Natalie Grant, a few weeks ago they were up at Hershey, sharing his story. And so I called and talked to Jeremy, told him a little bit our series and wondering if would be willing to come and share with us. And he agreed and so he will be here next Sunday to share that story with us. If you really want to know what the “art of contentment” looks like, next week will be awesome and a great way to jump-start us into the Christmas season.

This morning we want to talk about one final piece to the art of contentment. I want you to think about this progression with me. Once we have learned that, we don’t need more, we have enough. Then we begin to express thanks for what we do have. Not only am I thankful for what I do have. In contentment I discover, I have more than I need and that allows me to share what I have with others.

Contentment ultimately leads to **sharing generously**.

Now the reason we need to talk about this, is because in our world we tend to think that the opposite is true. We tend to believe that keeping things will make us happy. The Bible calls this **storing up** for ourselves.

Jesus says, **“do not store up treasures on earth...”**

In fact if you have a Bible you can turn with me, to a fascinating story that Jesus tells in Luke 12. He says,

“The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

¹⁸ “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹ And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”

The danger for so many of us, is that instead of sharing generously out of our abundance, we build bigger barns to store up.

I was actually reading an article about this, just some fascinating stuff about storing up in our country.

Did you know that the fastest growing commercial real estate industry in the US, in the last 40 years are “storage facilities”?

The United States has upward of 50,000 storage facilities, more than five times the number of Starbucks. Currently, there is 7.3 square feet of self storage space for every man, woman and child in the nation. Thus, it is physically possible that every American could stand—all at the same time—under the total

canopy of self storage roofing.

I thought this was amazing...25% of people who have a two car garage, cannot park either of their cars in their garage.

The average 10 year old has 238 toys, but only plays with about 12 of those toys daily.

The average American donates about 1.9% of their income to charitable causes, while 6 billion people in the world live on less than \$13,000.00 a year.

And this maybe was my favorite statistic. We have so much stuff, that we spend an incredible amount of time just organizing our stuff. Over the course of our lives we will spend about 3680 hours or 153 days searching for misplaced items (phones, keys, watches). We have so much we can't find what we're looking for.

We don't have resources or time to share generously because we are consumed by storing our piles of stuff.

A psychology professor actually does this little test with his students, he asks them to just think about the number of items you brought with you today in your car?

So I'll let you in on a little secret, the storing up life-style never leads to contentment.

20 “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’”

21 “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

Storing up, leads to selfishness, to “I need more”, to discontent,

But Jesus says, you don't have to live this way. Let me let you in on a little secret about the art of the content life...listen to what Paul says,

35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Giving, sharing generously is at the heart of the Creator. **“God so loved the world, that he gave...”**

Every good and perfect gift comes from above...

You were made to experience contentment, satisfaction in giving. Sharing out of your abundance.

So how can we practice generous sharing?

- **Give from the best you have.**

Throughout the Old Testament God is trying to teach his people about generous sharing. He knows the human tendency to keep and store up. And so one of the ways God says to practice this is to give from the best you have. In the Old Testament law this was called “**offering of first fruits**”. You can read about this in the book of Exodus for example.

"As you harvest your crops, bring the very best of the first harvest to the house of the LORD your God." (NLT)

Now you need to know, Israel was an agricultural society. They lived on the land and life was dependent on the harvest. So when the crops started to grow, Israelite farmers would take the very best, healthiest, first plants of their harvest to the temple as an offering back to God. It was like a way of saying, “God has given so generously to me. And rather than keep this for myself, I give the best back to God.”

I was thinking how in our world we usually try to do the opposite. We usually keep the best for ourselves and give out of our left-overs. God says, if you want to learn how to share generously, give from the best you have.

Last year I bought a pair of brown pants to match some of my shirts and when I brought the pants home, they didn't match. And so I had them on the cedar chest at the end of our bed. Not knowing exactly what to do with them. And no joke, this is how it happens to me. I was thinking, “*I just bought those pants, they're brand new, I can't give them to clothes closet. Maybe I should give away a pair of my old work pants, and I'll just wear these new pants as work pants.*” Why because I have trained to give out of my left-overs. Why can't you give some of your new pants away?

Why does giving have to do with the best of our stuff, our time, our resources, our lives? Because it's at the heart of God, the one who made us. And you're made in his image.

In fact, it's kind of neat in the New Testament when Paul is trying to think of a way to express the significance of God giving Jesus he says, **“²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.**

(1 Corinthians 15)

Paul says, “Jesus is God's first fruit for us” Jesus is the very best God has to give. God gives you the best he has to offer.

