

“Three Ways God Calls Us to Live Generously”

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One of my first memories is my fifth birthday party. I have a summer birthday, so it was a month after I had finished preschool. The birthday party was Pocahontas-themed, so my mother and I put together gift bags with party favors that matched images from Disney’s Pocahontas movie. There was a girl in my preschool class that I really did not like, but my mother said that I had to invite *every* girl from my class. “After all,” she told me, “you would not want to be the one person who does not get an invitation while everyone else around you does.” My five-year-old self was not happy about this. When it came to putting the gift bags together, I made sure to give all my friends the cutest Pocahontas erasers (the one with the raccoon, named Meeko, was my absolute favorite), and I gave the ugliest eraser to the girl that I did not like.

My five-year-old self thought that this was a genius idea; however, looking back on this, I realize that God used this to teach me a lesson. The day of my party came and the girl I didn’t like never showed up. So, guess which gift bag I got to keep? The one with the ugly eraser of course! I learned more than just “give the people you do *not* like the cute erasers.” I learned that when we withhold giving our best to others, we do not get to experience the true blessings that God has for us.

If you look at 2 Chronicles, verse 31, we see that the Israelites not only gave a tithe of everything, but they gave the firstfruits of their grain *generously*. 2 Chronicles 31:5 reads: **“As soon as the order went out, the Israelites generously gave the firstfruits of their grain, new wine, oil and honey and all that the fields produced. They brought a great amount, a tithe of everything.”**

The context of this passage gives you a better idea of what was happening historically. If you look back at 2 Chronicles 29: 6-10, you see that the Israelites had, for a time, drifted away from God. The text goes on to explain the following in 2 Chronicles 30:18-20:

¹⁸For a majority of the people, many of them from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover otherwise than as prescribed. For Hezekiah had prayed for them, saying, ‘May the good Lord pardon everyone ¹⁹who sets his heart to seek God, the Lord, the God of his fathers, even though not according to the sanctuary’s rules of cleanness.’ ²⁰And the Lord heard Hezekiah and healed the people. (ESV)

They returned to God. In reading this, you realize that giving is done with a heartfelt attitude. When God has our hearts, we are free to give without worrying. In Chronicles 31:5, we see that the Israelites gave a tithe of everything, which demonstrated their faithfulness in giving to God. That faithfulness is an outflow of a heart that is focused on God.

WHAT IT MEANS TO GIVE GENEROUSLY

1. Giving Generously Means Giving the Best

There are two primary things that I have learned about riches through reading the Bible. First, Jesus said it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven than it is for a camel to enter the eye of a needle. It is important to note that Jesus says that we are not to turn down others, and we are to give to anyone who asks. It does not say “Give to anyone, unless they are going to use the money for drugs and alcohol.” Just as there are no conditions with respect to God’s grace for us, there can be no conditions regarding those to whom we are to give.

Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:17-19:

¹⁷Command 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. ¹⁸Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹In 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.

I'm going to go out on a limb and say that the reason people search their entire lives and find that they still come up empty is because we are called to give generously. Our tired hearts scream for more. We are not called to have financial security in order to develop a closer relationship with Jesus. Often, people think that they do not have enough to spare to give to the church or enough to donate to charities and still pay the bills. Generosity that is merely convenient is not saving anyone.

Think about it—and not just in terms of money. How much do you give away that really *costs* you something? The most I give away are my clothes—and not even clothes that I like. I give away the minimum. I give away only what will not *cost* me anything. What does that do for people in difficult positions, financial and otherwise? Please do not hear me say that giving of our clothes is not important; however, it is better to offer the best of what we have rather than just our leftovers.

When people live their lives generously, they give generously. Their first motive is not “How will this affect me?” but instead, “How can I use what I have been given to bless others?” When giving generously, we no longer only give the remains, we give the best. We no longer limit ourselves to giving safely, but open our hearts to giving generously.

Psalm 37:21 sums it up best: **“The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously.”**

2. Giving Generously Means Missional Giving

According to Proverbs 22:9a: **“A generous man will himself be blessed...”** God blesses people in scripture so that they are able to be a blessing to others. This is

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especially true when it comes to supporting missions. The Church of the Nazarene has always been a very missional church. Through the central idea of going into all nations and baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Church of the Nazarene has a focus on being a disciple of Jesus. Christian discipleship is something that should soak through every aspect of our lives, including our approach to giving.

Not everyone is called to overseas missions, but as members of the Body of Christ we are called to support each other. Giving is vital to living a missional life because it helps the journey of those around us as they grow and develop in Christ. If missions is truly a three-legged stool, and I believe it is, we know that without prayer and financial support, the work of the missionary will not be completed and relationships cannot be built.

In pursuing true holiness—and I feel that is where God wants us to be—we must pursue a real stripping down of our agendas, our plans, and our goals. We must run toward the goal which God set before us, which is in Christ Jesus. Not only must we ourselves run, we must also allow others to realize that same goal. We can do this through giving and living a missional life in Christ.

3. Giving Generously Means Giving Gratuitously

Gratuitously is defined by the dictionary as, “Given unearned or without recompense; not involving a return benefit, compensation, or consideration.” When one gives gratuitously, they are giving without expecting anything back, and they are giving even when it is not required. My college roommate’s mother is one of the Godliest women I have met in my life. She has the philosophy that if you give, you should think of it as a *gift*. In other words, you should not expect anything in return when you give. If, by chance, you do get repaid, then great! However, if you never get a return on the gift or money, you should not hold it against anyone. This is what Jesus taught.

Think of it like this: We are called to be Teflon people in a Velcro world when it comes to giving. Worldly material possessions gravitate toward Velcro people, firmly sticking to them. On the other hand, Teflon people allow wealth to slide off of them and

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to other people in their community. We cannot take our possessions to heaven. In fact, people are the only ones we can take to heaven. Sometimes we need to think about our priorities: Is it keeping up with the Joneses? Is it thinking that we must have the latest and greatest and biggest and best?

Maybe that is not your issue, but I want you to consider now how you give. We are not called to give grudgingly, but rather with a joyful attitude. You can tell if you are giving grudgingly if you say, “I *have* to tithe ten percent,” or if you think of giving as just something on your to-do list that you can cross off. There needs to be a level of joyfulness when you give. If we do not give with a joyful heart, then we have allowed other things to become more important.

In conclusion, true stewardship is an attitude of the heart. I challenge you to think about the condition of your heart. This is not a new, radical idea, but I feel that this is something that we too often forget. I challenge you to search your heart for not only how you are giving, but why you are giving. Giving is not something that can only be done on the surface. When giving, it should come from inside of our hearts. It requires a great deal of faith to be able to give, especially when giving costs us something. But this is how God calls us to give: generously in giving our best, giving in order to live a missional life, and giving without expecting anything in return. We should adopt the same attitude as John Wesley had when he said, “Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can.”