



Living for Giving

A Series on Generosity and Discipleship

INTRODUCTION

One of the most well-known passages in all of scripture is this: “For God so loved the world that he **GAVE** his only son that whoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life.” God is fundamentally generous by nature. God is a giving God. God is a self-giving God. As those who are followers of the one who gave himself for us, we are called to live generous lives. Money can be an uncomfortable topic of discussion precisely because we assign so much value and importance to it. And yet, the witness of scripture is clear. How we approach money and how we use money matters. Giving generously of our money is fundamentally connected to our life of faith and discipleship. God doesn’t just want generosity from us. God wants it for us too. This series will explore the beauty of living for giving.

A Generous God

Image Bearing Stewards

Jesus is Lord (of our bank accounts)

Treasure, Heart, Kingdom

Expressing our Trust

Freed from Affluenza

Fruit

Overflow of Thanks



Living for Giving

“A Generous God”

Opening Prayer: Gracious God who creates, provides and saves with generous love, we thank you for your abundant mercies. You are a God whose nature is to give. Indeed, what do we have that we have not received? Help us to learn what it is to live generous lives. Empower us by your Spirit to give from a heart overflowing with generosity and thanks. We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Opening Question: What is one of the most generous things anyone has ever done for you?

Read: Genesis 1:1-4, 31; John 3:16

When God began to create the heavens and the earth— the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God’s wind swept over the waters— God said, “Let there be light.” And so light appeared. God saw how good the light was.

God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good. There was evening and there was morning: the sixth day.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won’t perish but will have eternal life.

Discussion:

- Why do you think God created at all?
- What does God creating the world and calling it good say about God’s nature?
- How does the created world remind us of God’s generous heart?
- What happens when we read John 3:16 and really emphasize the word “gave?”
- How does Jesus reflect God’s generous nature?
- What is the connection between God’s love and God’s generosity?
- What is the connection between receiving the gift of Jesus and living generous lives?

Big Idea: From the beginning of scripture to the end, it is clear God is a generous God. It is a fundamental part of God’s nature. It is how God reveals God’s self to us. From the creation of the world to its redemption in Jesus Christ, God is constantly giving because God so loves. As people who have received God’s ultimate gift of generosity in Jesus Christ, we become people who are also generous.



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Opening Question: What is one of the first things you remember having to take care of?

Read: Genesis 1:27-28; 2:15; 1 Peter 4:10

God created humanity in God’s own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground.”

The LORD God took the human and settled him in the garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it.

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

Discussion:

- When you hear the word “stewardship” what comes to mind?
- What does being made in God’s image have to do with being a steward?
- What are human beings supposed to be stewards of? What does that look like?
- Humans are placed in a garden setting. How might the image of a gardner help us think about our role as stewards?
- What do you think it means to stewards of the manifold grace of God? How are we entrusted to care for grace?
- How does embracing our role as image bearing stewards move us toward generosity?

Big Idea: Stewardship is about how we care for the things that God has entrusted to us in ways that serve God’s purposes. By virtue of God’s generosity, God entrusts things to our care and expects us to help bring about more order and beauty and flourishing. When we steward those things wisely, we are able to participate in God’s generosity and help bring forth God’s abundance. A bold embrace of our responsibilities as stewards moves us from timidly hoarding what God gives us to using it to opening our hands with generosity as we remember that the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.



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“Jesus is Lord (of our bank accounts)”

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Opening Question: What is one thing that you would be most reluctant to give to someone else?

Read: John 6:5-13

Jesus looked up and saw the large crowd coming toward him. He asked Philip, “Where will we buy food to feed these people?” Jesus said this to test him, for he already knew what he was going to do. Philip replied, “More than a half year’s salary worth of food wouldn’t be enough for each person to have even a little bit.” One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said, “A youth here has five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that for a crowd like this?” Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass there. They sat down, about five thousand of them. Then Jesus took the bread. When he had given thanks, he distributed it to those who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, each getting as much as they wanted. When they had plenty to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather up the leftover pieces, so that nothing will be wasted.” So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves that had been left over by those who had eaten.

Discussion:

- What does the truth that “Jesus is Lord” mean to you?
- What happens when this boy hands over his lunch to Jesus?
- Why is our money one of the hardest things to hand over to Jesus’ Lordship?
- What does it look like when Jesus is Lord of our finances?
- How is being financially generous connected to living like Jesus is Lord?
- What does this story have to say about the amount vs. spirit behind our giving?
- What might this story indicate to us about what happens when we’re willing to give to the work of Jesus?

