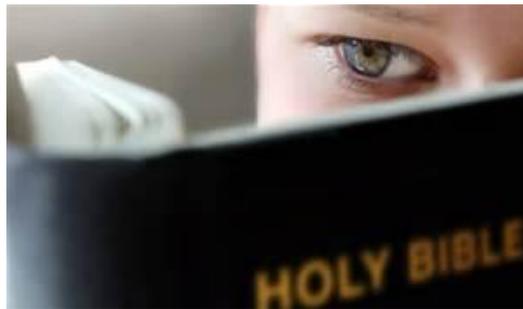


Overflowing Generosity

Learning 1

Generosity Is a Gift of the Holy Spirit



Word/Witness/Apply

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, we give you thanks for your unfailing faithfulness towards us. Open our hearts, open our minds and open our hands to your overflowing generosity towards us! Holy Spirit, teach us how to be a generous people and stewards of your tender mercies and keep us steadfast in your Word. Amen.

“But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also” (2 Corinthians 8:7 ESV).

“**E**xcel’s” synonyms are, to: shine, be excellent, be outstanding, be skillful, be talented, be preeminent, reign supreme. We excel at many things in ministry and thank God we do! We are generous with our time and energy preparing weekly worship and serving on council. We do the tedious work of developing and balancing budgets. We prepare Bible studies, lead youth ministries and serve people in need within our

local and the global communities. It takes the resources of an entire congregation to grow and spread the Good News!

Paul knew that the Corinthian Church had indeed demonstrated great gifts. They had great speakers and an attractive flair to their worship services, but he challenged them to think deeper and consider the more difficult side of faith: What about your giving? Are you excelling in your financial support?

And as he challenged them, he made the connection between spiritual gifts and giving. Just as you demonstrate these spiritual gifts, so you should demonstrate the spiritual gift of generosity as well. In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul states that we are given the gift of generosity by the Holy Spirit. ***“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”***

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the ever-giving, unbelievably generous God. He gave. He gives continually. He will never stop giving.

Read: Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-38. The early church was working hard to grow itself and serve people despite opposition, shortages of people and money, and the pressure to conform to a Roman government that was not based on generosity but exploitation.



After Peter announces the Spirit’s creation of a new kind of community, Acts traces the rapid growth of such communities in a variety of places. We are reminded of how ***overflowing generosity*** is made possible when the Holy Spirit empowers each believer to give and this giving spreads throughout the entire community—it’s contagious.

The amazing story of the early church was that, out of the faith of believers, God opened His hand towards them and they opened their hearts! The community described in Acts 2 and 4 is one that was committed first to the Lord and then the shared life among believers. They expressed their faith in the following ways:

- 1.) **They *devoted* themselves to prayer, worship and the teachings of Jesus Christ.**
- 2.) **All believers were *together* and were of *one* heart and mind [spiritual unity—loyalty, commitment and love of Jesus].**

- 3.) They *voluntarily* sold their property and homes and laid the proceeds at the apostles' feet, where they were distributed as needed.
- 4.) Believers were *filled with the Holy Spirit* and spoke the word of God boldly.

God's grace was powerfully at work among them. God added daily to their numbers!



These early believers understood that what they possessed in the way of wealth and possessions was not their own. They looked at their wealth and possessions through the lens of the cross and salvation. They understood a basic stewardship principle: **“All that we are and all that we have comes from God”**.

The gift of God's grace shapes our faith and leads to the conviction that all that we have—our time, talent, treasure and testimony—has been given to us for a purpose. These early believers were *intentional* in creating a ***culture of generosity***. Their beliefs in the death and resurrection of Jesus shaped their shared values.

1 Chronicles 29:14 “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.”

Psalm 100:3 “Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.”

God is our Creator. We did not create ourselves. David tells us to acknowledge the Lord as God! How can we do that? We praise our Creator, worship Him and accept his authority in every detail of our lives.

Psalm 104:28 “When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.”

Psalm 145:16 “You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.”

Luke 6:38 “Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

Overflowing generosity occurs in the mind/heart of believers when one acknowledges that “all” things in this life, everything—faith, intellect, creativity, physical health and strength, the capacity to earn money to purchase homes, technologies, medical and retirement plans, careers and education—comes from God!

