

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15  
Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16

1 Timothy 6:6-19  
Luke 16:10-31

On September 17, the Lincoln Journal Star reported on another large gift to UNL from Jeff Raikes. Jeff Raikes is a native of Nebraska, growing up in the Ashland area. He worked for Microsoft and helped drive Microsoft's early work and had other high roles. He was CEO of the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation. He recently donated \$3 million to the newly created Nebraska Food for Health Center. In 2008 he donated \$10 million to the University. He has been a vital force in developing better seeds, advancing animal science, and improving ag engineering and farm management. We are grateful for the work of philanthropist such as Jeff Raikes.

Here is another story of generosity.. Kermit Long of Arizona has a moving story about one Christmas evening in Chicago. "A gentle snowfall added to the already magical, mystical beauty of the season. I had just finished presiding over the first of our candlelight services. Rather than waiting in the church until the late hour for the second service, I visited in the hospitals and roamed the few stores still open for late shoppers.

"I saw some people in a flower shop and joined them. Soon a young boy of about 7 or 8 came into the shop. His clothes were torn, and his tennis shoes had holes in them. He walked purposefully over to the counter and asked the shopkeeper, 'Do you have any roses for my mother for 10 cents?' "The man replied, 'Wait just a moment and I'll see what we can do for you.' After serving the other waiting customers, the owner turned back to the little boy and said, 'I have good news for you. On Christmas Eve, we have a special on roses for young fellows who want them for their mothers.' Taking the boy's dime, he placed a dozen beautiful, long-stemmed red roses in his arms. With a

big smile on his face, the boy left the flower shop and headed home. Those of us who looked on were warmed by what we had seen.

Generosity is not limited to multi-millionaires. We don't need to be filthy rich to be generous. In fact, the generosity of those who are not rich may be more generous in terms of the percentage of their income they give away. We can be generous.

As Christians, we are to be generous. Paul, in his letter to Timothy, calls Christians to be generous. Paul was a veteran missionary, traveling throughout Asia Minor and on to Europe, establishing churches along the way. He invited young Timothy to accompany him, mentoring Timothy as they traveled. Timothy became a trusted companion and younger colleague of Paul. Timothy was left to be responsible for a group of churches. In this letter Paul continues to mentor Timothy. Paul provides guidance in the problems of church administration and to oppose false teaching. Paul's advice is that we "are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share." We are to be generous people.

And yet it isn't easy being generous, is it? We take our smartphone in to ask an agent how we can put our spouse's phone number as a shortcut on the home screen. While waiting we see all the new phones that have more bells and whistles than our current phone. We go to the car dealership to have the oil changed, and to pass the time away, we go looking at the new cars. Having that car with a rear-view camera and extra air bags is exactly what we need. We go to the mall, walk through Youngkers and we see the suit that we really like. Other people have the things I want, and they seem fine. I mean, how bad can that be, really?

And so, how can we be generous when we are so tempted, when we want to keep up with the Jones. If they have it, why cannot I. Paul gives us some good advice: If we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.” Here Paul is referring to our basic needs, not the latest fashion or the fastest car. I think we all know this. We all know we should be content. As I said, we all have the strong temptation to have more. Other people have the things we want, and they seem fine, so how bad can that be, really?

Many of us Americans do not realize we really have it good. Compared to the whole world we have it good. In no other time in history has the world ever saw the prosperity we have. There is an interesting website called Global Rich List. I encourage you to try it. You can enter your income and find out where you stand in comparison to the rest of the world. Or you can enter your wealth, and find out where you stand in comparison to the rest of the world. I entered \$40,000. That showed that people making \$40,000 are in the top .57% of the world. You are a part of the one percent we keep hearing about. When we make \$20.83 per hour, the average laborer in Indonesia makes just \$.39 in an hour! Again, I encourage you to go in and try it. It is [GlobalRichList.com](http://GlobalRichList.com), or Google it, as they say.

Contentment with the basic necessities of life is put forward here as the proper approach to life. The word “contentment” in the Greek, the language in which Paul wrote this letter, also means “self-sufficiency.” In Philippians Paul wrote, “I have learned to be content with whatever I have.” The rationale, Paul explains is that “we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it.” As they say, “You cannot take it with you. Evidently this person did not know that.

In 2001, popular author Stephen King gave the commencement address at Vassar College. Though King is known for horror fiction, many readers have noticed explicitly Christian themes in his novels, and he has even acknowledged that in interviews. While walking down the road one day in 1999, King was struck and severely injured by a minivan. In the speech, he referred to both his accident and to the earning potential of the graduates, saying: Well, I'll tell you one thing you're not going to do, and that's take it with you. I'm worth I don't exactly know how many millions of dollars ... and a couple of years ago I found out what "you can't take it with you" means. I found out while I was lying in the ditch at the side of a country road, covered with mud and blood and with the tibia of my right leg poking out the side of my jeans .... I had a MasterCard in my wallet, but when you're lying in the ditch with broken glass in your hair, no one accepts MasterCard. ... We may be dressed when we go out, but we're just as broke. ... And how long in between? ... Just the blink of an eye.

King went on to discuss what the graduates could do with their earnings in the time they had in that eye-blink: Of all the power which will shortly come into your hands ... the greatest is undoubtedly the power of compassion, the ability to give. We have enormous resources in this country — resources you yourselves will soon command — but they are only yours on loan. ... I came here to talk about charity, and I want you to think about it on a large scale. Should you give away what you have? Of course you should. I want you to consider making your lives one long gift to others, and why not? ... All you want to get at the getting place ... none of that is real. All that lasts is what you pass on. The rest is smoke and mirrors.

Blessed be the Lord our God. Amen.