

GENEROSITY EXERCISES

GARY HOAG

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*A Three-Week Stewardship Journey
Through the Scriptures*



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GENEROSITY EXERCISES:

WEEK ONE – OLD TESTAMENT

Day 1 – In the Beginning11

Day 2 – The Patriarchs and God’s People13

Day 3 – Giving according to the Law15

Day 4 – Obedience and Material Blessing17

Day 5 – Handle Money with Care, Simplicity and Generosity19

Day 6 – Put Your House in Order21

Day 7 – Good News for the Poor23

WEEK TWO – GOSPELS

Day 8 – Jesus is Generous27

Day 9 – Abandon Everything for the Gospel29

Day 10 – Possessions can keep both the Poor and the Rich from Christ31

Day 11 – What does Jesus say about giving?33

Day 12 – The Financial Advice of Jesus35

Day 13 – Be Rich toward God and the Poor37

Day 14 – The Gift of the Holy Spirit39

WEEK THREE – THE EARLY CHURCH: THE REST OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Day 15 – Be Content to Enjoy and Share Material Blessings43

Day 16 – Spiritual Gifts and Stewardship45

Day 17 – Giving under Grace: Proportion not Percentage, Love not Law, Gratitude not Guilt, Justice not Favoritism47

Day 18 – Partnership in the Gospel49

Day 19 – Give Yourself to God and You will become Generous51

Day 20 – Faith with Deeds is Alive53

Day 21 – Eternal Blessings for Faithful Stewards55

CONCLUSION: TWO WORDS

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The Generosity Monk cross symbolizes the community of saints from the four corners of the earth brought together in unity by our Triune God through the cross of Jesus Christ.
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INTRODUCTION

The book is for stewards of the Lord Jesus Christ. The goal is to help prepare each steward to hear the words: “Well done!” To accomplish this objective, the book has four distinct facets.

First, this is a biblical book.

To understand our Master’s instructions for stewards as outlined in the Scriptures, this book invites you to explore passages in three sections: (1) the Old Testament, (2) the Gospels, and (3) the rest of the New Testament, the world of the Early Church.

This format helps readers form a theology of stewardship and generosity that is rooted in biblical truth, rather than one formed by our cultural expectations and/or denominational traditions.

Second, this is a spiritual book.

Applying biblical principles regarding stewardship and generosity cannot follow the prescriptive plan of any person. It requires spiritual discernment; thus, this set of exercises will take you on a faith journey following the leading of the Holy Spirit.

This book is structured in such a manner as to allow the Spirit to lead the process of transformation and growth in the life of each steward.

Third, this is a historical book.

You are not the first to go on this adventure. Stewardship and generosity are not new topics. For centuries, saints have grappled with the radical significance of stewardship in the Scriptures. This manual will share some of their profound quotes and comments, so they will serve as sojourners with you.

Lastly, this is an intentional book.

It charts a course that is three weeks long and has seven distinct steps each day:



(1) Statement – You will begin each day by reading a statement related to biblical stewardship and Christian generosity.



(2) Supplication – Before going further, please start your daily exercise with a simple, focused word of prayer.



(3) Scriptures – Each exercise includes passages of Scripture for you to read and study.



(4) Silence – You may find this hard to manage, but try to sit in silence, taking time to reflect on what you have read.



(5) Saints – After your own reflection, consider what saints in church history said about stewardship and generosity.



(6) Spirit – Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as to applying these biblical truths in your own life as a steward in His kingdom.



(7) Summary – At the end of each day, journal what you believe God may be saying to you regarding your role as a steward and your generosity.

The name of this book, *Generosity Exercises*, was derived in part from a classic work, *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*. His work remains today as a set of exercises that has inspired countless Christians to calibrate the compass of their lives to Christ.

In his honor, it is only fitting, that I invite you to begin your generosity journey with his prayer for generosity, which is my prayer for you as you work through the exercises.