Big Idea: Christians confess that Jesus is Lord. And yet, it’s very easy for us to behave like Jesus is Lord only of the parts of our life that we want him to be in charge of. It can be easy for our bank accounts and financial receipts to show that Jesus is not Lord. The truth is, when we are willing to be generous with our financial resources and offer them up to the Lordship of Christ, Jesus can take them and multiply them for his good and for ours creating an economy of abundance and provision. When we give to the church, we confess Jesus is Lord with our money.



Living for Giving

“Treasure, Heart, Kingdom”

Opening Prayer: Gracious God who creates, provides and saves with generous love, we thank you for your abundant mercies. You are a God whose nature is to give. Indeed, what do we have that we have not received? Help us to learn what it is to live generous lives. Empower us by your Spirit to give from a heart overflowing with generosity and thanks. We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Opening Question: What is one thing you feel like you have really invested in lately?

Read: Matthew 6:19-21; Mark 4:30-32

“Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don’t eat them and where thieves don’t break in and steal them. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

He continued, “What’s a good image for God’s kingdom? What parable can I use to explain it? Consider a mustard seed. When scattered on the ground, it’s the smallest of all the seeds on the earth; but when it’s planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all vegetable plants. It produces such large branches that the birds in the sky are able to nest in its shade.”

Discussion:

- What do you think Jesus means by “collecting treasures for your own benefit?”
- What do you think Jesus means by “collecting treasures in heaven?”
- In what ways might how we spend/invest our money be related to “collecting treasure?”
- How does what we invest in (where our treasure is) begin to shape what we love?
- What would Jesus say if he saw where your treasure is right now?
- What does investing in God’s Kingdom with our money look like?
- How might it look like the parable of the mustard seed Jesus tells?
- What would have to be true for you to assess how you spend/invest your treasure? What changes would you make?

Big Idea: Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21). People commonly take this to mean we should invest our resources in what’s important to us. But the meaning is just the opposite. Jesus is telling us that things become important to us when we invest money in them. So the question is, what do our receipts and our use of money say about our hearts? When we invest money in God’s Kingdom, we sow mustard seeds for God’s preferred future on earth as it is in heaven. The return on investment is priceless. Our hearts follow our investment—they become more full of love for God and neighbor.



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“Expressing our Trust”

Opening Prayer: Gracious God who creates, provides and saves with generous love, we thank you for your abundant mercies. You are a God whose nature is to give. Indeed, what do we have that we have not received? Help us to learn what it is to live generous lives. Empower us by your Spirit to give from a heart overflowing with generosity and thanks. We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Opening Question: How do you show someone that you trust them?

Read: Matthew 6:25-33

“Therefore, I say to you, don’t worry about your life, what you’ll eat or what you’ll drink, or about your body, what you’ll wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds in the sky. They don’t sow seed or harvest grain or gather crops into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth much more than they are? Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? Notice how the lilies in the field grow. They don’t wear themselves out with work, and they don’t spin cloth. But I say to you that even Solomon in all of his splendor wasn’t dressed like one of these. If God dresses grass in the field so beautifully, even though it’s alive today and tomorrow it’s thrown into the furnace, won’t God do much more for you, you people of weak faith? Therefore, don’t worry and say, ‘What are we going to eat?’ or ‘What are we going to drink?’ or ‘What are we going to wear?’ Gentiles long for all these things. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. Instead, desire first and foremost God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Discussion:

- What is the easiest and what is the hardest thing to trust God with/about?
- What does this passage communicate about God and God’s nature?
- Is it harder to trust God with our lives before or after we die? Why?
- Why do we place so much of our sense of security in money?
- What is the connection between trusting God to provide and take care of us and our own generosity with financial means?
- How might our financial giving be a way that we demonstrate our trust in God?
- How might our financial giving be a means by which we grow our trust in God?

Big Idea: A pastor once asked, “Why is it that we have an easier time taking Jesus at his word when he says, ‘In my Father’s house are many dwelling places...I go to prepare a place for you’ than when he says, ‘Don’t worry about your life, God will take care of you?’” It’s a good question. There is a fundamental connection between our generosity and our trust in God’s provision. Our giving reflects the extent to which we trust God as well as strengthens our trust muscles. When we give generously, we put our money where our trust is! We say, “God, I trust you will provide.”