Wow, aren't you glad God gives his best for you and not his leftovers. You'll know you're starting to learn the art of contentment, when you don't mind sharing some of the best that you have. With our resources, with our time, it becomes this life-style of giving God the best.

I was reading this really neat story about a lady named Evelyn Brand who saw her entire life as a “first fruits offering back to God.” When she was young, she felt called by God to go to India. As a single woman in 1909, a calling like that required a truckload of faith and an equal amount of

determination. She married a young man named Jessie, and together they began a ministry to people in rural India.

Evelyn and Jessie gave 20 years of their lives to this ministry and then Jessie died. By this time Evelyn was 50 years old, and everyone expected her to go back to her home in England. But she wouldn't do it.

She was known and loved for miles around India as "Granny Brand," and she stayed another 20 years. Her son, Paul, came over when she was 70 years old and this is what he said about his mom: "This is how to grow old. Allow everything else to fall away until those around you see only love."

At age 70 she got word from her home mission office in England that they wouldn't give her another 5 year assignment. They felt she was simply getting too old. But she was also stubborn.

A party was held to celebrate her time in India, and everyone there cheered her on. "Have a good trip back home," they all said. "I'll tell you a little secret," she announced. "I'm not going back home. I'm staying in India."

Evelyn had had a little shack built with some resources she'd smuggled into the country. Then she bought a pony to get around the mountains, and this woman in her 70's rode from village to village on horseback to tell people about Jesus. She did that for 5 years on her own. One day, at 75 years old, she fell off her pony and broke her hip. Her son, Paul Brand, a respected doctor, said to her, "Mom, you had a great run. God's used you. It's time to turn it over now. You go on back home."

"I am not going back home," she said. "I'm staying here in India."

Evelyn spent another 18 years traveling from village to village on horseback. Falls, concussions, sickness and aging couldn't stop her.

Finally, when she hit 93 years old, she couldn't ride horseback any more. So the men of in these villages – because they loved Granny Brand so much – put her on a stretcher and carried her from one village to another. She lived two more years and gave those years a gift, carried on the stretcher, to help the poorest of the poor.

In generous sharing, we learn to give our first fruits, out of our best, not our left-overs.

I don't know how God might be convicting you to regarding your first fruit offerings. But be creative and intentional and give from the best you have. That's sharing generously.

Give specifically to those in need...

Remember a couple of weeks ago, the story of the rich man and Lazarus. And we said, God has a soft spot for the Lazarus's in this world. I think you'll start to find contentment in sharing generously when you are giving to people who are in need.

Once again, I want to take you back to what this looked for Israel. There's this really neat concept you find all over the Old Testament.

Leviticus 23 - 22 “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you. I am the Lord your God.”

Deuteronomy 24 - 19 When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

Isn't that awesome? God tells these farmers, to purposefully leave behind some of their crops for those in need, in such a way that it almost seems irresponsible.

I mean in these passage it's like God is saying, every once in a while, when you drop a \$20.00 just let it there for someone else to find.

Generous sharing at times causes us to wrestle with practicality and extravagance. God says, generous giving sometimes looks like this.

Like when you tip after a meal. We can get so caught up in rules about this, ok 20% and then we analyze how much the server deserves based upon their performance that evening. Sometimes the best thing to do is, just leave a big 'ol tip of extravagant generosity. It's good for your heart!

Every once in a while when the person standing on the street corner asks for money, you just give it to them no questions asked.

Every once in a while when you get some money you weren't expecting, instead of keeping it to build bigger barns, just find out about somebody who you know could use that money and just pass it along to someone else.

Or consider **sponsoring a child**. Next week when Jeremy is here, he's gonna talk the opportunity to sponsor a child. The purpose behind it. It is part of the impact that his trip had on him. He discovered in that village, there are 1500 other kids who need sponsorship. And thought, man so many of us back home, just building bigger barns. And he said I'm gonna go back and tell other people they can do this.

And I just want to be clear about this, when Jeremy is here you don't need to feel obligated to sponsor a child. Some of you are already doing this. Or you are giving your money in other ways to something similar. This is not some kind of a “make you feel guilty” ploy so that you sign up.

But if you are thinking, I've wanted to do this, but I never really knew where to get started or what organization is trustworthy, reputable for something like this. I'm saying, Jeremy's offer is a good place to start.