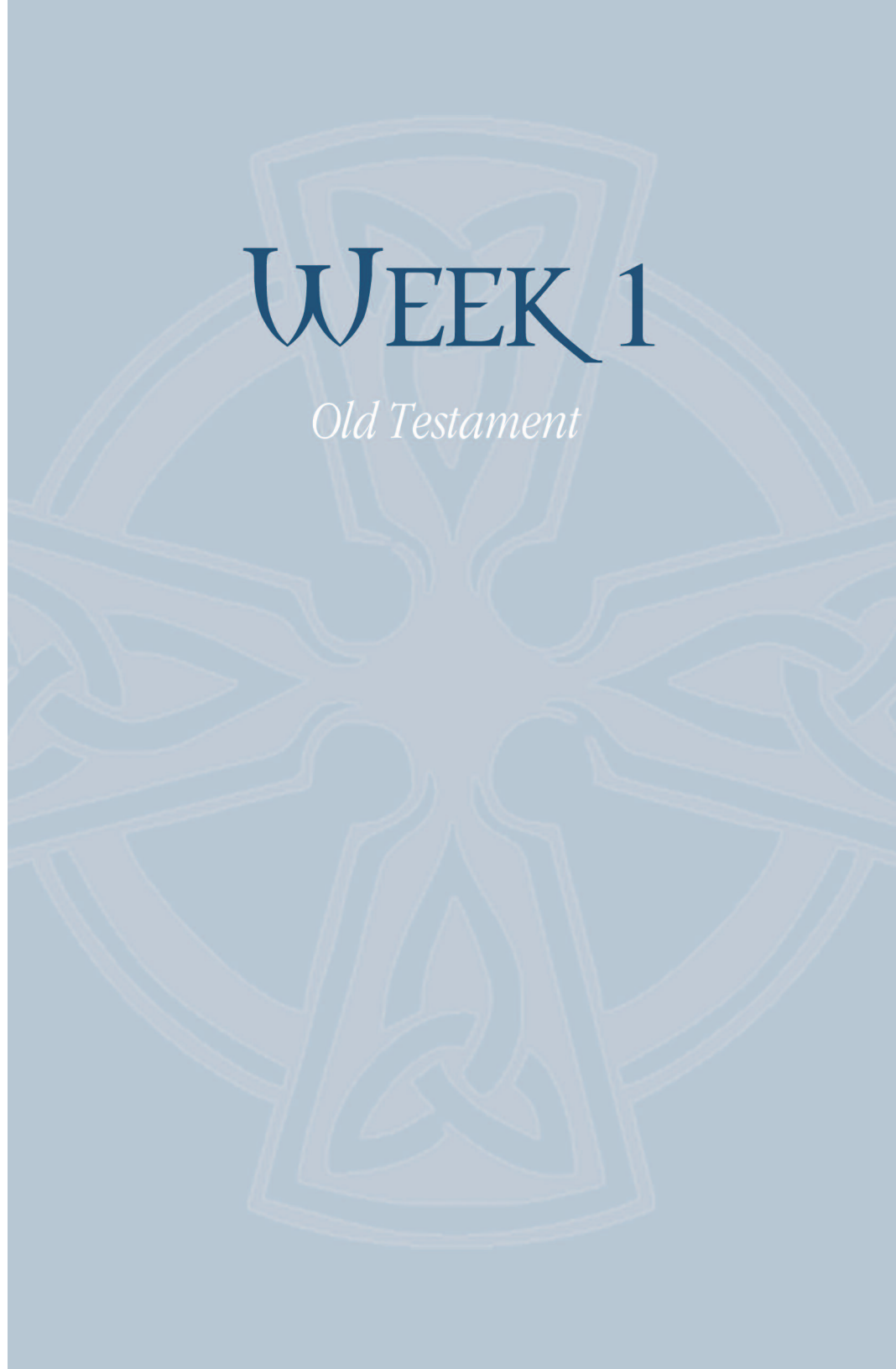
PRAYER FOR GENEROSITY

Lord, teach me to be generous.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve;
To give and not to count the cost,
To fight and not to heed the wounds,
To toil and not to seek for rest,
To labor and not to ask for reward,
Save that of knowing that I do your will.¹

St. Ignatius of Loyola
(1491-1556)

WEEK 1

Old Testament



IN THE BEGINNING



God's generosity is reflected in creation, all of which God owns and has declared it to be good. From the beginning, He appointed man and woman to serve as stewards of all that was made.



God, show me your generosity in creation and help me grasp my role in it.



So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Genesis 1:27-31

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendo, for everything in heaven and earth is yours.

1 Chronicles 29:11a

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

Psalms 24:1



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



"Now look at God's loving plan... He created certain things as common property—the sun, the air, the earth and water, the sky, the sea, light and the stars—and shares them out equally as with members of a single family... and notice that no one argues over what belongs to all in common; all is peaceful. Strife comes on the scene only when someone tries to gain possession of something and make it his own... God has made these great

gifts available to all in common so that we might learn to share lesser things. Nevertheless, we have not learned this lesson."² John Chrysostom (c. 349-407)

"God made the sun—it gives. God made the moon—it gives. God made the stars—they give. God made the air—it gives. God made the clouds—they give. God made the earth—it gives. God made the sea—it gives. God made the trees—they give. God made the flowers—they give. God made the fish—they give. God made the fowls—they give. God made the beasts—they give. God made man and woman—they ? God made me—I ?"³ Anonymous



What is the Holy Spirit revealing to you about your role as a steward of God?



How do you see God's generosity in creation?

THE PATRIARCHS AND GOD'S PEOPLE



Provision for the Old Testament patriarchs and later for God's people was to have something to return to God, care for one's family and share with others in need.



God, reveal to me your plan for the material blessings you have given to me.



The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

Genesis 12:1-2

When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.'" The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed. Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning." However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them. Each morning everyone gathered as much as they needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away.

Exodus 16:14-21

For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it. . . Bring the best of the first fruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God.

Exodus 23:10, 11a, 19a.



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



"Where did you get all this, and from whom. . . Is it not God who asks you now in your turn to show yourself generous above all other creatures and for the sake of all other creatures? Because we have received from him so many wonderful gifts, will we not be ashamed to refuse him this one thing only, our generosity? Brethren and friends, let us never allow ourselves to misuse what has been given us by God's gift."⁴ St. Gregory of Nazianzen (329-390)

"Lord, it is not always easy for us to give you thanks. Teach us, we pray. Teach us to thank you when we would rather grumble. Teach us to see all that we have as gifts from you. Forgive our ungratefulness. May our first and last thoughts be mixed with thanks."⁵ G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936)



What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about all that you possess?



