

# The Habit of Generosity

The Power of Spiritual Habits #6 - Pastor Gary Combs - September 21, 2025 - 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

**INTRO:** Good morning church! We're continuing our sermon series entitled: "The Power of Spiritual Habits." It's a study of Christian disciplines that help us grow in Christ Jesus.

**Series Theme:** Ephesians 4:23-24 (NLT) <sup>23</sup> Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. <sup>24</sup> Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

Spiritual habits help us yield to the Spirit's work in us. Spiritual habits are means, not ends.

Spiritual habits are a way of yielding to and cooperating with the Spirit's work in us for our sanctification.

Over the past four Sundays we've talked about the habits of #1 Daily Devotion, #2 Fellowship, #3 Service, #4 Rest, and #5 The Habit of Bible Study. Today, we're going to consider a 6th spiritual habit, THE HABIT OF GENEROSITY.

WHAT IS GENEROSITY? "Generosity is the virtue of giving plentifully. It is first and foremost a disposition of the heart. It isn't merely something we do; it is an essential characteristic of who we are. Generosity is a way of life." (Matthew Kelly. *The Generosity Habit: How Daily Giving Can Change Your Life and Transform the World* p. 16).

**IT'S TIME UPDATE:** Speaking of generosity, I'd like to offer an IT'S TIME generosity initiative update! For those that are new here, we have committed as a church to give \$1.6 million over and above our normal giving, for the next three years to accomplish three goals: to BE STRONG, strengthening our community engagement, to DO THE WORK, sharpening and expanding our ministry capacity, and to BE FEARLESS, taking hold of a miraculous opportunity to acquire a new home for a RM campus and to faithfully set aside funds for a future worship space in Wilson.



**HOW ARE WE DOING? Community engagement:** we're seeing new guests every week because of our increased social media presence and new resident mailers. People are coming in telling us they saw our invitation and love our church. More than that, these newcomers are making decisions to follow Christ! These people are the fruit of your It's Time generosity!

Plus, just this past week, we put our "Come as you are" invite on a billboard on Bethlehem Road in RM, near RMHS! Your generosity is making this possible!



**Ministry capacity:** we hired Michelle Minter as our Children's Ministry Director in Wilson last month and we're currently looking at a other possible candidates for positions in both Wilson and RM.

**New home:** We're celebrating our RM campus' 10 year anniversary (9/27/15-9/27/25) next Sunday and our first season in our new home! Since we've moved in our attendance has doubled. Last Sunday, we saw 20 guests! Church, it's the generosity of Jesus, faithfully being revealed in your giving that's making this possible! PTL! If you'd like to know more about IT'S TIME, go to our website or ask one of our members.



**Need:** However, we live in a culture that prizes *getting* more than *giving*. Advertisers constantly tell us we don't have enough, while inflation and bills pressure us to hold tighter to money and possessions. As God's children, instead of a having a mindset of abundance, we often struggle with a mindset of scarcity, doubting God's provision and anxious about having enough. **Trans:** Yet, God is generous! And we were created in His image to be generous too!

**BODY:** In the apostle Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he urged them to them to excel in the grace of giving by pointing to the Macedonian churches, who, though poor and afflicted, gave generously beyond their means, and by reminding them of Christ's supreme example of generosity. We can cultivate the habit of generosity to excel in the grace of giving. How can we cultivate the habit of generosity? The text gives three principles for cultivating the habit of generosity.

**Read text:** 2 Corinthians 8:1-9 (ESV) <sup>1</sup> We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup> for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. <sup>3</sup> For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, <sup>4</sup> begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— <sup>5</sup> and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. <sup>6</sup> Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. <sup>9</sup> 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.

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## HOW TO CULTIVATE THE HABIT OF GENEROSITY:

### 1. Rely on God's grace to enable joyful generosity.

**EXP:** (1-2) The grace of God in Christ enables genuine, joyful, and sacrificial generosity, which is an act of worship and a natural outflow of a heart surrendered to God. It is a testament to God's ongoing work of grace in believers' lives and a means to support His kingdom work.

**"Know"** (1) (γνῶριζω, *gnōrizō*) - to know, to gain knowledge of, have thorough knowledge of.

**"Grace"** (1,6,9 - 3x) (χάρις, *charis*) - unmerited favor; that which affords joy, delight; of the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues.

