

**RESPONDING
TO THE
GENEROSITY
OF GOD**



**THE
JOURNEY™**

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The Generosity of God

Psalm 107:8-9

Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.

St. Augustine said that man suffers from an inward famine. He spends his life seeking to quench his thirst and fill his empty soul. He stuffs his heart full

of career, relationships, money and expensive toys. But, at the end of his search, he is still spiritually emaciated. Man, Augustine says, is starving for God.

What man needs, only God can supply. He is the One who provides spiritual drink that finally quenches the thirsty soul. He is the One who provides spiritual food that finally fills the hungry heart. It is his unfailing love that brings the peace of knowing there is nothing we can do to make him love us more, and there is nothing we can do to make him love us less.

Perhaps you can relate to the feeling of an inward famine. You have tried to fill your life with everything the world has to offer. But you are still empty. Today I invite you to find in Jesus the spiritual food and water you have wanted all along. Don't "try" Jesus to see if he "works." Bow before him as your Savior and Lord. Through Jesus, God has done "wonderful deeds of men!"

Heavenly Father, I pray for the person reading this who well understands the feeling of inward famine. I pray that today that person trusts in Jesus as the only way to have a relationship with you. May they finally understand that they have been starving for you all along. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generosity of God

James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

Life presents weighty issues that carry significant consequences. There are decisions we face each day that will put us on a path that is good for us, or a path that is best for us. But it is hard to see the

"good" or the "best" at the beginning of the journey.

When we lack the wisdom we need, there is only one place to go. We must seek God's direction. When we do, he promises to give us the insight we need. Wisdom from God is not simply acquired information. It is "practical insight with spiritual implications."

God will never find fault in our requests. He desires that we come to him and seek his help. He wants us to trust him and "lean not on our own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5-6). He knows the beginning from the end. After all, he is God - and we are not.

Heavenly Father, give us the wisdom we need for this day. Help us to make decisions led by your Spirit. Thank you for being such a generous God! In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generosity of God

2 Corinthians 8:9

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Often we evaluate the depth of our spiritual life by the things we do for God. We log our hours of service. We account for our tax deductible giving.

We note our endeavors to share the Gospel. We check off another day on our Bible reading plan. We make an entry in our prayer journal. We track the times when we mowed the neighbor's lawn or took a meal to a person recovering from surgery.

These are all good things to do for God. But let's be very clear on this point: It's not about what we have done or will ever do for God; it's all about what he has done for us. The owner and creator of all things humbled himself by taking on human flesh in order to provide the free gift of grace for you and me. The One who was eternally rich became poor in order to transfer eternal wealth to those who were spiritually bankrupt. Generosity begins and ends with Jesus.

Father, thank you for your generosity! Thank you for the gift of salvation that comes only by your grace. Thank you for making us new creatures in Christ Jesus. Thank you for preparing in advance good works for us to do! In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generosity of God

2 Corinthians 9:6

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

My brother-in-law was a wheat farmer. In the summer, he and his brothers would plow acres of ground outside our little Oklahoma town and in the fall they would plant wheat. There is a basic principle to this procedure: The more seeds that are

scattered in the fall, the more wheat would grow in the spring.

The Apostle Paul used this agricultural analogy to make a spiritual point. When we live stingy lives, we will get a stingy return. When we live generously, we will reap generously. This principle is not unique to Paul. The proverbs say that a generous person will be blessed. "...He who refreshes others will himself be refreshed" (Proverbs 11:25, 22:19). Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you.... For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6:38).

So, the question for today is fairly straightforward. When it comes to all that God has given you, are you stingy or generous? The answer to that question will be evident at harvest time.

Father, our giving is based in trusting you. Help us to trust you more deeply so that we can give more generously. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generosity of God

2 Corinthians 9:13

Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

In today's passage, Paul gives two results of generosity—Proof and Praise. Let's check them out.

First, sincere generosity proves our relationship with God. We are by nature selfish and stingy. Just watch a little boy protect his toy truck. Not much changes when we get older. But generosity demonstrates that God is at work in our hearts. Generosity is one characteristic that shows the natural has been replaced with the supernatural.

Second, generosity leads others to praise God. When you share the blessings that God has given, the recipients will "praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ." Beneficiaries are grateful for God's work in the heart of an individual characterized by giving.

So, here's your assignment. Demonstrate that God is at work in your heart with some no-strings-attached generosity. Cause others to praise God for your supernatural obedience.

Father, give us the opportunity to be generous today so that others will give praise for your work in our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Life

Psalm 139:16

Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Have you ever wondered if your life really matters? In quiet moments do you contemplate what kind of impact, if any, you are making? In those reflecting minutes before falling asleep do you ever question

your significance and value? Well, I can assure you that God is not thinking those thoughts about you.

God has always had you on his mind. Before your first moment of life he knew all about you. He watched you grow in your mother's womb. Like Michelangelo's "David" and da Vinci's "Mona Lisa", you are God's masterpiece and more priceless than any painting. In fact, before you came to be he had charted all the days of your life. You have been created to do the good works that God prepared in advance for you to do (Eph. 2:10). He sent his Son to die just for you and is preparing your eternal home. One day he will take you there to live with him forever.

Does your life matter!? Perish the thought!!

Father, thank you for life. Thank you for the complex systems that make up our bodies. Thank you for an Earth that allows us to live and breathe. Thank you for Jesus who allows us to know you. Thank you for your Holy Spirit who enables us to do those good works that you prepared in advance for us to do. Thank you for your generous and gracious gift of life! In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Life

Luke 1:41

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

When John the Baptist, still in his mother's womb, heard the voice of the one who was carrying the Anointed One of God, he leaped for joy. He would be the one who prepared the way for Jesus and,

even prior to birth, John's excitement could not be contained.

John the Baptist never lost his excitement for Jesus. John's ministry garnered quite a following of his own. A lesser man might have used that influence to his own advantage. But John said of Jesus, "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30).

A friend is fond of asking people, "When you die, what do you want to be put on your tombstone?" Few spend much time thinking about that until it is too late. But John's statement could be...no, should be...the tombstone statement for us all—"Jesus became greater; I became less."

Father, remind us daily that our lives are about lifting up Jesus. Each day may we become less as we exalt Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Life

Matthew 18:2-3

He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

We recently lost a young man at our church who battled with health issues for the entirety of his life. Josh passed from this life...but he did not

pass away. Jesus described Josh's journey as a crossing over from death to life (John 5:24). Because of Josh's child-like faith in Jesus, death was simply a transition. The moment he was absent from his body; he was present with the Lord (Phil. 1:23-24).

Jesus never describes faith as an intellectual exercise reserved for the learned. Certainly, there is much value in serious study and challenging debate. We are to know what we believe and why we believe it. But the journey with Jesus always begins with the kind of simple trust of a child.