How can I extend God's generosity to others with the possessions entrusted to me?

GIVING ACCORDING TO THE LAW



God's people were to give far more than 10%. They were to give God their first fruits and firstborn: tithing 10% to the temple, 10% for the festivals and 10% every third year for the needy as well as extra gifts for special projects.



God, help me move beyond these percentages to understand Your heart.



A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.

Leviticus 27:30

Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always. But if that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the LORD your God and cannot carry your tithe (because the place where the LORD will choose to put his Name is so far away), then exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go to the place the LORD your God will choose. Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice. And do not neglect the Levites living in your towns, for they have no allotment or inheritance of their own. At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

Deuteronomy 14:22-29

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.

1 Chronicles 29:14



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



"It is interesting that those who still think tithes are mandatory normally do not insist on 23.33% – 10% to go to the temple, 3.33% to the poor and 10% in celebration during festival time."⁶ Craig Blomberg, Denver Seminary

"We give Thee but Thine own; whate'er the gift may be; All that we have is Thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from Thee. May we Thy bounties thus, as stewards true receive, And gladly, as Thou blessest us, to Thee our first fruits give."⁷ Lowell Mason, George Webb and William How (1864)

"If sometimes our poor people have had to die of starvation, it is not because God didn't care for them, but because you and I didn't give, were not instruments of love in the hands of God, to give them that bread, to give them that clothing; because we did not recognize him, when once more Christ came in distressing disguise—in the hungry man, in the lonely man, in the homeless child, and seeking for shelter."⁸ Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1919-1997)



How is the Holy Spirit moving you regarding your giving?



What do I need to change to have something to give to God and care for the poor?

OBEDIENCE AND MATERIAL BLESSING



Obedience and hard work often lead to material blessing, but sometimes the righteous suffer great material loss. Blessings retained often corrupt their keepers. Disobedience or laziness often leads to ruin. Both righteous and unrighteous prosper.



God, teach me to obey you and to treasure spiritual blessings above all else.



Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Joshua 1:8

In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.

Job 1:1

Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Psalms 73:1-3



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



“That God gives good things to the wicked is—if you want to understand why—for your growth and does not indicate a divine perversity. Yet I see that you still do not grasp what I said. Listen therefore to what I was telling you who blame and accuse God because he gives these earthly and temporal goods even to wicked persons, which according to your way of thinking he ought not to give except to the righteous alone. Gold, silver, every type of money, clothing, clients, relatives, cattle, honors—all these are externals. If these lower, earthly, temporal, transitory goods were not given to the wicked as well, they would be considered great by the righteous. And so God, who gives these things to the bad, teaches you to long for higher things.”⁹ Augustine (354-430)

“Let them [Christians] be active, useful, generous toward others; manifestly moderate and self-denying. Let them be ashamed of idleness, as they would be of the most acknowledged sin. When Providence blesses them with affluence, let them withdraw from the competition of vanity; and, without sordidness or absurdity, shew by their modest demeanor, and by their retiring from display, that, without affecting singularity, they are not slaves to fashion; that they consider it as their duty to set an example of moderation and sobriety, and to reserve for nobler and more disinterested purposes, that money, which others selfishly waste in parade, and dress, and equipage. Let them envince, in short, a manifest moderation in all temporal things; as becomes those whose affections are set on higher objects than any which this world affords...”¹⁰ William Wilberforce (1759-1833)

“The first Christian suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world.”¹¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)



What is the Holy Spirit revealing to you about valuing higher things (such as obedience) above earthly things (such as material blessings)?



Have I believed the false narrative that says: “I will obey so God will bless me?” How has the desire for stuff wormed its way into my faith?

HANDLE MONEY WITH CARE, SIMPLICITY AND GENEROSITY



Handle money carefully because extremes of prosperity and poverty often lead to sin. Living beyond one's means leads to debt, which enslaves, so live with simplicity. In this way, you will have enough to care for those you love and celebrate special occasions, while also sharing generously with those God loves: widows, foreigners and the poor.



God, help me relate to money carefully so I can live simply and generously.



Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.

Proverbs 30:8-9

The borrower is a servant to the lender.

Proverbs 22:7b

The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.

Proverbs 29:7



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



"Those, then, who start from these beginnings and make good progress attach themselves to no visible instruments, nor do they burden themselves with such, nor desire to know more than is necessary in order that they may act well. (This is because) they set their eyes only on being right with God and on pleasing Him, and therein consists their covetousness. Thus with great generosity they give away all that they have, and delight to know that they have it not, for God's sake and for charity to their neighbor, no matter whether these be spiritual things or temporal. For, as I say, they (have) set their eyes upon the reality of interior perfection, which is to give pleasure to God and to give pleasure to themselves in nothing (else)."¹² St. John of the Cross (1542-1591)

"Simplicity is the first cousin of contentment. Its motto is: We brought nothing into this world, and we can certainly carry nothing out. It recognizes that we are pilgrims. It concentrates us on what we need, and measures this by what we use. It rejoices in the good things of creation, but hates waste and greed and clutter. It knows how easily the seed of the Word is smothered by the 'cares and riches of this life.' It wants to be free of distractions, in order to love and serve God and others."¹³ John R. W. Stott, Anglican Author and Clergyman

"Giving doesn't just happen. Most of us don't give as much as we should because we don't plan our giving. You may need to make some tough financial decisions in order to have the freedom to give more. You may need to reduce your debt load or opt for a simpler lifestyle. You might need a budget. It will certainly mean having a priority list, planning and keeping records. Remember, you are handling God's money."¹⁴ Dan Busby, Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability



What is the Holy Spirit revealing to you about how you have handled money?



