



The Seven: Generosity

December 3 | Weekly Devotionals

DAY 1

I imagine she got up that morning, like every morning, thinking of her dear husband, who was now gone. She lived in a small room with very few things to call her own and just enough food to get by. She and her husband had moved to Jerusalem for business and had no other family nearby, so when he died, she was left alone.

Soon after waking up, dread started to set in. Today, she had to go to the temple to take her offering. She had saved as much as she could, and what she came up with wasn't even worth a measly penny. She could have just skipped it. No one would have noticed. What good was a penny going to do? But she had to give. She wanted to give. She had faith in her Jehovah Jireh – the God who provides. So she made her way to the temple.

When she arrived, she walked among others who were making a big deal about their large gifts. It's ironic that the offering boxes were shaped like trumpets, because some who gave were tooting their own horns – making sure as many people as possible knew how much they were giving. She tried to sneak by and around those people to be as inconspicuous as possible, hoping no one would notice.

But someone did notice. As he watched the gifts being given, he saw through all the show to the heart. He saw that the gifts filling the temple coffers were coming from empty hearts...until she arrived. He didn't miss her. In fact, as she approached, he called his followers to come and see. "Watch this lady...she's about to give what no

one else has given today." They watched with rapt attention. And when they saw what she gave, they must have been a little disappointed.

They saw a small, insignificant offering. Jesus saw a heart poured out.

They saw a woman hiding from people. Jesus saw a woman shouting from the rooftops to her God that she trusted him completely...and there wasn't a greater gift given that day.

Generosity goes beyond giving obediently, and it goes beyond giving money. At the heart of generosity is love. Thomas Aquinas says, "To love is to will the good of the other." Sounds like love and generosity are cut from the same cloth, doesn't it? Maybe that's why **John 3:16** makes so much sense. "For God so *loved* the world, he *gave* his one and only son..." Generosity is one of the leading actions tied to love - and that's what our mission, vision, and priorities are all about.

Questions for reflection:

1. Read the story of the widow's mite in **Mark 12:38-44**. Imagine the scene for yourself. What is Jesus' reaction to what she gives? Why did he call his disciples around? What does that tell you about Jesus? What did you learn about generosity from this story?
2. What do you think *has* to be true of the widow's worldview that enabled her to be that generous? How does her outlook differ from the others giving large amounts of money? In what ways is her view of the world the same or different from yours?
3. Compare Jesus' reaction to this widow to his reactions to other acts of faith. Read **Matthew 15:21-28** and **Matthew 8:5-13**. What does this tell you about Jesus? What does it tell you about yourself?

DAY 2

The Bible is replete with examples of God's generosity, goodness, kindness, and faithfulness; how he gave us this world to live in, how he gave us Jesus to save us, and how he continues to provide for our needs today — all of which are facets of his generosity.

Let's look at how the Bible depicts God's goodness and his resulting generosity. As you read each passage, mark down the phrases that demonstrate God's generous nature.

Psalm 8:3-4

Psalm 36:5-8

Matthew 6:25-34

2 Corinthians 9:8-11

1 Timothy 6:17

James 1:17-18

Jesus manifested all those remarkable qualities of God when he came to earth. Every day of his ministry was a day of giving: hope, salvation, healing, time, company. He constantly and generously gave. Read how he publicly announced the beginning of his ministry in **Luke 4:16-21**.

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

He declared his intentions to give fresh life to the hopeless, to free the oppressed, and to proclaim the Lord's favor. That's the same work we're invited to do as God's agents in the world.

Questions for reflection:

1. Go back and revisit the scriptures you read and the phrases about God's faithfulness and generosity you wrote down. When you reflect on all of it, what does it tell you about God's character?
2. Do you feel like your character matches that of God's in terms of generosity? In what ways is this so? In what ways are you lacking?
3. How does the manifestation of Jesus, God in the flesh, renew your perspective about generosity?

DAY 3

God has invited us to partake in his generosity: to receive and to pass it along. We respond to his gifts with gratitude and with an eye toward others with whom we can share them. We act as a conduit of generosity because we are only giving back to God what he's given us.

Take this story from the Old Testament as an example. King David wants to build a temple, but he was told by God that his son, Solomon, will actually be the one to build it. But David wants to make sure he does his part in providing for its completion. As David is giving the money, everyone else started giving as well.

Read this from **1 Chronicles 29:10-14**.

David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, "Praise be to you, Lord, the God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name. "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.

The amazing part of the story is David's reaction. He was labeled (by God, no less) as a man after God's own heart. And his relationship with God humbled him to acknowledge that everything he had—some estimate his wealth to be in the hundreds of billions (in current dollars) — was God's. God's generosity to him was a bit overwhelming, but it was the generosity on God's part that prompted David to give back and to glorify God.

For David, God's generosity caused him to worship God. It's the same with us, our giving is not just an act of managing the resources God's given us, it's an act of worship. It's a declaration that we are grateful for what he's already done and trust him for what he will do. And we make that declaration by passing the same hope and freedom we've received along to others.