By the way, our finance committee here at church they just share so generously in amazing ways. They help us to do this with our resources as a church. It's actually kinda neat and I just gotta share this with

you all because we are all a part of this. There is a missionary, who we support from Five Forks, Steve Newcomer. **(PIC OF STEVE AND CHRIS)** He and his wife Chris have been serving in Mozambique for many years. An agricultural society, but doesn't have the resources we do. So Steve thought, wouldn't it be cool if we could buy a tractor **(PIC OF TRACTOR)** and ship a tractor this area. Now that's thinking BIG! A couple of weeks ago Steve got an amazing deal on a tractor that could be shipped to Mozambique. But as of last week, they were still in need of \$2,500 to ship this tractor. He wrote a letter to Five Forks asking if there is any way we could help out. Well, I'll just tell you our finance committee read about this and they said, we want to be a church that shares generously, extravagantly with those in need. And agreed that we would cover the remaining amount. So I just want to say thank you to all of you and to this church, we're sending a tractor to a village in Mozambique.

Isn't that amazing? That's the kind of people we have at Five Forks. I hear that kind of stuff and I say "Yay Five Forks. Thanks for being a generous, sharing community." That's called leaving sheaf's of grain for the poor and the foreigner.

It kind leads to the final thing I want to say about sharing generously.

Sharing generously leads to joy.

Sharing is not easy because we often think, what if we give it away and then decide we need it! We often think that if we keep it, then we'll be happier.

Well one of the things that's neat about giving is that giving actually leads to joy. I'm not joking, you find this concept all over Scripture.

To the Church in Corinth Paul wrote... (2 Corinthians 9)

7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

I think God loves giving, because it gives him great joy to see the joy in our faces.

That's why we sing that song "Joy to the world, the Lord has come." I mean that Christmas is about for us, God shares Jesus with us. Joy to the world because God has given so extravagantly and just causes so much joy.

In fact it's really neat in the Old Testament when the Israelites were learning how to give back to God, they actually did something called a **wave offering**.

What do you suppose a wave offering was? Well they would literally throw their arms in the air and wave around whatever it was they were giving away.

Why? Because putting your arms in the air and waving is an expression of joy. Have you been on a roller coaster? If you want the ultimate the thrill, when you sit down and buckle up...you don't hold the handle bars... You throw your arms in the air.

And so God wanted the Israelites to associate their sharing generously with joy. God has given so much to us, we get to share that with others. The joy we get from God giving to us, God says, I want you to be able to experience that. And so he gives us so much that we get share with others. And when we do, we get to experience the joy of giving. And when we see the face of that person receiving our gift of generosity, I mean there is just nothing better. When we give to someone in need, when you give out of the best you have and you see someone benefiting from that, I'm just telling you joy overflows. When I tell you about our church helping to give a tractor...doesn't that fill you up inside. And so they would literally wave their offerings in the air.

I thought that was kind of cool, so just for the fun of it, let's try it for a moment. If you don't mind, everybody take out a wallet. Right now I want you to reach into your pocket or your purse. Pull out your wallet, your checkbook, some money, or a credit card. Hold it up and wave it around.

Now give it to the person next to you, and let's take an offering. Just kidding. Actually you can go ahead and put it away. (ORTBERG)

This is why I said, I believe gift-giving is a good thing. This should be at the heart of the Christmas gifts that we share at Christmas time. The joy of seeing someone open something that you are giving.

Maybe you've been missing out on the content life, and you've been wondering how do I get that? Where does that kind of deep joy and satisfaction come from? Well it won't come from keeping and storing up treasures for yourself. You just try these things as a rule of thumb as you think about Christmas and giving this holiday season:

Give from the best you have. Give extravagantly this year.

Find someone who is really in need and give to them this year. Instead of another unnecessary gift for yourself, seriously give to someone who could really use it. There are no rules about Christmas gifts. You can send a tractor to Mozambique.

And I'll just bet if you start to share generously this way, it will give you great joy. And think if we all started to do this as a church. I mean, how many people could we impact with our sharing? What if we became known as the sharing church, freely and generously? Can you imagine the joy that would just overflow from this place into our communities, our work places. Every community event, they would want a Five Forks person involved. Because we come with a heart of generous sharing and joy. We would be the church of the wave offerings. What 5K wouldn't want that kind of joy? What local coffee shop wouldn't want some of our joy? What co-worker wouldn't want some of that joy?

Well there you have it, that's the art of contentment. That's where the Bible says, comes from. And don't forget next week, a real life example of this happening in our world. Jeremy will be here. I hope he senses our sharing, our joy...the church of the wave offerings that just supports and encourages this kind of life. So come next week, and bring someone with you who you know needs a little bit of overflowing abundant joy.