What would a life of simplicity and generosity look like for you?

PUT YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER



The prophets of the Old Testament proclaimed the sins of God's people regarding their stewardship: they had many idols, hoarded their wealth, failed to give generously, and behaved unjustly toward the poor.



God, open my eyes to see my stewardship sins; in Your mercy, forgive me.



Their land [Judah] is full of silver and gold; there is no end to their treasures. Their land is full of horses; there is no end to their chariots. Their land is full of idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their fingers have made. So people will be brought low and everyone humbled.

Isaiah 2:7-9a

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: You have gone far enough, princes of Israel! Give up your violence and oppression and do what is just and right. Stop dispossessing my people, declares the Sovereign LORD. You are to use accurate scales, an accurate ephah and an accurate bath.

Ezekiel 45:9-10

This is what the LORD says: You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil. Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.

Amos 5:11-15



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



“When someone steals a person's clothes, we call him a thief. Should we not give the same name to one who could clothe the naked and does not? The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry; the coat hanging unused in your closet belongs to those who need it; the shoes rotting in your closet to the one who has no shoes. The money which you hoard belongs to the poor.”¹⁵ Basil the Great (330-379)

“A great many people are wondering why they don't grow in grace; why they don't have more spiritual power. The question is very easily answered. You have got your treasure down here. It is not necessary for a man to have money to have his treasure down here. He may have his heart on pleasure; he may make an idol of his children; and that is the reason that they don't grow in grace. If we would only just be wise and do as God tells us, we would mount up, as it were, on wings, and would get nearer to heaven every day. We would get heavenly-minded in our conversation, and have less trouble than now. And so, my friends, let us just ask ourselves today, Where is our treasure? Is it on earth, or in heaven? What are we doing? What is the aim of our lives? Are we just living to accumulate money, or to get a position in the world for our children? Or, are we trying to secure those treasures, which we can safely lay up in heaven, becoming rich toward God?”¹⁶ D.L. Moody (1837-1899)



What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about your stewardship?



In what ways has your stewardship been shaped by your culture?

GOOD NEWS FOR THE POOR



God's prophets also announced that someday a Savior would be born for the world and good news would be proclaimed for the poor.



God, use me to deliver good news through my words and actions.



For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Isaiah 9:6-7

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.

Isaiah 61:1-3

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Zechariah 9:9-10



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



"We must pray without tiring, for the salvation of mankind does not depend on material success nor the sciences but on Jesus alone."¹⁷ St. Frances Xavier Cabrini (1850-1917)

"How we treat the poor is how we treat God... Reaching out, preferentially, to the poor is an essential component of the spiritual life."¹⁸ Ronald Rolheiser, Oblate School of Theology

"We should always look upon ourselves as God's servants, placed in God's world, to do His work; and accordingly labour faithfully for Him; not with a design to grow rich and great, but to glorify God, and do all the good we possibly can. Again, never expect any satisfaction or happiness from the world. If you hope for happiness in the world, hope for it from God, and not from the world."¹⁹ David Brainerd (1718-1747)

"If our God is self-sacrificing and seeks to bless others who have done nothing to merit it, then we should be people who are self-sacrificing and who bless others who have not earned it."²⁰ James Bryan Smith, Friends University



