

# Overflowing Generosity

## Learning 3

### Generosity Flows from and Brings Joy!

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### Word/Witness/Apply

#### Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us to overcome our fears about giving with an expectant faith in your ability to provide. Help us to understand that “little can become much” when you are in it, and to determine what “enough” is for our family and to joyfully and generously share the rest. AMEN!

***“In the midst of a severe trial, their overflowing joy and extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity” (2 Cor 8:2).***

Acts of generosity surprise and inspire people. When the grace of Jesus penetrates the human heart, it rebounds back to God in generous love for God and love for neighbor. Generous people are compelled to see the world through the lens of God’s abundance rather than scarcity.

We live in a culture of exchange. We purchase an item (a vacation, a meal out, clothing, etc.) or make an investment (mortgage, school loan, or stocks) and expect to get something back in return. Many of us who give to charities of any kind, give expecting a tax reduction. When we experience the joy of giving, we give because God first gave to us (**John 3:16**)—this is the great exchange!

We give to God out of love and devotion. The “give to get” thing always has a variety of motives. Generous people trust that, as they give, God will meet their needs, sometimes in very special and unexpected ways. And that is at the heart of the joy of giving. Instances arise when it makes no financial sense to give to the Lord. Yet, God wants us to give with the realization that we are totally dependent on Him to meet our basic needs and desires.

***A working definition of generosity.*** At its core, generosity is a lifestyle, a lifestyle that shares all that we are, all that we have and all that we will ever become as a demonstration of God’s love and a response to God’s grace. Generosity, when it flows naturally, is joyful, and it has an undeniable effect on people who come in contact with it.

***“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7).*** Milo Kauffman says, **“Joyful people will be generous people, generous people will be joyful people.”** It is difficult to say which is cause and which is effect. Generosity leads to rejoicing and joy (being blessed) leads you to be generous. It's a wondrous cycle of giving and blessing!”

When a congregation works out of the belief that there are limited resources for the work of ministry, it works at less than full capacity. We allow our limitations of time, talent, testimony, or money to shape and limit our vision for ministry. Rather than working from a place of strength—the strength of living in the power of resurrection—we often work from a place of weakness. This scarcity mindset is rooted in fear that one day we will run out of resources. If leaders work from this fear of scarcity, it trickles down to the person in the pew. When a person is worried about not having enough, joy and creativity are overshadowed by doubt and uncertainty. When a congregation works out of fear and allows its limitations to define who they are, they limit their dreams by cutting budgets and scaling back ministry, and spiritual growth suffers. Rather than ask “What do we need to cut to survive?”, our faith compels us to ask, “What is God calling us to be—to risk—for the sake of the gospel?”



**Matt 19:16-22.** In the story of the rich man asking Jesus how he might inherit eternal life, Jesus asked him if he had fulfilled the commandments. The man said that he had, since boyhood. Then Jesus looks into the heart of the man. The man is unsettled. And Jesus sees this, so He adds, “You lack one thing. Go sell everything you have, give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me”. The man was speechless. He was a man of great wealth. So he went away

sad, disappointed and deceived of his hopes—for he placed so much value on his wealth. Sadly, he walked away from Jesus’ offer.

What is so strikingly powerful in this story is that it’s a story that resonates with each one of us. What we value the most is where we spend our time, energy, and money. We protect, watch over, and cling to those things we value most.

Luther spoke of wealth as a gift. “Wealth is God’s gift. One should not discard it; one should thank God for it and use it in a Christian manner” (W 47, 356). And yet he also talked about the liabilities of wealth (W 24, 357). For there is a burden of care for our wealth, fear in keeping it, temptations in using it, guilt in abusing it and sorrow in losing it.

**Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21).** What do you treasure most in life? It is not that God doesn’t want us to have wealth. God does. What Jesus implies is we ought to *use* our wealth, not *serve* it. Your heart will *follow* what you treasure the most!

**“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Ps 37:4).**

**“It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).**

### **The Law and Gospel of Giving.**

When people give to the church because they feel obligated to fulfill a church requirement or to be obedient to the church's teaching, they are responding to the law. When they give out of gratitude for God's undeserved grace, out of a joyous and spontaneous willingness to sacrifice, they are responding to the gospel (T.A. Kantonen).

Giving to God can be our response to both law and gospel, and as such it can become both our duty and delight (Powell, 72). **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by**

***his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9).*** When we give sacrificially, for the benefit of others, we are preaching the Gospel message **(Acts 20:35).**

### **The Good News!**

You can learn to be a cheerful, generous giver. As we said in Lesson 2, you can start today, right where you are. If in your congregation right now there is a need, a dream you want to accomplish—then ask God to help you. The cure for a scarcity mindset is to let go! Open up your heart, give the talents and skills of your profession. Open up your wallet and saving accounts and give to the needs of your church!

Generosity is, then, a learned character trait that involves both attitude and action—a virtue both as inclination or predilection. To give liberally then becomes a habit, not an afterthought!

## Word/Witness/Apply

I love to give! When my husband and I travel, we leave a gift every day for the house-keeping person on the night stand with a note and smiley face, saying, “God loves you—thank you.” When a furniture truck came last month and delivered some bedding, it was a hot day, so we gave each of the men a cold soda and tipped each of them \$20. Their eyes lit up! In my old life, it would have never crossed my mind to do such a thing.

I remember a time when I served on church council, was president of the deacon board, and taught Sunday school. Every Sunday during the offering when I put my envelope in the offering plate—I felt uneasy, no joy. What I was experiencing was a spiritual incongruence. I knew I was giving my least to God. Like the rich man, I could not give up my money. I could easily give up my time, my professional skills, even my testimony but not my money. I silently struggled with this for some time, until one morning I was touched by the grace of God through a pastor’s sermon and it transformed my life!

Since that moment of transformation, I know now, “Everything I own belongs to God.” I see God in everyone and everything. The things I own are only on loan to me by the grace of God. And thus, I give thanks to God for the privilege of choosing me and giving me the gift salvation! Now, the more I give, the more joy I receive. This joy compels me to give to others and to look for new opportunities to give!

## Word/Witness/Apply

1. Are you joyful in your giving or does it feel more like a duty, an obligation? How might giving to God be a little of both?
2. Explore these motives for giving—Matt 6:21, “Where your treasure is, there will be your heart”. Joy comes when our heart is set on God!

What does “giving” mean when we give to...

*gain* recognition  
*attain* power and influence  
*appease* God  
*earn* rewards  
*fulfill* obligations  
*support* a worthy cause  
*give* thanks  
*express* love for God  
*convey* Christ within...

3. When have you witnessed the giving story of one person inspiring the generosity in another?
4. Are you leading your church with a belief in the abundance of resources, or are you leading it with a belief in their scarcity? Refer to the rich man, Jesus and the kingdom of God.
5. In what ways have you’ve been contagious in your joy of giving, thus leveraging your financial resources for ministry impact?
6. How are you growing in your generosity and joy towards giving to your congregation’s mission/vision?
7. How is your congregation growing in generosity and joy to giving towards the NALC, the greater church?



### Closing Prayer

**Lord Jesus, we dedicate all we are and all we have to you on this day as living sacrifices. Help us to show and share your love with others today. Whether we have little or much, help us to always live open-handed in a tight-fisted world and to find our greatest joy in following and serving you. AMEN.**

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