So, at his memorial service, we talked about Josh's first impressions of heaven. We talked about the things that were present and absent. We talked about the things he would be doing. And we talked about how everything would dim in the presence of Jesus...the Person and Object of Josh's child-like faith.

Father, help us to not get full of ourselves and take ourselves too seriously. Help us to love you and follow hard after you with a child-like faith. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Life

James 1:27

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Six died; thirteen lay wounded. A senseless tragedy brought about by a deranged young man in Tucson, Arizona. The memorial services lasted for days; the

first one for a nine-year-old girl whose life was snuffed out by the killer's abandon. We live in a confused and confusing world.

Believers do not have all the answers to the shock waves that rock our country or the storms that rock our lives. We live in a "polluted" culture where children lose parents, parents lose children, and spouses walk from the grave of their life mate. Our job is not to explain why... we have a higher calling.

A relationship with the living God calls for us to do something. We are to "look after" those in the midst of shock waves and storms. We are to provide listening ears. We are to offer helping hands. We are to speak with voices of comfort. Our job is to convey the love of the Loving God.

Lord, today we will have the opportunity to speak truth and comfort. May we not be silent. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Life

Psalm 82:3-4

Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

We were helpless and hopeless. Sin did its ugly work and threw us in a ditch by the side of the road. There we lay...wounded, broken, alone and left to die. Then Jesus came.

Jesus gave us everything we needed. By his wounds he healed ours. In his brokenness he made us whole. He died alone so we would never be by ourselves again. He died so that we could live. He was raised from the dead so that we could live forever.

Now, empowered by his Spirit who lives within us, it's our turn. We are his hands and feet to care for the weak, fatherless, poor, oppressed and needy. Having been saved by the Rescuer, we are commissioned to do our part. Slow down and look around. Sin is still doing its ugly work and throwing people in the ditch by the side of the road.

Father, may we not be hoarders of your goodness. Compel us to respond to your great generosity in our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Jesus

Genesis 3:17

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

There is deep within us an ambition for deity. We get it from our first parents. We like to call our own shots instead of following the direction of the Creator. Adam and Eve learned the hard way and we are still suffering the consequences.

Work was not a result of the fall, but "painful toil" was. We will plow the fields, or chase down business, or tire ourselves in occupational pursuits until we die. And then we will return to the ground. "For dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3:19). It's all a meaningless cycle... unless broken by the One who crushed the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15).

Jesus makes us a new creation. Still living in a fallen world, in him we find meaning and significance. We live to honor him through every facet of our lives. Our bodies still return to the dust awaiting the great resurrection, but our spirits fly away absent from the body and present with the Lord. All this because of God's generous gift of Jesus.

Father, thank you for Jesus, who makes all things new! In his name we pray. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Jesus

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16 is the simplest, clearest and perhaps most powerful presentation of the Gospel in all of Scripture. These inspired words describe the immense generosity of God's love, and the generous gift that waits when we respond. How can we begin to describe the depth of God's love that "gave his one and only Son" for us?

Henry Moorhead was a 19th century evangelist who preached John 3:16 night after night as he shared the Gospel throughout the world. At one of his meetings, Moorhead said:

My friends, for a whole week I have been trying to tell you how much God loves you, but I cannot do it with this poor stammering tongue. If I could borrow Jacob's ladder and climb up into heaven and ask Gabriel, who stands in the presence of the Almighty, to tell me how much love the Father has for this world, all he could say would be, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son."

-Morgan, 100 Bible Verses, 54

God's love led him to give his Son for you! Only one question remains: Have you received the free gift of eternal life by placing your faith in Jesus as the One who paid the penalty for your sin? If not, what are you waiting for?

Lord Jesus, thank you for dying so that I might live. Thank you for paying the debt I could never pay. Thank you for dying in my place. Thank you for eternal life. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Jesus

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Our backs were turned on God. We wanted no part of him. We were not seeking God. We were seeking to fill our lives with the things that brought pleasure. Our heart did not fear God; we feared not getting

what we wanted.

But Jesus did not wait for us to get our spiritual act together. He knew that left to ourselves we would never come to our spiritual senses. So, “at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died” for us (Rom. 5:6). God demonstrated how much he loved us by sending Jesus to die for us in our sinful state!

J. Sidlow Baxter wrote, “Christ died for us. Here is a simple sentence in four words. The first two words state a historical fact: ‘Christ died.’ The second two add the theological significance: ‘for us.’ The full four form the crux of the Gospel: ‘Christ died for us.’ Never did four short words hold a bigger or better message.” (Morgan, 100 Bible Verses, 60).

Father, thank you for demonstrating your great love to us by sending your Son to die on our behalf. We will never be able to comprehend the depth of such love. We will never stop praising you for it. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Jesus

Philippians 2:5-8

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross!

The work of Jesus on our behalf is hard for us to comprehend. The depth of his love burrows into places of our heart where we have not yet traveled. There are times in dark moments of pride when we reason that we are worthy of his love. Being the self-made men and women we are, it’s hard for us to understand the helplessness and hopelessness of our spiritual bankruptcy. Yet, even in our arrogant state, Christ died for us—“even death on a cross!”

The Greek word, kenosis, translates “made himself nothing.” It describes the self-emptying of Christ when he became man. Jesus did not empty himself of deity. He lived and died fully-God, fully-man. However, he did set aside his heavenly glory (John 17:5), his authority (Matt. 26:39), his divine prerogatives (Matt. 24:36) and his eternal riches (2 Cor. 8:9). Jesus even set aside, for a time, his relationship with God. He voluntarily experienced the Father’s wrath for our sin while on the cross (Matt. 27:46).

How can you respond to such love? A half-hearted life of serving when you feel like it, giving when it’s convenient, and loving as long as you get something in return will not do. At some point we have to begin responding to Christ with our whole heart and whole self.

Father, forgive us for holding back and holding out. Forgive us for spending this one and only life on personal desires and pleasure. Plant and grow in us the attitude of Jesus. Develop in us a whole heart for you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Jesus

John 12:3

Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

It was worth a year's wages; perhaps a lifetime of savings. The flask contained more than expensive perfume; it provided financial security. But that was not on Mary's mind as she knelt at the feet of her Lord; the One who raised her brother from the dead. In an act of pure worship she poured out the perfume and used her hair to wipe the fragrance on the feet of Jesus.

Not everyone appreciated Mary's worship. In fact, the disciples were "indignant." They asked, "Why this waste? This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor." Few can relate to such radical worship. But Jesus can. He said that Mary had "done a beautiful thing" to him.

Radical acts of service and worship will often be misunderstood. When believers sacrifice their lives or possessions to further the kingdom, many people...even many believers...will conclude, "What a waste!" But then people...even other believers...didn't die for us, did they? There is only one perspective that matters. And he calls radical worship "a beautiful thing."

Father, pry our clinching fingers from the stuff that matters most to us. Give us a heart, not just for worship, but for radical worship. Help us to do "a beautiful thing" in your sight. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of the Holy Spirit

Psalm 2:6-7

"I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father."