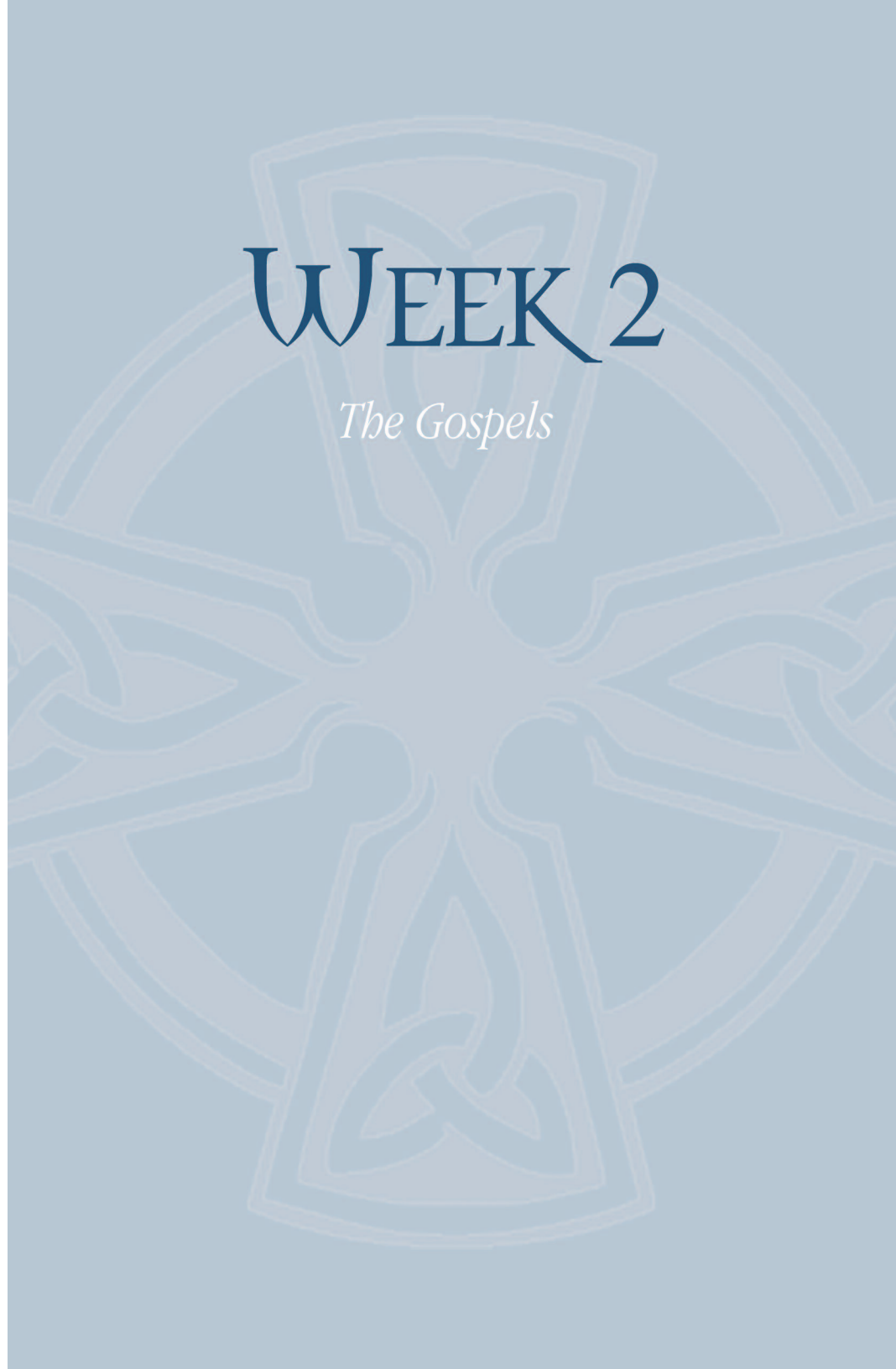
What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about sharing the good news?



What does the good news have to do with my stewardship and generosity?

WEEK 2

The Gospels



JESUS IS GENEROUS



For all who seek Him first and receive Him, Jesus is the generous giver of abundant life and the riches of the Kingdom.



God, thank you for the generosity extended to me through your son, Jesus.



The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

John 1:9-13a

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

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

John 10:10b

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matthew 6:25-33



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



"Jesus Christ chose twelve poor men to be His companions. These twelve are called the Apostles or Disciples, and He chose them from among poor men, in order that the poor might know--always after that, in all years to come--that Heaven was made for them as well as for the rich, and that God makes no difference between those who wear good clothes and those who go barefoot and in rags."²¹ Charles Dickens (1812-1870)

"All that is in the world is vanity except to love God and serve Him only. This is the most noble and the most excellent wisdom that can be in any creature: by despising the world to draw daily nearer and nearer to the kingdom of heaven. It is therefore a great vanity to labor inordinately for worldly riches that will shortly perish or to covet honor or any other inordinate pleasures or fleshly delights in this life, for which a man after this life will be sorely and grievously punished. How great a vanity it also is to desire a long life and to care little for a good life; to heed things of the present and not to provide for things that are to come; to love things that will shortly pass away and not to haste to where joy is everlasting."²² Thomas á Kempis (c. 1380-1471)



How may the Holy Spirit be moving you to experience life in the Kingdom?



How have you personally experienced the generosity of Jesus?

ABANDON EVERYTHING FOR THE GOSPEL



Followers of Jesus give money to further mission not because Jesus needs it, but because in giving, his followers show where their hearts are. Followers of Jesus cannot serve God and mammon. They abandon all to follow Him.



God, help me let go of what I can see to take hold of what I can't see.



After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Luke 8:1-3

Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight."

Luke 16:10-15

Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the Gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.

Mark 10:28-30



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



"The love of money will, in all probability, prove the eternal overthrow of more characters among professing people than any other sin, because it is almost the only crime which can be indulged, and a profession of religion at the same time supported."²³ Andrew Fuller (1754-1815)

"While American Christianity has emphasized getting people saved, it has not spent nearly as much time and resources teaching disciples how to lead the Christian life. And one of the most crucial areas where teaching is needed is that of the Christian's use of money and possessions. Jesus said, 'You cannot worship God and money both.' God is not indifferent to our daily financial choices but is interested in transforming all our lives."²⁴ Wesley K. Willmer, Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability



What is the Holy Spirit revealing to you regarding mammon? Need to abandon anything?



How are you supporting the advancement of the Gospel through your giving?

POSSESSIONS CAN KEEP BOTH THE POOR AND THE RICH FROM CHRIST



Most people in the ancient world were poor, and their call to discipleship was simple: follow. They had to surrender the desire to be rich for something greater. For the rich, the call was more complicated: go, sell, give, come and follow. Materialism, greed and covetousness often hinder the rich from following Jesus.



God, give me a desire for You alone.



As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

Mark 1:16-18

The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown.