**"Given, gave"** (1,3,5 -3x) (δίδωμι, *didōmi*) - to give; to bestow a gift, to grant.

**"Churches of Macedonia"** (1) (Μακεδονία, *makedonia*) - the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea that Paul planted in his 2nd missionary journey.

**"Severe test of affliction"** (2) - likely refers to the combination of external persecution and deep poverty that the Macedonian churches endured. Macedonia was known for being financially weak compared to Corinth in Paul's day. Their generosity was remarkable because they gave in the middle of affliction.

**"Abundance"** (2) (περισσεία, *perisseia*) - abundance, superabundantly.

**"Joy"** (2) (χαρά, *chara*) - joy, gladness. More than happiness, a deep spiritual condition of contentment.

**"Extreme poverty"** (2) (πτωχεία, *ptōcheia*) - poverty, the condition of one destitute.

**"Overflowed"** (2) (περισεύω, *perisseuō*) - same word for abundance now in verb form.

**"Generosity"** (2) (ἀπλότης, *haplotēs*) - simplicity, sincerity; the virtue of openness of heart manifesting itself by generosity. [Dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com): "willingness and liberality in giving away one's money, time, etc. Not selfish."

**ARG:** The habit of generosity begins by setting our hopes on God, rather than worldly wealth.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 (ESV) <sup>17</sup> As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. <sup>18</sup> They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, <sup>19</sup> thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

**God cares more about your heart attitude than the amount of your giving.**

2 Corinthians 9:7 (ESV) Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (ἡλαρός, *hilaros* - God loves a hilarious giver!)

**ILL:** The Dead Sea: the Jordan River flows in, but nothing flows out. It sits, heats up, and evaporates, making it the saltiest body of water in the world and making it lifeless. God will only give to us what He knows will flow through us. Be a river not a reservoir!

**APP:** Generosity isn't about what's in your wallet, but about what's in your heart. Generosity doesn't wait for abundance—it overflows even in affliction because joy in Christ is the wellspring. If we wait until we feel "financially ready" to be generous, we may never give. Instead, let's rely on God's grace! Misers are miserable, but givers are glad! Grace-fueled generosity means being a river not a reservoir!

### 2. Draw on God's grace to supply surprising generosity.

**EXP:** (3-5) The grace of God offers an "unexpectedly" abundant supply of surprising generosity in us.

**"Not as we expected"** (5) (ἤλπίσαμεν, *ēlipsisamen*) - hoped, expected. Paul said, "They surprised us!"

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**"For they gave" (1,3,5 -3x)** (δύναμις, *dunamis*) - power. "They gave according to their ability and beyond.

**"Beyond their means" (3)** (ὑπέρ, *hyper*) - over and above, beyond, more than.

**"Own accord" (3)** (αὐθαίρετος, *authairetos*) - voluntary, of free choice, of one's own accord.

**"Begging us earnestly" (4)** (δέομαι, *deomai*) - to want, lack; to desire, long for; to ask, beg

**"Favor" (4)** (χάρις, *charis*) - same word for grace (v.1) or gift.

**"Relief of the saints" (4)** (διακονία, *diakonia*) - service, ministering. Paul was collecting an offering for the saints in Jerusalem where a severe famine (Acts 11:27–30) and persecution (Acts 12) had come.

**"Gave themselves first to the Lord" (1,3,5 -3x)** (δίδωμι, *didōmi*) - Having already given themselves and all they owned completely over to the Lord, they willing gave sacrificially to the need of the saints.

**"Then by the will of the God to us" (5)** - Their generosity overflowed back to God and to Paul.

**ILL:** The surprising offering of the widow who gave out of her poverty.

Mark 12:41-44 (ESV) And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them:

Mark 12:43-44 (ESV) "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

**APP:** Have you ever been surprised by someone's generosity—an anonymous gift, a meal paid for, a check arriving just when it was needed? That's the kind of Spirit-led giving Paul describes here. Let's ask ourselves: Have I first given myself completely to the Lord? When He has my heart, He also has my hands, my wallet, and my willingness to serve and give generously. So, this week, call someone just to say hello, tip like you've never tipped before, give an unexpected gift, compliment someone who least expects it, smile generously, make someone's day, be happy for others' success. You're at your best when you're generous. So, don't just dabble in generosity, live a life of amazing, surprising generosity.