So, at the end of the day, it really isn't about the money. Some of us can give a lot; some of us very little. Our gifts become special when we add them to God's gift. That's

what makes the difference. No matter the size of the gift, when we give as a form of worship, it becomes a fortune.

Questions for reflection:

1. When was a time in your life when you allowed yourself to be undone by God's generosity like David was? How did that impact you?
2. Read about Mary's extravagant gift to Jesus in **Matthew 26:6-13**. What does it teach you about giving as an act of worship? How can our giving to the church or to others act as the same kind of worship?
3. When have you been able to give generously to someone and then see God multiply the effects of that gift? How did it impact your own worship of God? How did it impact the recipient's worship?

DAY 4

We know God is generous; we know what he's given us through Jesus. It's easy to look at him as our example and see generosity poured out. The problem sometimes becomes our desire or ability to follow that example.

There seem to be four types of givers in this world:

1. *Some people don't give.*
2. *Some people give meagerly.*
3. *Some people give obediently.*
4. *Some people give joyfully.*

Take time to honestly evaluate where you are in your current giving. Evaluate where you'd like to be. What's a simple step you can take to get there? What thought patterns or underlying beliefs about your world are undergirding your ability or inability to be generous (Example: "What if I don't have enough?" or "I'm not sure God will come through for me.")? Note your reflections in the provided space.

In **Matthew 6:24**, Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." This word "mammon" shows up in some translations like this one, the New King James; maybe you've heard it before and wondered what it meant. Mammon basically means "greed" or "the greedy pursuit of gain." It's easy to denounce mammon and say we shouldn't be greedy. But, like all of Jesus' teachings, there is a deeper truth and freedom that only he can offer.

It would be easy to say that mammon refers to collecting an excess of material possessions: nicer homes, faster cars, greener lawns, more luxurious bath towels. But what if mammon referred also to things we buy for safety: food on the table, a good education, a fully funded IRA. It's easy enough to point our finger at one group and say it's excessive while saying the other items are necessary for living. But Jesus wants us to realize that anything we count on for security, anything we would not immediately give up for the sake of his kingdom, anything we trust for our lives that isn't him, it has in some way replaced him in our lives. It's an insidious truth that sneaks in for all of us, and it's why Jesus warned so heavily against it.

Money isn't evil, nor are the things it can buy. We have freedom to make [wise] purchases and enjoy God's goodness and abundance. The question is about control. Do we use our things to control life, to make sure we get the outcomes we want? When we look at our heart of hearts, are we trying to work a system, complete a program, match a percentage? Or are we looking at others with enough love and living a modest enough lifestyle to meet a need when we see it?

Questions for reflection:

1. Read these two parables: **Luke 10:30-37** and **Luke 12:16-21**. Compare the main characters in each story. How are their perspectives different? Which one do you currently relate with more?
2. Greed is a sneaky sin that can quickly sneak up on us. How can generosity be an antidote to greed? How does giving help us keep a proper perspective on the things we own?
3. Spend time in prayer, asking God to forgive any lack of trust, confessing times when you held on too tightly when you should have let go, and accepting his great loving mercy and grace as he speaks truth to you. It's easy to feel condemned when the subjects of money and generosity come up, but know that, in Christ, there is no condemnation.

DAY 5

Take a few moments on this final day to read two stories from the Gospel of Luke.

(1) The first story is about the Rich Young Ruler. Read **Luke 18:18-30**.

(2) The second story is about a man named Zacchaeus. Read **Luke 19:1-10**.

It's interesting that Luke places these two stories right next to one another. In both accounts, you have a rich man. In both accounts, the men encounter Jesus. The main difference between the two? One realizes that giving is better than getting. And the other does not.

One of the things we learn by comparing these two stories is that generosity isn't about giving away what's left after we've had our fill or have gotten all we want. Generosity isn't even about us. It's an opportunity to look at someone else and choose their good over our own. It's a realization that there is enough true goodness for all of us, no matter what we give away. It's about a shift in perspective from wanting what's best for me to wanting what's best for the people I love.

And weirdly, the way life works is that by giving away what we hold dear, we actually find even deeper fulfillment. That's what Zacchaeus realized.

And this is what Jesus says in **Matthew 10:38-39**. Take a few moments to read that passage.

- In what ways do you think you might have missed out on true fulfillment by holding onto something?
- In what ways have you experienced true life by giving something or a part of you away?

Jot down your thoughts in the provided space.

That's what generosity is all about. The steps to generosity are sometimes measured, sometimes spontaneous. Sometimes big, sometimes small. But they always have the same effect of making us more generous. Generosity is born from love and it makes us more loving. Giving not only makes us more dependent on God, it makes us more like him.

When that becomes true of us, we don't give out of guilt or compulsion or because we're told; that's not how Jesus operates. We give because we love. And we love because God first loved us.

Questions for reflection:

1. Do you have a story of giving that changed your perspective from self-centered to other-centered?
2. How might a desire to generously love others change the way you order your financial priorities? Are there things you can sacrifice in order to be ready to meet needs?
3. What would becoming 1% more generous look like for you practically?