Mark 4:14-20

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Mark 10:17-21



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



"One goes more quickly to heaven from a hut than from a palace."²⁵ St. Francis of Assisi (c. 1182-1226)

"The gift of God cannot be purchased with money, but money not rightly used may cause us to miss heaven."²⁶ Charles R. Hale (1873)

"It struck me that selling what you own, leaving your family and friends, and following Jesus is not a once-in-a-lifetime event. You must do it many times and in many different ways. And it certainly does not become easier."²⁷ Henri Nouwen (1932-1996)



What is the Holy Spirit revealing to you about how you relate to possessions?



Can you think of any material goods that chokes the fervency from your faith?

WHAT DOES JESUS SAY ABOUT GIVING?



How much should one give? Jesus only mentions the tithe to his opponents while cursing them for thinking themselves to be righteous for tithing down to the mint and spice; conversely, the giving Jesus seeks from His disciples is sacrificial, missional, and motivated by love for one's neighbor.



God, please work in my life to make my giving reflect Your giving.



Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

Matthew 23:23

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

Mark 12:41-44

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the

man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' 'Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?' The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Luke 10:25-37



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



"Give according to your income lest God make your income according to your giving."²⁸ Peter Marshall (1940-2010)

"I do not believe one can settle on how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare."²⁹ C.S. Lewis (1898-1963)



What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about your giving?



Since Jesus did not instruct His disciples to tithe but to give sacrificially and lovingly, what would that look like for you?

THE FINANCIAL ADVICE OF JESUS



Jesus instructs us not to store up treasures on earth but to store them up in heaven. To live this way requires followers of Jesus to depend on God for daily bread and everything else.



God, teach me to trust you for my provision today and in the future.



This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.”

Matthew 6:9-11

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Luke 6:30-31



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



“The total consecration of money to God is a prophetic act because it announces the last days. It is an element of the kingdom of heaven in the midst of us, announcing the greater and final reality of God’s kingdom. It is an element of the kingdom of heaven because it means that God’s grace is worth giving up everything for.”³⁰ Jacques Ellul (1912-1994)

“When Jesus warns us not to store up treasures on earth, it is not just because wealth might be lost; it’s because wealth will always be lost. Either it leaves us while we live or we leave it when we die. No exceptions.”³¹ Randy Alcorn, Eternal Perspective Ministries

“For many decades our country was a communist country. During these years we were told that the government owned everything and that the government would provide for all our needs. But this didn’t work. Then communism fell and many people came to our country and told us about capitalism. They taught us that we were owners of our own possessions and destiny and that we needed to take care of our own needs. But for most people, this has not worked. Today I learned about Christianity. You have taught me that God is the true Owner of all things, that we are to serve the Lord, honor him with our lives, share whatever he gives us, and that God will be our Provider.”³² Anonymous Eastern European

“Instead of fields, buy souls that are in trouble according to your ability. Look after widows and orphans. Do not neglect them. Spend your riches on these kinds of fields and houses.”³³ Shepherd of Hermas (c. 140–155)



What is the Holy Spirit revealing to you about your current financial plan?



If you were to proclaim the financial advice of Jesus in the church today, how might people respond? How about in our culture at large?

BE RICH TOWARD GOD AND THE POOR



Jesus calls disciples to handle their possessions radically different from the world, and to care for the poor. In so doing, they live out the Gospel. Many come to faith and somehow their earthly treasures become heavenly ones.



God, help me live out the Gospel and be rich toward You and the poor.



Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" 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." And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' 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?" This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.

Luke 12:13-21

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Luke 12:32-34



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



"Let the one who is strong take care of the weak; and let the weak show due respect to the strong. Let the wealthy provide what is needed to the poor, and let the poor offer thanks to God, since he has given him someone to supply his need. Let the one who is wise show forth wisdom not through words but through good deeds."³⁴ Clement of Rome (c. 96)

"As to the care of these early Christians of their poor; of this we have a famous example in the conduct of the Church of Rome, in the earlier and better period of her history. The Emperor Decius demanded their treasure. A deacon answered for the whole church, and required one day to comply with the order of the tyrant. When the term was expired, he assembled all the blind, and the lame, and the sick that were supported by the church and pointing to them, told the Emperor, "These are the riches of the church, these its revenues and treasure."³⁵ (c. 249-251)

"Being rich toward God begins with giving to God that which we desire most of all. And what he desires most from you is you—your heart and devotion. Just as God can give us many gifts but the best gift is himself, so we can offer God our resources and acts of service, but the gift he desires most is us."³⁶ John Ortberg, Menlo Park Presbyterian Church



What is the Holy Spirit saying to you? Need to sell anything?



What would being rich toward God look like for you?

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



Jesus promised His disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit, the greatest treasure anyone could ever possess. It was not just for them but all who believed.



God, thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit!



If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

John 14:15-17

Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. 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. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

John 16:5-15



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



“God has given us the greatest gift possible and in profusion...What is this gift? It is the Holy Spirit!”³⁷ John Chrysostom (c. 349-407)

“The Spirit in us tends toward fellowship with God. He gives ever more grace and turns us away from the love of the world.”³⁸ Severian of Gabala (c. 400)

“The heart must be empty of all other things; because God will possess the heart alone; and as He cannot possess it alone without emptying it of all besides, so neither can He act there, and do in it what He pleases, unless it be left vacant to Him.”³⁹ Brother Lawrence (1611-1691)

“God’s appeal for unlimited generosity from His people has been preceded from His side by a limitless love, a love so intent upon a response that He has empowered us to respond through the gift of His own Holy Spirit.”⁴⁰ Brennan Manning, Contemplative Priest and Author



What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about stewardship and generosity?