God has installed his King. Despite the nations joining forces to overthrow him (see Psalm 2:1-5), God has already done what they tried to keep him

from doing.

God has installed his King. Because of his obedience to death, God exalted Jesus to "the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name" (Philippians 2:8-9). One day everyone will bow and proclaim that he is King.

God has installed his King. But who is really sitting on the throne of your life...you or Jesus? Really?

Heavenly Father, thank you for installing your King! May we live today in the presence of Jesus. May we live today with a passion to obey him. May we live today with the purpose he has planted in our hearts. In the name of King Jesus we pray. Amen.

The Generous Gift of the Holy Spirit

John 16:7

But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

Jesus promised that when he left the Holy Spirit would come. That promise was fulfilled in Acts 2.

Now, the moment a person trusts in Jesus as Savior

the Holy Spirit comes to live with them and in them (John 14:17).

This truth is much more than good theology. It is practical for daily living. A. W. Tozer wrote, "Wherever there's more godliness, there's less crime. A Spirit-filled congregation is useful in the neighborhood—useful to the sons of men, even the ones that are not converted."

Are you "useful?" Is your office different because you are there? Are you "useful" in your home? Have you allowed the Holy Spirit to work through you in your school, neighborhood and church? May we be so determined to follow hard after Jesus by the power of his Holy Spirit that we are used by him and are "useful to the sons of men, even the ones that are not converted."

Dear Heavenly Father, use us and make us useful. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of the Holy Spirit

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

I sometimes get it backwards. When my relationship with God grows stale, I convince myself that spiritual performance will freshen up my walk. But

I am beginning to learn that doing more does not bring renewal. Oswald Chambers says it well: "Freshness [with God] does not come from obedience but from the Holy Spirit; obedience keeps us in the light as God is in the light."

In today's passage, Jesus commands us to be his witnesses. Certainly, there is some "doing" involved in that. We are to take his message to our community, region and world. This is, or should be, the believer's determined purpose. But notice what precedes our action—the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we grow spiritually stale, it is time to recharge...not to continue our charge forward. When we have been revived by the Holy Spirit's power then we will be able to do all that he has called us to do. Attempts at obedience without God's power leads to legalism and staleness. Let's not get the cart before the horse.

Father, remind us that freshness comes from you alone. Forgive us for getting it backwards. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of the Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 12:13

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-- and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

There is much discussion regarding the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Let's break down this passage to help us better understand the significant role of the Holy Spirit.

For we were all baptized by one Spirit.... At the beginning of the Christian life the Holy Spirit gives us new life (regeneration) and frees us from the power and love of sin (initial stage of sanctification). The baptism of the Holy Spirit refers to all that God does for us at the beginning of our Christian lives.

...into one body.... By the work of the Holy Spirit every believer, regardless of nationality or status, is a member of the Universal Church... the Body of Christ.

...we were all given the one Spirit to drink... God indwells us by his Spirit. It is the indwelling Holy Spirit that provides spiritual freshness and fruit. "Freshness does not come from obedience but from the Holy Spirit" (Oswald Chambers).

Father, thank you for the Spirit's work of regeneration and sanctification in our lives. Thank you for the freshness that only he can bring. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of the Holy Spirit

Ephesians 6:18

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

I am not sure how this works with you but here's the deal for me—I don't always know how to pray or what exactly to pray for. I want to pray for God's will,

but often it's hard to know if I am praying for his will or mine. Today's passage is the first step to praying for my will to match God's rather than God's will to match mine.

To pray "in the Spirit" does not refer to a mysterious prayer language. The focus here is submission. When I pray "in the Spirit" I am submitting to the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit in my life so that what I desire lines up with what God desires for me.

Paul says it like this in his letter to the Romans, "...The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (Rom. 8:26-27).

Father, help us to always pray in the Spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Community

Acts 4:32

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.

The early church is a great example of what can happen when Christian egos are checked in at the front door. Emboldened and empowered, these early

believers moved forward as one person, “one in heart and mind.” So deep was their love for Christ and each other, that they lived in a state of perpetual generosity.

Think of the impact your local church could have if this example was followed. Fighting would stop. Rumors would end. Vision would move from paper to practice. Needs would be met. Spiritual gifts would be exercised. Your community would see that God is doing a powerful work among his people. Christ would be honored.

But...what happens when the example of Acts 4:32 is ignored? Rumors spread. Fighting continues. Vision is only a word. People are hurt. Spiritual gifts atrophy. Your community concludes the church is not that much different than the country club, or the VFW, or the neighborhood bar. Christ is shamed.

Father, thank you for your church—the Bride of Christ. May we do our part to make it look like the church of Acts 4:32. Forgive us if we have been involved in anything to shame the Bride of Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Community

Acts 2:46-47

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The need for community is embedded deep within the human heart. From the neighborhood bar to a book club; from golfing buddies to a section of season ticket holders...we yearn for a place to be known and accepted. I have asked retired professional athletes what they miss most after leaving their sport. They tell me that it's not so much the game they miss; it's the camaraderie of the locker room.

The need for community is embedded deep within the human heart because God put it there. He desires us to be in a relationship with him and with each other. That's why he ordained the Christian community. The early church met together regularly, enjoyed meals together and worshiped together. And the world was attracted to the vibrant community.

The church is not made up of perfect people. We are broken and wounded. And many are still trying to find a place to deposit their past baggage. We are sinners with this in common—we have been saved by grace! It's our relationship with Jesus that changes everything. And real community that is focused on Jesus is still attractive to the world.

Father, thank you for the Body of Christ—the Church! Thank you for inviting the likes of us into your great community! In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Community

James 1:27

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

When you hear the words “Big Talker” a certain person probably comes to your mind. The phrase describes a person who is full of stories of

accomplishment, but little to show that he has actually gotten anything done. In the words of the country song, “a little less talk and a lot more action” is what God is looking for.

God is looking for people whose spirituality produces more than big talk. “Pure and faultless” religion puts love into action by looking after people in distress. “Pure and faultless” religion follows hard after Christ in obedience instead of breathing in the spiritual pollution of the world.

So, how about you? Do you possess a “religion” that the Father accepts. Or...are you just a big talker?

Father, make us men and women of action, empowered by your Spirit and sold out to your cause! In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Community

James 2:15-16

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

Bloodied and bruised, he lay by the side of the road.

Thugs had done their dirty work leaving the traveler stripped of his clothes and money, and left for dead. Helpless, the beaten man waited to die.

Two religious leaders traveled the road and saw the poor man's desperate state, but they had things to do...important meetings and appointments. So they avoided him, passing by on the other side. Finally, a man came along who belonged to a hated race. No one could have blamed him if he didn't stop. Goodness knows, no one would have stopped if he were the dying man. But something grabbed his heart. He tended to the beaten man's wounds and took him to a safe place to recover. He paid for all the expenses.

