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Title: Tethered to God

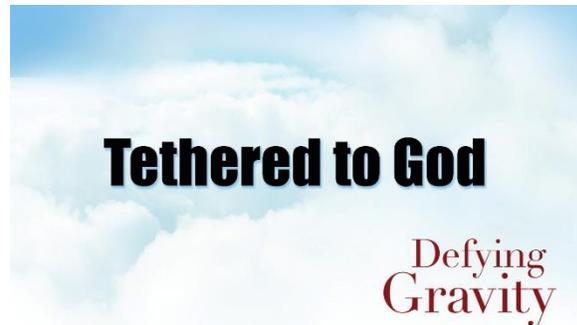
Date: October 27 & 28, 2018

Preaching: Randy Spleth, Senior Minister

Scripture: [Luke 14:28-33](#)

Text: [Matthew 6:19-24](#)

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There is a story about a businessman who checked into a hotel late at night. He decided that he would stop in the lounge for a nightcap. Pretty soon he called the hotel desk and asked, "What time will the lounge be opened in the morning?" The night clerk answered, "9:00 a.m." About an hour later he called again. The phone rang. The night clerk answered it. The businessman again asked, "What time will the lounge be opened in the morning?" He said, "9:00 a.m." He called a third time, and every hour throughout the night. Each time the night clerk answered, saying, "9:00 a.m."

At 7:00 a.m. the day manager arrived. The night clerk reported everything went all right, except for this crazy man who kept calling the desk every hour asking what time the lounge would open. Right then the phone rang again. The manager picked it up this time. Sure enough, it was the businessman asking what time the lounge would open. The manager said, "Look here! The night clerk tells me that you have been a nuisance all night long asking the same question. I am telling you for the last time, the lounge will be open at 9:00 a.m. You can't get in until then!" The businessman said, "Get in? I don't want to get in. I want to get out!"¹

We don't want to get in. We want to get out; that is the theme of our series. This is the third week that we've talked about having a better life by "Defying Gravity." It's not about trying to levitate or float in midair. It is about trying to avoid financial gravity, freeing ourselves from the pull of money. We want to get out.

To do so, you have to discover gravity. The starting place is recognition. Since Adam and Eve left the garden, there has been the financial gravity of needs, a gravitational pull to provide for the basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing. Like earth's Goldilocks zone of gravity, there is a goldilocks zone where the right amount of gravity leads to a healthy lifestyle. But we

live in a society that constantly tells us that we will be better off with more. There is a gravitational pull to move well beyond the zone of our needs into the zone of wants and it can threaten our health and well-being. As an example, we pointed to the rich young man who experienced so much financial gravity that he could not bear and accept Jesus' invitation to be a disciple. Our take away on the first week was this. Our many possessions pull on us, encouraging us to accumulate more and more. When we do, it creates a barrier to experiencing the kingdom of God. Discovering gravity, owning and claiming it as a financial force in your life is an important first step for spiritual growth.

Last week, we talked about breaking free. The example was another rich young man struggling with financial gravity. It was so severe that he was pulled into a black hole of excess, causing him to waste his inheritance through extravagant living. His story reveals a way to break free from this gravitational pull. It comes when we realize that everything you is a gift from God. Your life, your talent, and your resources are an inheritance, to be cared for as a steward. A steward understands that our lives, our talents, and our resources are to be used to honor the giver of our gifts, to honor and please God. Once you understand this responsibility, you can manage your inheritance through proportional giving leading to the discipline of a tithe. It is a biblical practice which God gave us to break free from the hungry black hole of financial gravity.

Discovering gravity is seeing. Breaking free is practice. Being tethered to God is about a life-giving connection, something you need if you are going to defy gravity. Ed White learned the joy of being tethered first hand.

