



THE DISCIPLINE OF GENEROSITY

WRITTEN BY DIANA BENNETT

What comes to mind when you hear “God loves a cheerful giver”? Perhaps the vision of a white knuckled child holding his/her precious coins of hard-earned allowance fills your mind and brings memories of modeling “generosity” with children. Along with being cheerful, God invites us to be generous. Usually money comes to mind and it is important to give cheerfully and generously back to God for his purposes and to those who are in need. After all, all our gifts, what we consider “our own,” have graciously been given to us by a generous God and belongs fully to him.

In what way has God been generous with us? What does it look like for us to be generous in response to God’s generosity? God gives us the most perfect example of generosity: his grace. He sent his Son, whose life bought us salvation. We can never outgive God and he has lavished his unending, amazing grace on us his children.

Remember this: *Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work... 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.* 2 Corinthians 9: 6–8, 11.

For us, generosity looks like freely giving to others with grace-filled attitudes and actions. Remember, every gift we have originates from God. To be generous is to offer what we have, whether in moderation or in abundance, to those in need. Being generous does not always depend on finances. We show generosity by using our various giftedness: generosity with

on-going forgiveness; generosity with our love, attention and compassion; generosity with moments of attentive listening; and generosity with whatever it takes to help another discover not only the love of God, but personal encouragement in the transformational experience toward Christlikeness.

Let us pray that God will remind us of the many ways he has been generous to us. Let us ask him for a generous spirit, a release of what we think we deserve to cling to, and a mind-set of release in order to assist those in need. History confirms that generosity has a rippling effect. The young pastor who once received financial help, now leads many to new life in Christ. The church and leaders that needed care continue to mentor others with life-giving spiritual formation. And the mission that brings the gospel to a culture without hope. We give out of our abundance with a posture of thankfulness and for the glory of God. Yes, God smiles on the cheerful and generous heart!

Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely.
— Psalm 112:5a

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.
— 2 Corinthians 8:7

Clearly, giving generously releases resources. And while the resources liberated through acts of generosity are a blessing, they are literally a “by-product” of the transformational power of generosity within the giver’s heart. For “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
— Matthew 6:21

MAKE ME A BLESSING

A HYMN BY IRA B. WILSON 1880–1950

Out in the highways and byways of life,
Many are weary and sad;
Carry the sunshine where darkness is rife,
Making the sorrowing glad.

Tell the sweet story of Christ and His love,
Tell of His power to forgive;
Others will trust Him if only you prove
True, every moment you live. (Refrain)

Give as 'twas given to you in your need,
Love as the Master loved you;
Be to the helpless a helper indeed,
Unto your mission be true. (Refrain)

Refrain: Make me a blessing, Make me a blessing
Out of my life; May Jesus shine.
Make me a blessing, O Savior I pray
Make me a blessing to someone today!

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

- Start each morning in prayer asking God to show you where you might be generous during the day. Practice the prayer of examen at night reflecting on opportunities you responded/did not respond to.
- Think of a friend, neighbor or community need. Ask God what his invitation to you might be concerning your generosity and their situation.
- Ask God to show you where a specific need might be: one that you are in a position to be of help with money or time; helping a student or organization struggling with tuition or meeting a budget. Then: Act!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In your journal, list the many ways God has been generous to you. Make a list of your generous responses to God's gifts to you. Be thankful!
- Reflect on how "cheerful" and "generous" you are with your material goods. Prayerfully consider your time and involvements with certain people or organizations.
- Pray for the Lord to open your eyes to specific giving opportunities. This might be a stretch of your giving in the past. It might also require some quality time you have been protecting.

A Prayer of Illumination:

Father in heaven, we stand in awe of your unfathomable extravagance of generosity through your Son Jesus, who bought our salvation. Thank you for uncountable gifts of grace, talents and treasures. We pray for receptive, generous hearts as you invite us to share what you so lavishly loan us for the furthering of your kingdom. And for this we give thanks in your Holy Name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

SUGGESTED SPIRITUAL FORMATION RESOURCES

Journey of Generosity, GenerousGiving.org

Celebration of Discipline, by Richard J. Foster

I Like Giving, by Brad Formsma

One Hen, by Katie Smith Milway (children's book)