Jesus told the story in response to the question, “Who is my neighbor?” But after telling the story Jesus turned the question upside down and asked which person in the story “was a neighbor” to the beaten man? That's the real question, isn't it? Not “Who is my neighbor?” but “Am I being a neighbor?” Being a neighbor is more than simply giving well wishes.

Father, may we never think our well wishes are an act of obedience. Help us to be those who get things done for you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Community

Romans 12:13

Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

At some point each believer has to deal with this question: What am I supposed to do with all the resources God has given me? We know the points of stewardship—God owns everything. Everything we have is a gift from him. Therefore, we should

thankfully use all our resources to honor him. But it's one thing to know those truths in our heads; it's another to accept them in our hearts. It's only twelve inches from the head to the heart, but it's a long journey that some believers never make.

I don't know the specific purpose for your possessions. But I do know four things:

- They are to be shared; not hoarded.
- They are to be used to meet your needs...and the needs of others.
- Your heart always follows your investments (Matt. 6:21).
- You can't serve God and money.

That's the general stuff. Now, specifically, what does God want you to do with all the resources he has given you?

Father, may we be thankful and purposeful. Show us what you want us to do with your resources. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Time

Genesis 1:5

God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning-- the first day.

Time is the one thing that puts all men and women on the same playing field. How we use the twenty-four hour units called "days" will be a big factor in who we are and how effective we are. In his book,

Spiritual Leadership, Oswald Sanders puts it this way: "The manner in which [a person] employs the surplus hours after provision has been made for work, meals, and sleep will make him either a mediocrity or a man to be reckoned with" (113).

A "mediocrity" or "a man to be reckoned with." I do not want to live my life and be described as a "mediocrity." But to become "a man to be reckoned with" you have to start right now. The clock is ticking.

Father, teach us to number our days. May we use each second, minute and hour in a way that honors you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Time

Ecclesiastes 3:1

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven....

Some people have more resources than others, some have more gifts, but time is the one thing that is measured out to us in the same amount. Whatever language you speak, wherever you are located on the globe, each of us is on the clock.

So, what are you doing with the 168 hours, 10,080 minutes, and 604,800 seconds God graciously gives you each week? How much time do you spend working; eating; sleeping; watching television; surfing the web; doing leisure activities with your family; using your spiritual gifts in service; reading Scripture?

You can do one of two things with time—invest it or waste it. Investing time in worthwhile endeavors reaps eternal benefits. Waste time...and you will never get it back.

Father, thank you for the gift of time. Help me to invest it in eternal things. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Time

Psalms 90:12

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

In today's passage, Moses calls for a time of reflection. Our lives, Moses says, "quickly pass, and we fly away." We need to consider the brevity of our time on Earth. Spurgeon says that men are humbled "as they look into the grave which is soon to be their

bed, their passions cool in the presence of mortality...."

This solemn reflection about our days on Earth allows us to "gain a heart of wisdom." Foolish living focuses only on today and seeks to satisfy immediate desires with instant pleasures. An understanding that our days are ordained by God with no guarantee of tomorrow leads us to invest in things that have eternal value...things that will outlive us.

Wise living comes from the wise investment of our time, gifts and money. One day we will leave all these things behind. But if we use them wisely our investments will continue to pay off. It's not about leaving an inheritance; it's all about leaving a legacy.

Father, we pray with Moses, please teach us to number our days aright. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Time

Psalm 139:15-16

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

God is the designer of our frame and the architect of our days. He not only wove us together, marking his masterpiece with a unique fingerprint; he also planned out our days with meaning and purpose.

The ordaining of our days was fulfilled when God brought us to Jesus. We were “created in Christ Jesus to do the good works that he prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

Every day, and every hour of every day, is an opportunity to do the good works that God formed us to do. We were created to live out his plan for our lives. That’s something to ponder, isn’t it? Are you living out God’s plan for you or your plan for you?

Father, living out our plan will leave us unsatisfied and unfulfilled. Don’t let us miss the good works that you prepared in advance for us to do. May we know and live out your will for our lives. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Time

Hebrews 9:27

Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment...

I think it was Woody Allen who said that he didn’t mind the thought of dying; he just didn’t want to be there when it happened. Many share his sentiments. We have settled in our minds that we will die but, until we are at that point, no one can be truly

prepared for life’s last experience.

But then, death will not be our last experience. After physical death, we will face judgment. That evaluation will determine our eternal destiny, and it all boils down to the issue of how we respond to Jesus.

How have you responded to Jesus? The writer to the Hebrews says that Jesus was sacrificed once to take away our sins. When he comes again, it will not be to “bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” Have you trusted in Jesus as the sacrifice that took away your sins? If not, today is the day!

Father, I pray for the person reading this who has not trusted in Christ. May you bring them to yourself today. May they trust in Jesus as the only way to an eternal relationship with you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Possessions

Luke 12:15

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Mukesh Ambani owns it...the most expensive house in the world. The 570 feet tall structure is made entirely of glass and has 27 floors. Ambani's

160 car garage is filled with his collection and 18 additional cars have to be parked outside. If Ambani ever sells the house you'll only need a cool \$1 billion and it's yours!

Last I checked, avarice is not a fruit of the Spirit. But acquiring stuff is certainly attractive. That's why Jesus tells us to "Watch out!" and be on our guard "against all kinds of greed." God does not measure our lives by the size of our portfolios.

And one more thing...when Ambani dies, guess how much money he is expected to leave behind? All of it! He will leave every last cent. As someone well said about money, "You can't take it with you; but you can send it on ahead." That's why believers invest in eternal stuff.

Father, remind us of this truth—our worth does not consist of the abundance of our possessions. We need to be reminded often. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Possessions

Luke 12:18-20

Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." 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?"

Our passage today is a parable Jesus told about a rich man who produced a good crop. He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops." So he decided to build bigger barns, store the grain, and take life easy; eat, drink and be merry. And you can see from the passage that God was not impressed with the decision.

For many people in our upwardly mobile society, more money usually means more stuff. We move from a starter home, to a mid-size home, to our dream home, to a second home. We translate God's blessing on us as bigger, better, faster for us. And God is not impressed.

Have you ever seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul? Everything we work for with an earthly price tag will one day be left behind. Jesus said, "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." Remember, you can't take it with you, but when you invest in eternal things, you can send it on ahead.

Father, help us to use your blessing on us in a way that honors you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Possessions

Luke 12:22-23

Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes."

How much time do you spend worrying—the mental torment of disturbing thoughts about today and

fretting about what may or may not happen tomorrow? The good news about worrying is that you will never run out of something to worry about. The bad news is...worry will suck faith and trust and dependence right out of your heart.

Jesus' teaching on worry can be summed up in one word—"Stop!" Worry is a fruitless exercise that robs you of today's joy, fills tomorrow with dread and then repeats the pattern. Worry does not add value; it steals your thoughts and emotions.