Living for Giving

“Freed from Affluenza”

Opening Prayer: Gracious God who creates, provides and saves with generous love, we thank you for your abundant mercies. You are a God whose nature is to give. Indeed, what do we have that we have not received? Help us to learn what it is to live generous lives. Empower us by your Spirit to give from a heart overflowing with generosity and thanks. We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Opening Question: What is your guilty spending pleasure?

Read: Matthew 6:24; 1 Timothy 6:10

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Discussion:

- “Affluenza” is the constant need for more and bigger and better stuff — as well as the effect that this need has on us. Why do humans struggle with this condition?
- What happens when the value we place on money is based on security and status?
- Why do you think Jesus says that you cannot serve God and wealth?
- What do these passages suggest about the spiritual issue that might lie underneath affluenza?
- How might generosity be an antidote to affluenza?
- How might gratitude and contentment be important also?
- How does giving to God place a different kind of value on money?

Big Idea: As a part of our broken human condition, we fall prey to the temptation that the “good life” involves ever-increasing wealth and possessions. God’s abundance is meant to provide for our needs, not satisfy our greed. We can resist the constant “desire to acquire” illness when we live generous lives giving of our financial resources to God. This helps to foster contentment and gratitude which help inoculate us against affluenza.



Living for Giving

“Fruit”

Opening Prayer: Gracious God who creates, provides and saves with generous love, we thank you for your abundant mercies. You are a God whose nature is to give. Indeed, what do we have that we have not received? Help us to learn what it is to live generous lives. Empower us by your Spirit to give from a heart overflowing with generosity and thanks. We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Opening Question: When is a time you experienced good fruit from something you did?

Read: Deuteronomy 26:10; Galatians 5:22

So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me.’ You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God.

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

Discussion:

- “First Fruits” was a giving practice for Israelites where they would donate their first and best crops of harvest to the Temple. What would that have demonstrated?
- What is the difference between giving God our leftovers vs. giving to God “first?”
- How might approaching our giving with a “first fruits mindset” help us become more generous?
- Speaking of fruit, how are we as followers of Jesus the “first fruits” of God’s generosity?
- What does it mean that generosity is a “fruit” of the Holy Spirit in us?
- Why is it important that others see our “generosity” fruit of the Spirit?
- What does generosity evidence about us? About God?

Big Idea: There is a big difference between giving to God first and giving to God last. It can be easy to give to God whatever we have left at the end of the week or month. When we joyfully give to God first, we demonstrate our love for God as well as our priorities. It opens us up to allow God to work in our lives. It also reflects the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. When we practice “first fruits giving” we show the fruit of generosity.



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“Overflow of Thanks”

Opening Prayer: Gracious God who creates, provides and saves with generous love, we thank you for your abundant mercies. You are a God whose nature is to give. Indeed, what do we have that we have not received? Help us to learn what it is to live generous lives. Empower us by your Spirit to give from a heart overflowing with generosity and thanks. We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Opening Question: What do you most often do when you are really thankful for something?

Read: 2 Corinthians 8:12; 9:7-8

For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

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. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Discussion:

- What do these passages communicate about the spirit behind giving to God?
- Why do you think these scriptures place so much emphasis on the motivation rather than the amount?
- What might be the problem with giving out of obligation or guilt?
- What do you think it means to be a “cheerful giver?”
- How does gratitude relate to our willingness to give and our cheerfulness in giving?
- One pastor said, “If your giving is not bringing you joy, it’s *not* because you’re giving too much. God calls us to give until it feels good.” What do you think about that?
- How might our thankfulness and joy help us “decide in our hearts what to give?”

Big Idea: Giving of our financial resources is and must be an expression of our gratitude; not a forced or guilt-driven duty. Giving is a product of our joy and also makes us more joyful too! God is much more concerned with our motivations than the amount we are giving. Generosity flows from a heart that is cheerful when it comes to giving. Our willingness to give as an overflow of thanksgiving is much more sustainable and will lead to more generous amounts over the long haul.



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Wrap-Up

What is the biggest thing God is saying to you after this study and these conversations?

What are you going to do about it? What are your next steps?