As leaders, we must constantly be aware that our time, skills, energy, money and every resource, person, and opportunity comes from God. These are not ours to use as we wish, no matter how hard we may have worked for them and no matter what we have contributed. We are stewards. We are managers—not owners.

C. S. Lewis puts it this way...

What difference does it make that we belong to God? This simple truth can transform our lives. It can give us profound reassurance of our self-worth. We matter because we belong to the Creator of the universe. The fact that we belong to God also gives order to our lives. We are first and foremost God’s people. Thus, all of our other roles in life must be seen in the light of this primary reality. You may be a lawyer or manager or teacher, but you are first of all one of God’s people. You may be a father or a mother or a friend, but you are first of all one of God’s people. How you live in each of these other roles will be shaped by your primary relationship to God as someone who belongs to Him.

Word/Witness/Apply

God is concerned **how** a person gives from his or her resources. ***“I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine...So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men” [2 Cor 8:8, 24].*** Martin Luther, wrote *“There are three conversions necessary: the conversion of the heart, the conversion of the mind, and the conversion of the purse.”*

Giving is conducted in faith that God will provide for those who give. **Mark 12:41-44** reminds us that there is a significant difference when we give from our wealth, rather than when we give abundantly from the little we have. As we look at the church today, we have more wealth than ever, but we give less than ever to the church!

Witness: *A devoted senior member of a congregation, a single woman on a fixed income, was really struggling with what to give towards her congregation's capital campaign. She talked it over with her pastor.*

She even consulted her financial planner who told her she should cut back her giving to the church. After much prayer and deliberation and because she knew the church was in need, she took the risk and gave \$10,000 to the capital campaign, a sizable amount compared to her monthly income. To do this, she decided to cut back on her personal spending—change her lifestyle. A few weeks went by and to her surprise, a family member unexpectedly sent her a check for exactly \$10,000—a gift to be used anyway she chose to use it. There was no doubt in her mind, this was truly a gift from God. She was overflowing with joy! This member now leads her congregation's annual stewardship campaigns!



Recall and share a time when you or someone you know excelled in giving by increasing annual giving to the congregation or by giving to a special request or special need. Even though it stretched the household budget, were you or those giving immensely blessed in the process?

As believers, we should consider increasing our giving and *work towards* sacrificial giving [beyond a tithe—10%], to give beyond the point of convenience or calculation.

If you are not already tithing, you can start with what you gave last year and increase by 1-2% and work towards it. It doesn't matter where you begin. No matter where you are in your personal or corporate giving, start where you are. For some of you tithing will be a process. For others it will be an overnight transformation. **Make generosity a core value in your life!**

Word/Witness/Apply



- 1.) Give 3 examples of how the Holy Spirit's gift of generosity is flowing through your congregation right now!
- 2.) Because Scripture informs us that "everything belongs to God," what do you find promising, risky and threatening [explain]?
- 3.) As you look at the early church in Acts, how might your "giving" be seen as:
an act of worship,
an expression of faith,
a spiritual discipline [self-denial and renunciation]?
- 4.) If you find yourself giving only out of obligation—what might have to happen in your faith life to experience giving as a joy, privilege and opportunity rather than an obligation?
- 5.) List in priority, 20 things you are truly grateful for, people or things you can't imagine living without. Do you consider yourself an *owner* or *manager* of these things? Share within the group.
- 6.) When we think of ourselves as *managers* rather than *owners* of the things we own—how might that be a game-changer in how you approach giving?
- 7.) How might you generate a culture of generosity that will help you excel and grow in your financial giving to your congregation and beyond your congregation?



Closing Prayer

O Lord, your love for me is nothing less than overflowing and generous. Your Word will not go out from this study and return empty. You sent your only Son to die for me that I might live abundantly in your redeeming grace. Holy Spirit, help me to excel in my giving. Like the early believers, rekindle that same excitement, to give with an open heart and open hand. Amen.

(The author is Pastor Dona Johnson, pastor of Christ the King Lutheran Church, Centerville, Ohio.)