You have heard it said that worry doesn't change anything...but it does. Worry changes you! It changes your capacity to make decisions, your energy level, your personality and even your physical appearance. Most of all, it changes your view of God. Worry belongs to those who believe in a small, weak god...so they have to take matters into their own hands.

Father, help us to not worry. Teach us to depend on you even in the midst of storms and fears. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Possessions

Luke 12:29-30

And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them.

"Running after stuff" aptly sums up the lives of many people. The "stuff" includes money, possessions, relationships and careers. The significance sought in

"stuff" is found in a paycheck, purchase, promotion or person. When our heart is set on "stuff" we are like a person walking down a sloping sidewalk after a freezing rain. Sooner or later... we are going to take a tumble.

Jesus reminds us in today's passage that our Father knows exactly what we need. Instead of running after stuff, we should pursue him! When we pursue God, we'll find all we need in him.

Father, turn us from the dangerous paths of pursuing temporal stuff. Point us toward a dogged pursuit of you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Possessions

Matthew 6:33

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

A year out of college and newly married, I stood on the ramp that led from the locker room to the basketball court. Our team was anxiously waiting to take the floor amid a gym full of cheering fans

and the band blasting out our fight song. I had experienced these feelings as a player. Now, as I stood on the ramp as an assistant coach for my alma mater, the emotions came flooding back.

Faye O'Dell, the Athletic Director, made his way down the crowded corridor. I had great respect for O'Dell, an outspoken follower of Jesus. He found me in the hallway, put his arm around me and shouted, "Matthew 6:33!" I will never forget that as long as I live.

I absolutely loved coaching. But God had placed another call on my life. After that year Lori and I moved south to start training for ministry at Dallas Theological Seminary. Mr. O'Dell is now with the Lord, but his reminder of Matthew 6:33 still rings in my ears.

Father, help us to always seek you first...then depend on you to take care of the rest of our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Purpose

Ephesians 2:10

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Feeling low? Lift up your head! Feeling discouraged? Be encouraged! Feeling defeated? The game's just getting started! You are on this Earth for a reason! Your life has meaning! You have been created in

Christ Jesus "to do good works, which God prepared in advance for [you] to do"!

You are God's masterpiece! He knit you together in your mother's womb and ordained your days (Ps. 139:16). He sent his Son to die for you! He created you anew in Christ Jesus and sent his Holy Spirit to be with you and in you forever (John 14:16-17)! God has a purpose for you to accomplish and he will give you everything you need to get it done!

If you are waiting for God to write all the details of his will for you in the sky, I am afraid that you're going to have a long wait. Take it one step at a time. Take a step of faith and you will be amazed to watch him open and shut doors, speed up and slow down your journey, and provide strategic connections. Partner with God and he'll take you for an unbelievable ride!

Father, thank you for creating us in Christ to do good works! Give us energy and passion to get these works done. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Purpose

Ecclesiastes 3:11

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

The world is too big for us, but its satisfactions are too small. We are made for eternity! The things of this world will never fully satisfy our hearts. Of

course, we'll give it a shot.

We will try money to see if it fills the God-shaped void only to find that whoever has money never has enough. We'll try possessions because we've been told that he who dies with the most toys wins. But stuff simply gets old and outdated. We'll try relationships. But the best spouse cannot provide that thing reserved for God. Pleasure, position, power...you name it, we'll try it. But everything will fail to calm the cry of our souls.

We were made for eternity! Only eternity will do. And only Jesus can provide eternal life. Without Jesus we desire what we cannot have, search for what we cannot find, run fast to a dead-end destination. With Jesus the desire is satisfied, the search is over and the destination is eternity itself!

Father, thank you for putting eternity into our hearts. And thank you for making the way for the desire to be satisfied finally and forever. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Purpose

Ecclesiastes 12:13

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

Solomon had it all—looks, brains and a pile of cash. Whatever he wanted to do, he did. Whatever he wanted to have, he bought. When he told people to jump, they asked “How high?” on the way up.

However, Solomon found that position and power are not all they're cracked up to be. He decided that wisdom, pleasure, toil, advancement and riches are meaningless...like “chasing after the wind.” His unfulfilling endeavors left him with the conclusion that “the whole duty of man” is to fear God and keep his commandments.

Solomon's conclusion should be our starting point. The pursuit of anything other than God is as empty as a metal bucket in the middle of the desert. The trick is arriving at that conclusion without open wounds from a wayward journey.

Dear Father, please keep us on a journey far from unalterable decisions that hurt us and others. Help us to start where Solomon ended up. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Purpose

Mark 9:35

Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

I first met Chuck at a Saturday morning men's meeting. After the meeting, he folded and stacked chairs and tore down tables like a man on a mission. With sweat dripping from his face, he then arranged

the space for its function as our Sunday morning fellowship room.

A few weeks later, I learned Chuck had just retired as the CEO of a large company in Pittsburgh. He started at an entry level position in the company and worked his way to the top. Chuck became a ministry partner and a friend. When Chuck passed away, our church felt the loss deeply.

I have known many servant leaders since, but Chuck was the first. He served in many significant leadership roles in our church, but he often taught me that real leaders are never above tearing down tables. A servant leader is willing to be a "servant of all."

Father, thank you for your Son, the true Servant Leader. May we all follow hard after him and follow his example of true service. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Purpose

Matthew 26:34

I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.

Jesus' prediction that all the disciples would turn tail and run during the time of his great sacrifice did not sit well with Peter. The outspoken disciple boldly proclaimed that he would stay with Jesus whatever

the cost. "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." If need be, he would be the last man standing. "...If all fall away on account of you, I never will."

Jesus knew better. Not only did Peter leave when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, he disowned the Savior with a loud denial, "I don't know the man!" Following the third rejection, Matthew wrote, "Immediately a rooster crowed."

I can't be too hard on Peter. With all my words of commitment, how many times have I disowned Jesus? I have rejected his Word with blatant disobedience. I have refused to support him by my silence. I have rebuffed his generosity by selfishness. I have dismissed his blessing by taking personal credit. The difference is that after Peter realized his sin he "went outside and wept bitterly." Too often, I just continue the journey...away from Jesus.

Father, convict me of my sin. Forgive me for my sin. "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Forgiveness

Exodus 34:5-6

Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness..."

In Exodus 34, God invited Moses to bring two stone tablets to Mt. Sinai for the giving of the Law. This was the second trip up the mountain for Moses. The first time he returned to find the Israelites dancing around a golden calf. In his anger he threw the tablets to the ground "breaking them into pieces." God graciously invited him back and promised to write "the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke."

Early in the morning, Moses made his way up the mountain. The Lord came down from a cloud, stood with Moses, and proclaimed his name and his character. He introduced himself as the "Lord" — the Hebrew "Yahweh" — which explains that God depends on no one and nothing for his existence. Then God described his character. He is compassionate, gracious, patient, loving and faithful. Those were words Moses needed to hear...and those are words we need to hear today.