## 3. Let God's grace move you to pursue generosity.

**EXP:** (6-7) The grace of God in Christ moves us to pursue and excel (abound) in generosity.

**"Act of grace" (6)** (χάρις, *charis*) - grace, grace of giving. Here, the collection for the Jerusalem saints.

**"Excel in everything" (7)** (περισσεύω, *perisseuō*) - same as v.2 to exceed a fixed number of measure.

**"Faith, speech, knowledge" (7)** Perhaps what Paul referred to: 1 Cor. 1-2.

**"Earnestness" (7)** (σπουδή, *spoudē*) - with haste; earnestness, diligence; NLT "with enthusiasm."

**"In our love for you" (7)** (ἀγάπη, *agapē*) - affection, love, benevolence. Love is generous. Love gives.

**"See that you excel" (7)** (περισσεύω, *perisseuō* - PASubj) Lit., "let abound you." You excel in other ways, so now abound in this act of grace too.

**ARG:** How can we begin the pursuit of generosity? Bring the Lord's contribution. Moses said:

Exodus 35:5 (ESV) Take from among you a contribution to the Lord. Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the Lord's contribution... Then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought the Lord's contribution to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service.

**ILL:** This is when the Israelites were contributing materials for building the tabernacle. Their generosity overflowed so much that Moses literally had to tell them to stop giving (Ex.36:5-7).

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**APP:** Many scriptures point to **the tithe** (one-tenth) as a benchmark for generosity. Other Scriptures talk about offerings and even specific kinds of offerings. (Like the offerings for the tabernacle - Ex. 35:5).

- Giving the tithe shows that you agree by faith that everything belongs to the Lord:

Leviticus 27:30 (NIV) "A tithe of everything... belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord."

- God says to test him in **tithing**:

Malachi 3:10 (ESV) Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

- **First fruits:**

Proverbs 3:9 (ESV) Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce

What does New Testament generosity look like, since we're not longer under law, but grace? The principles of the tithe, special offerings (like the tabernacle gifts), and first fruits are still important. They can guide us in our pursuit of excelling at generosity. Indeed, I think the tithe is only a starting place for the NT saint!

Surely we're more blessed than the OT saints. Why, then, would we assume we'd be expected to be less generous? So let's look at the OT tithe as a kind of minimum percentage of our income to give away."

Remember, God calls us to be a river, not a reservoir!

## 4. Look to God's grace in Christ for **genuine** generosity.

**EXP:** (8-9) The grace of God in Christ works in us, sanctifying us and forming Christ's virtue of genuine generosity in us, proving our love and presence of Christ's Spirit at work in us.

**"Not as a command"** (8) - Generosity, the grace of giving, is not a command, but a proof of Christ in us.

**"Prove"** (8) (δοκιμάζω, *dokimazō*) - to test, examine, prove, to test as in metals.

**"Genuine"** (8) (γνήσιος, *gnēsios*) - legitimately born, true, genuine. (NLT) "I am not commanding you to do this. But I am testing how genuine your love is by comparing it with the eagerness of the other churches."

**"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ"** (1,6,9 - 3x) (χάρις, *charis*) - "You already understand and have personally experienced Christ's sacrificial generosity." "You know this genuine loving grace!"

**"Though He was rich"** (9) (πλούσιος, *plousios*) - wealthy, abounding in material resources; rich.

**"For our sake"** (9) - Not for His sake, but ours!

**"Became poor"** (9) (πτωχεύω, *ptōcheuō*) - to be a beggar, to beg, to be poor.

**"You by his poverty might become rich"** (9) - this is the great exchange: His righteousness for our sin, His Sonship for our separation, His eternal life for our death.

**ARG:** **If we have received God's free gift in Christ, then we freely give as proof of this!**

Matthew 10:8 (NKJV) Freely you have received, freely give.

**APP:** When God's grace fills us, generosity overflows from us. Be a river not a reservoir!

**CONCLUSION:** The supreme example of generosity is Christ Himself. True generosity flows from receiving His grace afresh—He became poor so we might become rich. Generosity isn't about what's in your wallet, but about what's in your heart. Has Christ given you a new heart? A heart of generosity?

The Bible calls us to pursue joyful, surprising, and genuine generosity. The bad news? We can't do it ourselves. The good news? Christ has already done it for us. Receiving Him, receiving His grace given freely, we can freely and generously give! Let's pray.