It took place on June 3, 1965, when Ed went for a walk. It happened on the third orbit of his Gemini spacecraft, somewhere over the Pacific Ocean near Hawaii. He opened the hatch and tumbled out into space. Ed was able to do so because he was tethered to the spaceship's belly by a 26-foot golden cord. He tumbled around like a kid in a ball pit, taking pictures of the far-off ocean and propelling himself to and fro with his oxygen-jet gun. He was incredibly excited and reported "I feel like a million dollars. This is the greatest experience; it's just tremendous."

The experience of defying gravity while being tethered was euphoric. He swam around space from Hawaii to the Gulf of Mexico. He didn't want it to stop and Ground control had to talk him back in. When he finally did, he said, "It's the saddest moment of my life." With that, White became the first American to walk in space. He also became one of the first humans to show signs of what is now known as "space euphoria"—an out-of-this-world happiness and joy at defying gravity while being tethered.²

The joy of being tethered is something that Jesus says can be experienced with God. He talks about this in his Sermon on the Mount. It happens when we hunger and thirst for the righteous when we are merciful and pure of heart, when we are peacemakers. When we do all these things, we will see God, we'll be children of God, and we will be linked to God, tethered. As such, we experience incredible freedom. Just as White experience the euphoria of letting go and trusting his tether, so too when we let go, God provides joy

A tethered relationship with God gives us purpose, provides direction and is demonstrated through service. We become, as Percy Dearmer's famous hymn says "drawn in by the Spirit's Tether" that as "living sacraments through caring, helping, giving, we may true disciples be." But Jesus recognizes that there is tether competition and it is impossible to be linked two different ways because you will be pulled in two different ways. You'll "...either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other." Of course, when he is teaching on this, he is talking about the tether of God or the tether of money. He simply says, "You cannot serve God and money." (Matthew 6:24b-25) So he challenged us to demonstrate which we are tethered to through the practice of generosity, saying "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal." (Matthew 6:19-20) By this, he is encouraging us to be caring, helping, giving, to be generous.

Are you? I don't know very many people who don't want to be generous. In fact, I think, as I shared in our recent discipleship series, we are genetically hard-wired to give, to be generous. The problem isn't with our desire to be generous, it is the lack of a plan to be generous. Financial gravity gets in the way.

Tom Berlin, whose book *Defying Gravity* is the inspiration for our series, illustrates this in a powerful way as he described an incredible gravity-defying event that took place in 1927. It was the brainchild of a man named Raymond Orteig who had emigrated from France to New York City some 15 years earlier. Orteig is a rags to riches story, moving from busboy when he first arrived, to café manager, to eventually owning two New York hotels. A year after WWI, Orteig had created enough wealth that he could offer a prize of \$25,000 for the first nonstop aircraft flight from New York to Paris. It approximately \$350,000 in today's dollars. It was enough to incentivize a number of pilots and teams to work on the project. Several famous aviators arrived at Roosevelt field and the public followed their plans with intense

interest.³ Berlin tells about four competitors as an illustration for defying gravity but for this sermon, let's look at three.

One is Colonel Rene Fonck, a French fighter pilot who at the end of WW1 was the top Allied Ace. To enter the competition, he persuaded the aviation genius Igor Sikorsky to help build the plane. They were the odds-on favorite, an ace, and a genius but financial gravity got in the way. Fonck wanted to return to France in style so he started decorating the interior of the plane like it was a chateau, with heavy tables, a sofa bed, a cooking area with a kitchen sink. He stocked it with champagne for his celebration in Paris, with gifts for his friends by home. He even installed a warming cabinet to be filled with a sumptuous hot meal to be eaten during the flight. The problem was Sikorsky designed the plane to carry no more than 20,000 pounds. Unfortunately, on the day he designed to try his trans-Atlantic crossing, all of the extra stuff that he accumulated brought the plane in a whopping 28,000 pounds. Under the excess weight, the plane lumbered down the runway and as it neared the end, the landing gear collapsed, the plane toppled and burst into flames. Fonck and his navigator made it out, but the other two members of his crew did not.⁴

Sometimes, financial gravity defeats us. We want to be generous but we get caught up in the black hole of wants and self-indulgence. We store up earthly treasure, money, and possession. When we do, generosity can't get off the ground because we are so tied down and tethered by our possessions.