What I am doing to share the greatest gift, the Holy Spirit, with others?

WEEK 3

*The Early Church: The Rest of
the New Testament*

BE CONTENT TO ENJOY AND SHARE MATERIAL BLESSINGS



Followers of Jesus are content to enjoy and share their material possessions with one another, church leaders and the poor.



God, teach me to be content to enjoy *and* share your rich blessings with thanksgiving.



They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 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... There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the Apostles feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Acts 2:42-47; 4:34-35.

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

1 Timothy 6:6-10

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:11-13



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



"Let Christian kindness overflow in you, dearly beloved. As you desire the recurring seasons of the year to be filled with fruit, so let your hearts be generous in feeding the poor. Assuredly, God...could produce the necessary materials for them, since all things are his. He could distribute so much goods to them that they would need nothing from your generosity. Much of the matter of virtue would be lacking to them and to you, if their want did not drive them to the crown of patience or your abundance lead you to the glory of compassion. Divine Providence has wonderfully arranged it that there should be in the church both holy poor and good rich people, who in turn benefit each other from their very diversity. In order for the eternal and incorruptible rewards to be gained, those receiving give thanks to God, and those distributing give thanks to God."⁴¹ Leo the Great (400-461)

"We are created to give--to be channels, not reservoirs."⁴² Dick Towner, Good \$ence



What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about contentment, enjoyment and sharing?



How much is enough? What will you do with everything over that amount?

SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND STEWARDSHIP



The Holy Spirit empowers believers with gifts to serve the Church and to glorify God.



God, help me use the spiritual gifts you have given me to serve others.



Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

1 Peter 4:10

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:7

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Romans 12:1-2



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



"Stewardship is the act of organizing your life so God can spend you."⁴³ Lynn Miller, Stewardship Theologian

"We should persevere from the beginning to the end of the times of our offices. And we should behave with all the greater awe and love during the great and perfect mysteries of our salvation, standing firmly before God continually with wakefulness of heart in spiritual service, resembling servants who are eagerly at the ready to serve their master."⁴⁴

Sahdona (c. 630)

"When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide,
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies: "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts: who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait."⁴⁵

John Milton (1608-1674)



What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about using your spiritual gifts?



How are you spending your light? Is it time to reorganize your life so God can spend you?

GIVING UNDER GRACE: PROPORTION NOT PERCENTAGE, LOVE NOT LAW, GRATITUDE NOT GUILT, JUSTICE NOT FAVORITISM



Everything related to giving for followers of Jesus changes under grace. As Christians in the Early Church are blessed, they bless others. Giving is based on proportion not percentage, is motivated by love rather than the law, by gratitude rather than guilt and flows with justice and not favoritism.



God, transform me by Your grace to give proportionately, motivated by love, gratitude and justice.



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

2 Corinthians 8:7, 12

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. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. 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. 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. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

2 Corinthians 9:10-15

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism... if you show favoritism, you sin.

James 2:1, 9a



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



"God prospers me not to raise my standard of living, but to raise my standard of giving."⁴⁶
Randy Alcorn, Eternal Perspective Ministries

"God's ownership of everything also changes the kind of question we ask in giving. Rather than, 'How much of my money should I give to God?' we learn to ask, 'How much of God's money should I keep for myself?' The difference between these two questions is of monumental proportions."⁴⁷ Richard Foster, Christian Theologian and Founder of Renovaré

"The Gospel of grace will turn anyone who truly believes it into a person who does justice for those in need. Doing justice includes not only the righting of wrongs, but also generosity and social concern, and a willingness to live a more modest lifestyle in order to be generous to the church and to the poor. This kind of life reflects the character of God."⁴⁸
Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church



What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about giving under grace?



Is your giving based on proportion or percentage? Motivated by love or law? Gratitude or guilt? Favoritism or justice?

PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL



Believers invest all they are and all they have to help others hear the Gospel as they did, and they do not seek recognition in advancing God's work.



God, lead me to the people with whom you want me to partner.



I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now.

Philippians 1:3-5

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

Romans 16:3-4

Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ. I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Romans 15:25-33



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



"Jesus does not want us to be attached to possessions, to human honors, to creatures. He asks humility. But his love and his generosity make this detachment less difficult and less cruel to our nature. Nothing else matters to me anymore, nothing has any value for me but Jesus, no place, no thing, no person, no idea, no feeling, no honor, no suffering, nothing that can turn me away from Jesus. For me, Jesus himself is my honor, my delight, my heart, my spirit, he whom I love, what I love, my home. Heaven here on earth. Jesus is my treasure and my love and Jesus crucified is my only happiness."⁴⁹ Bernadette of Lourdes (1844-1879)

"In this Paul seems to have been consistent: He did not ask for money from a community in which he was actively working to establish a church. The basic reason he gives for this is his concern about hindering the forward movement of the Gospel, whether by giving offense or by burdening fledgling churches. Once a church was established, however, he asked them to finance his travel to the next town. Clearly a concern for the Gospel is paramount for Paul's expectations here."⁵⁰ Jouette Bassler, Perkins School of Theology



What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about your role in the advancement of the Gospel?



