

September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025

## 1 Timothy 6:6-19 “What Disciples Do: Live Generously”

About a decade ago, we started hearing the term “the one percent” to describe the wealthiest Americans around the time of the “Occupy Wall Street” movement. That wasn’t the first time it was used though. Economists, back in the 1980s and 90s were saying that by the year 2016, the top one percent would own more than half of the world’s assets. But that estimate never came to pass. As of 2025, the top one percent do *not* own *more than half* of global assets. I tell you, the way some economists talk it’s like Chicken Little — always warning that the sky is falling. Pfft. “Over 50% of global assets.” Well, Oxfam calculates that the one percent only own 43% of global assets. It’s the two percent who own more than half. I mean, get it right y’all. Anyway, in today’s text, the author of 1 Timothy, who many believe is the Apostle Paul, wrote about “those in the present age who are rich.” Is Paul talking about the 1% or 2% of his time? Yes and no. Yes, the 2% definitely would be included in this statement. But you can’t really compare the conditions in the ancient world to today’s global financial landscape. If you want to make a fair *comparison* to the ancient world, *every* American who we’d call “lower to middle income” or “middle class” would be considered rich.

Back in my college days, there were quite a few international students at both the University of Oregon and Northwest Christian College where I was a student. Many of them were from Japan, Korea, and other Pacific Island nations. But we also had quite a few students from Sudan, Kenya, Haiti, and other developing nations. They’d come to this country and comment on how *everyone* who lived here was rich. Some of the college students who didn’t come from what we’d consider “rich” families said, “What do you mean, rich? *I’m* not rich.” The international students would say, “Yeah, but most people in your country have cars. Most people live in houses, and the houses they live in have running water, toilets, and floors.” Even people who came from developed nations –

France, Portugal, Korea, Brazil, South Africa – said, “Your grocery stores are overwhelming. You have so many choices. Your cereal aisles alone are enormous.” Apparently, Fruit Loops and Captain Crunch weren’t big in Johannesburg or Seoul. Some couldn’t get their heads wrapped around “big box” stores like Wal Mart or clothing stores like Macy’s or hardware stores like Lowe’s. We had a store in Eugene called G.I. Joes which started out as a military surplus store but grew into a huge sporting goods super-center. The international students even had a hard time understanding why Baskin Robbins had to have 31 flavors of ice cream. “Why so many? You are all so rich.”

Many of them had difficulty understanding our churches too. Of course, there were plenty of churches throughout the world that were ornate and had big buildings with stained glass windows and gothic architecture, but they were the exception, not the rule. Many of the elaborate church buildings in other countries were the mother-church of *all* of the congregations in their region. They couldn’t understand how *our* churches all had access to hymn books, Sunday school curriculum, and even Bibles. They couldn’t understand how every church seemed like they could have a separate fellowship hall with a kitchen. Even Sunday School rooms seemed like a luxury. And, they couldn’t believe that most of our pastors were paid money for their services. Some clergy in their home countries were paid in food and shelter with maybe a few days during the year where church members would take an offering for what little money they could come up with.

So to put this in perspective, according to Paul, the “rich” would include most American clergy and most members of US churches. It would include anyone who has the luxury of getting their food at a huge grocery store, anyone who has a vehicle, anyone who has regular access to indoor plumbing, and other things we take for granted here in the US. I’m sure today it would surprise some of those international students from developing nations how many people have cell phones. Paul’s message in this text is clear. He expects the rich who follow Christ to “do good, to be rich in good works, be generous, and be ready to

share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.”

In other words – This is what Disciples do: We live generously. Easy? No. Especially when we live in a culture where every day of the week we are bombarded with the message, “You don’t have enough.” Okay. Enough what? Possessions? Experiences? Friends? Security? Yes. All of the above. Your Wi-Fi isn’t fast enough. Your TV isn’t big enough. Your car isn’t safe. It doesn’t have a backup camera. It’s not stylish, nor is it energy efficient. You need the latest model.

Your clothes are out of style. Your shoes aren’t trendy enough nor do they perform as well as they should. Your body isn’t at its best. You aren’t buff enough. You aren’t slim enough. Your hair isn’t the right style or color. Your grill doesn’t talk to your phone and let you know when your pork chops are at their optimal temperature for serving. Your watch doesn’t keep track of your vital signs and tells you when you haven’t exercised enough or when it’s time to take a moment to breathe and meditate. Your house isn’t big enough nor is it smart enough. You should be able to say, “Hey Alexa, set temperature to 73 degrees Fahrenheit turn my living room lights to 30% luminosity.” Your vacations aren’t exciting enough or exotic enough. See, when you go on vacation, you deserve the “experience of a lifetime.” What you have isn’t enough. What you are isn’t enough. But we have something that will take care of that. This product or experience or whatever it is we’re offering is everything that you’ve been looking for. And, of course, it’s never enough.

I think this is one of the main reasons why Americans statistically aren’t very generous. What do you mean? Of course we’re generous. But are we? According to research that Christian Smith and Michael Emerson conducted in 2008, 20% of church people gave nothing to charity. Well, that’s not bad. That’s the opposite of the 80/20 rule that says 20% of people in any organization do 80% of the work so – big deal that sounds good actually. Okay, so let’s talk about the 80% who *do* give to charity. On average, the 80% give only 1-2% of their total income after taxes.

Smith and Emerson say that's what happens when people live in a radically consumerist culture – one that's intentionally designed to create permanent discontentment unless we buy more and more “stuff.” In short, we spend so much money on ourselves that we have little left for God and for people in need.

You know who the most generous people are? Poor people. Wait, are you saying poor people give more than rich people? Not quite. A study at the University of Manchester found that the poorest 20% of the population gave ~3.2% of their gross monthly income in a four-week period; while the richest 20% gave ~0.9%. So in absolute numbers, poorer people gave less money, but as a *share of income*, they gave a good bit more. Now, understand that this is a gross oversimplification of the study's results. There are a lot of other factors that we don't have time to consider. But I want you to think about what you know from your own experience with people. Think about how many times you've seen those who've experienced hard times step up when it comes to generosity, especially during disasters. People in poor communities are often quick to help others in need because during their time of need, folks came together to help them. You see it all the time. Especially in rural areas with a high concentration of churches. That isn't just in our country, it happens globally.

This is why international students from developing countries who identify as Christians cannot understand why all of these “rich Christians” in the United States have such a hard time being charitable when it comes to meeting community needs. They'll say, “It seems like they resent helping certain people they don't like. And the list of people they don't like seems to get larger every day.” Part of that, again, is the result of living in a hyper-consumeristic culture. But part of it also has to do with this, “I'm not going to give my hard-earned money to someone who I don't think deserves it. Or doesn't work as hard as me.” And yet Paul says –

There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

My international friends were right. By the standards of most of the world, we *are* already rich. So let's not waste time pretending we don't have enough. Instead, let's *surprise* the world by how freely we do share. Because disciples of Christ don't just talk about abundance — we live it. And when we do, the world sees a glimpse of the Kingdom of God that Jesus said was on it's way in.

Benediction —

Hear Paul's words again: "They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share." That's not a burden. That's an invitation. So may we leave this place with hands ready to give, hearts ready to serve, and lives ready to overflow with generosity — until the world sees in us the life that really is life.