Another competitor was Commander Richard E. Byrd who himself was a WW1 pilot and the previous year in 1926 was the first to fly over the North Pole. He would later lead two successful Antarctic missions. But by nature, he was extremely cautious, if not a worrier. Byrd wanted to fly from New York to Paris, but he was very clear that he would not be rushed, prize or no prize. He took every safety device you could find in 1927 and sometimes carried two for the sake of redundancy, including double rations, water, clothes, radio, and two rubber rafts. He tested over and over again. On one of his trial runs, after a rough landing, he became even more obsessed.⁵ As a result of his extreme caution, he was still testing and retesting for nine days after the winning flight took off. He simply couldn't let go. He was too worried.

In our financial lives, sometimes we become so worried about the future that it holds us back from being generous now. We'll do it someday when we're sure we have enough, but sometimes, as for Byrd, someday comes too late. It is why Jesus says, "...do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew

6:34) Being tethered to God by faith means we are good stewards of the resources God gives us and we trust God to continue to provide for us. It is why we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," trusting there will be enough for tomorrow.

A late entrant for the Orteig Prize was the young aviator Charles Lindbergh. With the backing St. Louis bankers and Ryan Aircraft, he was giving the go-ahead to plan his solo flight and plan he did. Lindbergh wanted his plane, known as "The Spirit of St. Louis," to be as stable and light as possible, so it had only one engine, one seat for one pilot and no front windshield, all to conserve fuel. He used a side window and periscope to navigate. He carried a small raft but no radio or even a parachute. Lindbergh took off on May 20, 1927, and completed the 3,600-mile flight in 33 ½ hours, greeted in Paris by a cheering crowd. When he landed in France, the press dubbed him Lucky Lindy. But his success was by no means an accident. It was the result of singular focus, and his flawlessly executed plan, serving as both pilot and navigator.

How does it relate to us? Generosity, like Lindbergh's flight, does not just happen. It's the result of thoughtful design and plan. Again, generosity doesn't happen by accident. It arrives out of a household budget but is influenced by our relationship with God who we have to tether our lives to. When God is central to our lives, we begin to order everything we do in light of God's purpose and design for us. We make a plan by faith and wisdom, and then summon the courage to act. Jesus taught his disciples that their clear plan of action began with being tethered to God. He taught that thoughtful planning is essential whether you are building a house, going to war, or giving your possessions. Only then can we align our priorities and our lives with God's kingdom will we experience the full joy and blessing of faithfulness and generosity.

This week, you should have received a Defying Gravity packet with a pledge card for the upcoming year. It also includes a brochure about the ministries of our congregation. I hope you will use this as a tool for you to plan. If you have not received one in the mail, please forgive us and let us know; we'll get one to you. Our hope is that you will complete your plan for giving and bring it with you next week. Or, you can use the enclosed envelope to mail to the church or even pledge online at our website.

Again, generosity does not happen by accident. To make a real contribution, you have to think out what you hope to accomplish, plan a strategy and then, muster the courage to act. I pray you will so that you might experience generosity "euphoria"—an out-of-this-world happiness and joy at defying gravity when tethered to God.

¹ Dig In, Mark Trotter, retrieved by subscription @ sermons.com <https://sermons.com/sermon/dig-in/1353223>

² <https://io9.gizmodo.com/50-years-ago-the-first-american-walked-in-space-and-di-1708781846>

³ <http://www.charleslindbergh.com/plane/orteig.asp>

⁴ Berlin, Tom. *Defying Gravity: Break Free from the Culture of More* (p. 60). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition. 2222

⁵ Berlin, Tom. *Defying Gravity: Break Free from the Culture of More* (pp. 61-62). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.