Who blessed you with the Gospel? Whom could you bless? With whom could you partner to do that?

GIVE YOURSELF TO GOD AND YOU WILL BECOME GENEROUS



Believers who give themselves first to God become generous as Christ is generous. They don't hoard because greed is idolatry. They empty themselves sacrificially as Christ emptied Himself.



God, forgive me for being greedy and help me generously empty myself like Jesus.



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. 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. 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.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

Colossians 3:5

For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Ephesians 5:5

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! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



“If you wish to strengthen your confidence in God still more, often recall the loving way in which He has acted toward you, and how mercifully He has acted toward you, and how mercifully He has tried to bring you out of your sinful life, to break your attachment to the things of earth and draw you to His love.”⁵¹ Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787)

“May it please His Majesty that the extraordinary generosity He has shown this miserable sinner serve to encourage and rouse those who read this to abandon completely everything for God. If His Majesty repays so fully that even in this life the reward and gain possessed by those who serve Him is clearly seen, what will this reward be in the next life?”⁵² Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)



What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about hoarding vs. emptying?



If that which I hold on to is that which I worship, then what am I holding on to?

FAITH WITH DEEDS IS ALIVE



Those who profess the Gospel do good deeds that come at a cost. Faith without good deeds is dead; faith with good deeds is alive. Faith with good deeds is what caused the Gospel to spread throughout the ancient world. This could be the answer for growing the church in the modern world too!



God, help put my faith in action through my deeds.



*Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.
And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.*
Hebrews 10:23-24

*I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with
braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate
for women who profess to worship God.*

1 Timothy 2:9-10

*What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can
such faith save him? 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? In the same way, faith by
itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

James 2:14-17



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



"Those who perform the works of faith provide experimental proof that they have faith. They show this firstly to themselves, and secondly to others, when they act with generosity and out of love to God and to their neighbour, and not out of vainglory."⁵³ Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)

"Blessed are they who have riches and who understand that they are from the Lord. For

they who are of that mind will be able to do some good service."⁵⁴ Shepherd of Hermas (c. 140–155)

"Do not think me mad. It is not to make money that I believe a Christian should live. The noblest thing a man can do is just humbly to receive and then go amongst others and give."⁵⁵ David Livingstone (1813-73).

"One more revival, only one more is needed; the revival of Christian stewardship, the consecration of the money power to God. When that revival comes, the kingdom of God will come in a day."⁵⁶ Horace Bushnell (1802-1876)



What is the Holy Spirit revealing to you about your faith and deeds?



What deeds do you want to flow from your faith?

ETERNAL BLESSINGS FOR FAITHFUL STEWARDS



Jesus promised unfathomable blessings in the eternal kingdom, so may we not lose heart in this life, but be found exhorting one another to be faithful stewards of everything entrusted to us.



God, be with me each step of my stewardship journey until you call me home.



No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.

1 Corinthians 2:9

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Hebrews 12:1-3

So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

1 Corinthians 4:1-2

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

1 Timothy 6:17-19



Sitting quietly, read through the Scriptures again, and then take at least five minutes to think about these verses.



"You came to see a race today. To see someone win. It happened to be me. But I want you to do more than just watch a race. I want you to take part in it. I want to compare faith to running in a race. It's hard. It requires concentration of will, energy of soul. You experience elation when the winner breaks the tape, especially if you've got a bet on it. But how long does that last? You go home. Maybe your dinner's burnt. Maybe you haven't got a job. So who am I to say, 'Believe, have faith,' in the face of life's realities? I would like to give you something more permanent, but I can only point the way. I have no formula for winning the race. Everyone runs in her own way, or his own way. And where does the power come from, to see the race to its end? From within. Jesus said, 'Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you. If with all your hearts, you truly seek me, you shall ever surely find me.' If you commit yourself to the love of Christ, then that is how you run a straight race."⁵⁸ Eric Liddell (1902-1945)

"All you can take with you is that which you've given away." Sign on George Bailey's office wall in Frank Capra's classic Christmas film: It's a Wonderful Life



What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about the rest of your life?



How will you live today in light of eternity?

CONCLUSION: TWO WORDS

At this point you may be anticipating the two words: “The End.” We’re almost there, but not yet.

You may also think, since this has been a set of *Generosity Exercises*, that the two words that bid you farewell are: “Well Done!” That statement can only come from our Lord, and if you are reading this, your time for hearing them is not yet.

Before revealing the two words, let us consider together one more passage of Scripture, which is fitting for concluding these exercises.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’ Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Matthew 25:31-46

Simply put, the righteous demonstrate their faith by their deeds. Do you?

Before I can leave you with the two words that conclude this set of exercises, which I realize are rigorous, I must ask you one question: Are you ready to put your money where your faith is?

If so, then the two words I offer you as a concluding charge to *Generosity Exercises* that can chart the course of the rest of your life are simply, “sow generously.”

Solomon concurs.

Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.

Ecclesiastes 11:6

And so does the Apostle Paul.

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

2 Corinthians 9:6.

On every remaining day God grants you—sow generously—in obedience to the teachings of Jesus, following the leading of the Spirit, all for the glory of God.



ΕΠΙΘΗΚΕΣ

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