Today, thank God for his compassion—his affection that leads to action. Thank God for his grace—acceptance without condition. Thank God for his patience—his slowness to become angry. Thank God for his love—the love that sent Jesus to the cross for you and me. Thank God for his faithfulness—he will always keep his promises. Thank God that through his Holy Spirit he is standing with you right now.

Father, thank you for who you are and what you do for us. Thank you for your attributes we have seen today in your Word. May we live a life that demonstrates our gratefulness for your great generosity. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Forgiveness

Luke 15:20

So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

The son demanded his inheritance...before his father was dead. This "slap in the face" request was granted and the boy left home yelling back over his shoulder "Good riddance" instead of "Good-bye." But the heartbroken father never stopped praying that his son would return and often looked down the long road that led home dreaming that he would see his son again.

This story has become known as the "Prodigal Son." But it is better called the "Forgiving Father." After squandering all the inheritance, the broken young man returned to his father. As soon as his son's distant figure appeared on the long road that led home, he could not contain his joy. He ran to his son, embraced him, kissed him, and welcomed him back into the family with full rights and privileges.

So, like the prodigal son, you have squandered the Father's blessing. The pain of loss envelops your heart and the guilt is almost too much to bear. You are broken and alone with your famished soul. It's time to start down the road that leads home. The Father is waiting and watching. He will run to meet you, throw his arms around you, kiss you with forgiveness, and restore you with full rights and privileges. What are you waiting for? Right now, start the journey home.

Father, thank you for your continued love when we are unworthy. Thank you for your forgiveness when we are still covered with the filth of our sin. Thank you for running to meet us when we return starving for your embrace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Forgiveness

Luke 15:27-28

Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.

You know the story. The younger brother demanded his inheritance, squandered it on wild living and returned home. The loving father embraced his wayward son, forgave him, restored him into the family and then threw a celebration party. You know the story of the younger brother...but are you familiar with the older brother?

The older brother was ticked! He stayed and obeyed; the prodigal got the party. He was working in the field while partiers were dancing to the music. He was working the cattle while the fattened calf was on the rotisserie. How in heaven's name could his father forgive, restore and plan a bash after all the younger brother had done?

There's a little "older brother" in all of us, isn't there? We love forgiveness until God restores someone we don't think deserves pardon. We love compassion until it is poured on a person who didn't make our list. But here's the deal...no one deserves God's forgiveness or compassion...especially you and me! God's grace is a free gift to the undeserving. So, when you get an invitation to a "Welcome Home" party, always check the box "Yes, I will attend." When we celebrate the forgiveness of another person we are truly celebrating God's grace in our own lives.

Father, please forgive us for the "older brother" sin. May we always celebrate your forgiveness in the lives of others just as we celebrate it in our own lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Forgiveness

Luke 7:42-43

Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

Jesus was having dinner in the home of a Pharisee when a woman known for her sinful lifestyle interrupted the conversation. With a heart of repentance she wet Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. With a heart of love she poured expensive perfume on the feet of Jesus. The host was incensed that Jesus would let a "sinner" touch him.

In response, Jesus told the story of two men who could not pay their debts. One man owed 500 denarii (a day's wages) and the other owed 50. But the gracious moneylender canceled the debts of both. Jesus used the story to teach that the Pharisee's legalistic religion gave him a false security of how little, if anything, he owed God. The woman, on the other hand, realized that she was a great debtor in need of forgiveness.

Regarding the two debtors in his story, Jesus said, "neither of them had money to pay [the moneylender] back." Regardless of the "size" of our debt, we are spiritually bankrupt. All have sinned and fall short. The day we realize that our sin has separated us from God is the day we realize that all debtors stand on even ground at the foot of the cross. We all have debts we can't pay. We are all great sinners in great need of a great Savior. He is the only One who can say to us the same words he spoke to the sinful woman, "Your faith has saved you, go in peace."

Lord Jesus, never let us forget where we were when you found us. Never let us forget your forgiveness of our great sin. Thank you for the forgiveness that provides the freedom to follow hard after you. In your name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Forgiveness

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Early in my ministry, I was certain that I could fix any problem. When a conflict arose, I called the warring parties together and started the meeting with today's passage. I then prayed, convinced that

as soon as I said, "In Jesus name. Amen," apologies would fill the room followed by tears and hugs. I got one thing right. There were tears! But no apologies; no forgiveness; no resolution.

C. S. Lewis said that forgiveness is a "lovely idea" until you actually have to do it. It's true, the actual doing it is hard and often left undone. Way too many Christians live their lives nursing past wounds instead of applying the healing salve of forgiveness. We love the fact that God has forgiven us, we just don't want to forgive others who have dared to offend us.

Believe me, I know that forgiving others is hard. But let's face it, unforgiveness is ugly. It keeps us enslaved to another person's words or actions. It lets out bursts of emotion at the simple mention of a person's name. It keeps us chained to the past. So, take the key of forgiveness, reach through the bars, and unlock your dark prison cell. Don't look back! Walk out into the light of Christ.

Father, forgiveness is hard. By your Spirit, who lives within us, please help us to forgive just as you forgave us in Jesus. Steady our hand to unlock the prison door and move forward in the freedom of forgiveness. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Giving

2 Corinthians 8:1-2

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

The Jerusalem church was in desperate need, and Paul organized a relief fund to address the situation.

The Corinthian church shot out of the blocks with enthusiastic participation but then fizzled. After a year, they had not completed their commitment. So Paul used the example of the Macedonian church to motivate them.

The believers in Macedonia were as bad off as the believers in Jerusalem. They were living in the midst of severe persecution and the extreme poverty that comes with it. But, amazingly, they responded to their difficult circumstance with overflowing joy. From their desperate situation came "rich generosity." What an example of the grace of giving!

I recently read that only ten percent of American Christians tithe. God says, "Here's ten dollars. Give me one to build the kingdom. You keep nine and use them wisely," and somehow we don't think that's a good deal! In the land of plenty, we struggle with hearts of "overflowing joy." We have a lot to learn from the persecuted, impoverished Macedonians.

Father, right now we acknowledge that you own all things. Everything we have is a gift from you. Everything you give us should be used to honor you. Remind us, Lord, that giving is an act of worship. May we demonstrate your worth in the use of the resources on loan to us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Giving

2 Corinthians 8:3-4

For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

The Apostle Paul was in the process of collecting funds for the impoverished Jerusalem church. It seems that, as he organized the relief fund, he did

not include the Macedonian believers in the loop. How could he? They were living in severe trials and extreme poverty. They needed assistance as much as the church in Jerusalem.

But the Macedonian believers would not be left out. They begged Paul to give them the honor of participating. Even in their poverty, they counted it a privilege to share. And they gave “even beyond their ability.”

How does that type of worship happen? How can you overflow with joy in the midst of severe trials? How can you give with rich generosity in the midst of extreme poverty? Do you really want to know...? The answer is found in the next passage. Meet me here tomorrow.

Lord, we want to have hearts that overflow with joy in the midst of trials and even poverty. Dear Lord, teach us to love you regardless of what we have. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Giving

2 Corinthians 8:5

And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

The believers in Macedonia lived in severe persecution and extreme poverty. Yet, Paul describes their lives as overflowing with joy and rich in generosity. How does that happen? How does a

person remain joyful in suffering? How can a person living in destitution demonstrate rich generosity? The answer is found in today's passage.

My first response to the generosity of God should be the willingness to give him myself. He doesn't want or need my stuff...he wants me! All of me! Wholehearted devotion! God isn't interested in a half-hearted, when I feel like it, when it's convenient for me Christian life. Obedience in all things starts when we give ourselves to him.

Peter Torjesen served the Lord as a missionary in China for many years. When he was only seventeen years old, this young Norwegian was so stirred by a challenge to give to missions at a church service, that he opened his wallet and poured all his money into the offering. But then he did something even more significant. He included in the offering a scrap of paper on which he wrote “og mit liv” —“and my life.” That's the kind of giving that God is looking for.

Father, may we never be content with half-hearted living and giving. Help us to give you our very lives...just as Jesus was willing to give himself for us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Giving

2 Corinthians 8:7

But just as you excel in everything-- in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us--see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

Have you ever been to a Bean Supper? I have. In fact, growing up the annual Bean Supper was the primary fund raising event at our school. There was

a prize for the student who sold the most tickets. Classes competed against each other. And if you sold a certain amount of tickets you won a trip to the zoo! As the competition drew near I made my list of people to contact. And when they issued the tickets I canvassed the neighborhood.

There was one house I went to only when the husband was at home. The Smith's attended our church and were friends with my parents. The wife was as nice as she could be—kind, considerate and a great cook. But...she was...a tight-wad! I knew my ticket sales to her would be meager. Her husband, on the other hand, would buy a roll of tickets just so I could go to the zoo. I never approached the Smith's house unless I saw Mr. Smith's car parked outside. Then I prayed that he would answer the door.

You can excel in many things as the believers in Corinth did. You can be full of faith, eloquent in speech, wise and sincere. You can be all of those things and still miss the boat in your giving. God loves a generous and joyful giver. He gives to us, not just to take care of our needs, but to share with others. So, today, find a way you can generously give to build the kingdom. And if some little kid knocks on your door selling Bean Supper tickets...buy the whole roll!

Father, please help us to respond to all that you have given us by excelling in our giving. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Giving

2 Corinthians 8:12

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

I will never forget my last experience in the Mathare slums in Nairobi, Kenya. The believers had so little, yet they were filled with joy. Living in poverty, they had learned the secret of being spiritually rich. They

were not distracted by a life full of stuff. Their focus was on daily necessities. And they sincerely thanked God for that day's provision.

But there was another thing that amazed me. Every time we met for worship, an offering was collected! At one Sunday service it was announced that a young woman needed tuition money in order to continue training at a Bible School. And these believers, these Christians who live in the slums, gave willingly according to what they had. I will never get over that. People who had little gave willingly.

I sat there that day in the midst of the slum thinking, "God, forgive me! God, forgive me for ever being reluctant to ask people in our congregation to give to your work. Forgive me for being reluctant to look people in the eye that you have blessed abundantly and ask them to be involved in building your kingdom."

Father, you Word says that to whom much is given, much is expected. Lord, remind us that we are stewards, not owners. Help us to be people who really believe that true riches are to be stored up in eternity...not here on Earth. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Giving

2 Corinthians 9:2

For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.

The common cold is not the only thing that can be caught. Our attitudes are contagious as well.

Cynicism spreads cynicism. Gossip spreads gossip. Criticism spreads criticism. On the other hand there are some positive attitudes that can pass from one to another.

In today's passage we learn that enthusiastic giving encourages enthusiastic giving. Paul had been so impressed with the Corinthian's giving that he used them as an example. That eagerness to give was caught by the Macedonians. Although they were living in severe trials and extreme poverty, the example of the Corinthians stirred the Macedonian believers into action.

Some things you need to keep to yourself. Enthusiastic giving is not one of them. Spread it around...and build the kingdom!

Father, may we be just as excited about you and your work and our involvement in it as we are our favorite sports team. Help us to get enthusiastic about things that really count. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Giving

2 Corinthians 9:7

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Giving against your will is giving against God's will. A person should prayerfully determine the amount of their giving. They need to be settled in their heart.

Giving against your will is giving against God's will. To give reluctantly means to give with a sense of "grief, sorrow, or pain in mind and spirit." If it is a pain for you to give...don't!

Giving against your will is giving against God's will. To give under compulsion is the feeling that someone has twisted your arm or put you on a guilt trip. The word "compulsion" can also mean to do something in order to get something in return. Either side of the compulsion coin is the wrong reason to give.

Giving against your will is giving against God's will. God loves a giver that is cheerful and happy and willing to give. The cheerful giver says, "All I have comes from God and I give it out of his hand" (1 Chron. 29:14b).

Heavenly Father, remind us that when we give we are simply taking out of your hand and giving it back to you. Make us cheerful in our giving. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Giving

2 Corinthians 9:10

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

God honors a faithful steward. When a person understands that God owns all things, everything we have is a gift from him, and everything should be

used to honor him, God will give that person ample opportunity to serve in the area of giving. He will “increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.”

Jesus made it clear in his story about the rich fool that God does not increase our harvest in order for us to build bigger barns, but to give with bigger hearts. His blessings are not for us to acquire bigger, better, faster toys, but to honor him with our wealth.

American Christians have to deal honestly with truth. Why are we so blessed? Why do we have so much? We have to come to grips with the truth of Scripture regarding wealth. How will we use what God has given us to honor him? Let’s deal with that question before the day we stand before Jesus to give an account of all his blessings.

Lord Jesus, remind us that what we do today will determine the accounting we give before you tomorrow. In your name we pray. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Giving

2 Corinthians 9:12

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

Three men were talking about how they decided on the amount of money they gave to God. One man said, “I draw a line in the dirt. Then I take a fourth

of my money and throw it up in the air. What lands on the left side is mine and what lands on the right side is God’s.” The second man said, “I also draw a line in the dirt. Then I take half of my money and throw it up in the air. What lands on the right side in mine and what lands on the left side is God’s.” The third man said, “You both have it wrong. I take all of my money and throw it in the air. Whatever God wants he keeps. Whatever lands on the ground is mine.”

How do you decide how much to give?

Lord, may we give to meet the needs of others and to cause fellow believers to express their thanks to you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Giving

2 Corinthians 9:14

And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.

There are many today who promote a "Prosperity Gospel." These teachers falsely purport that if you give money to God, he will give it back to you in increasing proportions. Scripture does promise

that the person who "sows generously will also reap generously" (2 Corinthians 9:6), but the enlarged harvest will be "righteousness," not ten times what you give. Following is the "Harvest of Generosity":

- **Complete provisions.** God, in his great grace, will meet all your needs (2 Corinthians 9:8; Psalm 37:25-26).
- **Good works.** "...You will abound in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8).
- **Honor.** The generous person will be respected and honored not as a philanthropist, but as a godly man or woman. The generous person will be honored as a person who God has blessed and trusts to meet the needs of others.
- **Increased Opportunities.** When you honor God with your wealth, he will give you more opportunities to honor him (2 Corinthians 9:10-11).
- **Thanksgiving and Praise to God.** People will praise God for your obedience (2 Corinthians 9:12-13).
- **Prayer.** As today's passage explains, people will pray for you.

Father, please help us to be cheerful givers. Help us to understand the true harvest of generosity. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Vision

1 Chronicles 29:3

Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple....

Leaders lead. They don't spend their lives talking about leadership theories or meeting every

Wednesday morning in leadership book discussion groups. Certainly, they are learners and readers but...at the end of the day...leaders lead.

Leaders lead. They don't mix in the obligatory marriage enrichment weekend and then neglect to love their wife like Christ loved the church the other fifty-one weeks in the year. They refuse to sacrifice their children at the altar of business. Leaders lead.

Leaders lead. They are the first to step on the battlefield and the last to leave it. They don't hoard their wealth; instead, they are the first to give from their personal treasures. In any organization, you can always tell who the real leaders are. They are the ones you see out front...leading.

Lord Jesus, thank you for your example of leadership. You were always out front leading...all the way to the cross. Thank you! Amen.

The Generous Gift of Vision

1 Chronicles 29:6

Then the leaders of families, the officers of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of the king's work gave willingly.

Leaders lead. They inspire people to move forward with their words but, more importantly, with their action. They motivate people to a preferred future.

Tom Landry, former coach of the Dallas Cowboys, said that the job of a coach is to “make men do what they don’t want to do in order to achieve the goals they want to achieve.”

The building of the temple was no small undertaking. It was a big structure with a big price tag and bigger vision. The temple not only served as a place of worship, but by its magnificent structure alone pictured the glory and majesty of the eternal God. So David led the way and “the officials in charge of the king’s work gave willingly.”

Leader lead...but not in order to build monuments to themselves. The narcissist does that. Leaders are not interested in fugacious endeavors. They lead to something that will outlive them and outlast them. At the end of the day, whether he or she is in business, education, medicine, law, government, or leading a church, the godly leader leads in order to bring glory and majesty to the eternal God.

Lord, make us godly leaders more interested in bringing glory to you than to ourselves. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Vision

1 Chronicles 29:14

But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

There are three basic principles that all believers need to understand.

- God owns all things.
- All that I have is a gift from him.
- All he has given me should be used to honor him.

In today's passage David's summarizes these principles in a vivid picture. Everything we have, David says, comes from God's hand. So think of God holding out his hand full of things like... time, money, possessions, gifts, experience, training, etc. When we give back to God we are simply taking these things from his hand and returning them to him.

Have you ever had your children ask for money so they can buy you a Christmas present? That's the same thing we do with our heavenly Father. The things we give back to him are the things he has given to us in the first place.

Father, remind us often of the giving principles. Otherwise we might actually begin to think that we have earned your generous gifts. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Generous Gift of Vision

1 Chronicles 29:18

O LORD, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep this desire in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you.

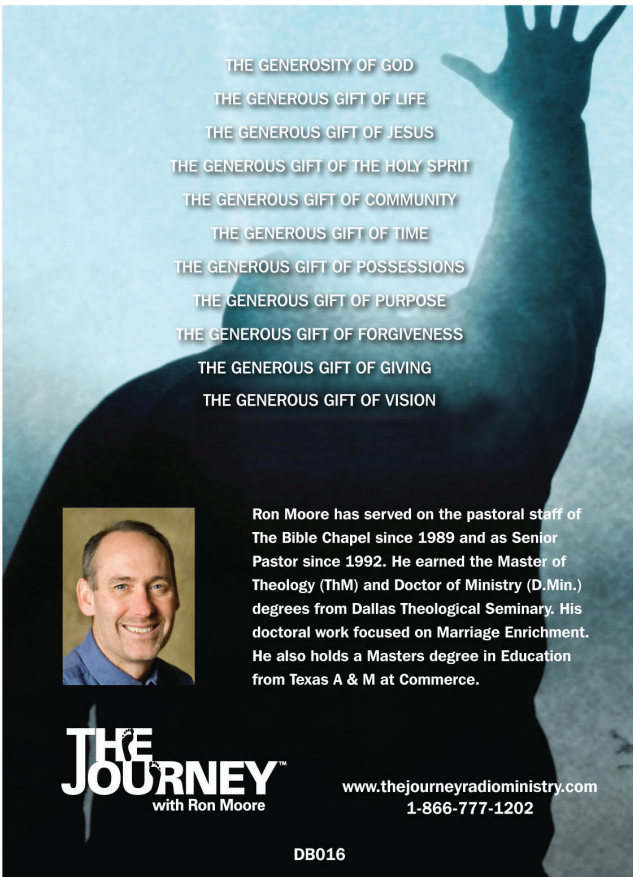
A new project, acquisition, or ministry drives most leaders. The energy elevates, the adrenaline rushes, the focus is fixed. But then, as the newness wears

off, we bore of the same ole, same ole and are ready to move on to something else that brings a buzz. Unfortunately, this can happen in our walk with Christ.

While a routine can result in a spiritual lethargy, we have to understand that a dulling routine is not the same as spiritual discipline and perseverance. Following hard after Christ calls for a "long obedience in the same direction" which for some might seem like a boring journey. But, as the Proverb reminds us, the "crooked path" is filled with danger even though its many sights and sounds may be alluring (Prov. 10:9).

As a strong leader, and as a man who ventured down the "crooked path" a time or two, David's prayer is for an ongoing desire to follow the Lord. David prays, "...keep this desire in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you." Following Jesus is the most exciting and exhilarating ride a human being can take. If obedience bores us...well, we need to take a hard look at our hearts.

Father we pray as David did...keep the desire to follow hard after you in our hearts forever and keep our hearts loyal to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.



THE GENEROSITY OF GOD
THE GENEROUS GIFT OF LIFE
THE GENEROUS GIFT OF JESUS
THE GENEROUS GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
THE GENEROUS GIFT OF COMMUNITY
THE GENEROUS GIFT OF TIME
THE GENEROUS GIFT OF POSSESSIONS
THE GENEROUS GIFT OF PURPOSE
THE GENEROUS GIFT OF FORGIVENESS
THE GENEROUS GIFT OF GIVING
THE GENEROUS GIFT OF VISION



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