

## **The Joy of Generosity**

Air Dates: December 5-9, 2022

### **Day One**

I want to talk about the “culture of more” in which we live. Let’s face it—everywhere we turn these days the message we hear is more stuff, more money, more things will make you happy. Advertising and marketing are all about making you dissatisfied with what you have, with who you are, with where you are, and convincing you that if you had more, you’d really be happy. This is a subtle influence in our culture that creeps into our thinking and our decisions far more than we realize. Not only is it subtle and insidious, it is relentless.

Why do we so easily buy in to this culture of more? Because the enemy of our soul wants to entrap us into this false narrative that bigger, better and faster will make us happy—and he has a lot of help! Your smart phone and computer quickly figure out how to target you with stuff that is specifically directed to your desires.

Did you know that there are more than 2300 verses in the Bible about money? In fact, Jesus spoke more about money than any other topic. That may surprise you, but it’s true that there’s more written in the Bible about money than about prayer and faith combined. So, what does that tell you? It says that our attitudes about money and what it can buy, our stewardship of the money we have, is a key part of our spiritual health and our spiritual growth.

So, we really need to pay attention to what the Bible tells us, right? And let’s start with what Jesus said, *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also* (Matthew 6:21). Randy Alcorn writes, “If you want a heart for something, invest in it.” A simple statement but profound in its impact in our lives. If you invest in, let’s say, a particular company in the stock market, you follow that company, you care whether it goes up or down, that investment has a part of your heart—right?

Well, here’s the thing: If you invest your time and money in giving to others, helping others, supporting the things of the kingdom, your heart will grow for others, for God’s work. There’s a ministry in Kenya that we support here at The Christian Working Woman, providing scholarships for nursing students and things like that, and so we really care about that program, we care about our fellow Christians in Kenya. Our heart is there, we pray for them, because we are invested there.

So, I would encourage you today to take stock of where you’re investing your treasure, whether you’re financially well off or struggling to pay your bills. Ask God to help you be more intentional about investing in God’s kingdom, because that will lead you to increased spiritual growth and vitality.

### **Day Two**

Our Lord said that *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). That word translated “blessed” is more accurately translated “happy.” It is more happy to give than to receive. Generosity—having a giving heart and attitude—is the pathway to real joy, just plain fun!

When was the last time you gave something away—money or some possession—and it just made you so happy? Have you ever met an unhappy generous person? We talked about the truth that where we

put our treasure is a good indication of the condition of our heart. But here's the truth we often overlook: Being a generous person doesn't take anything out of your life; it gives joy and fun that is far greater than the joy of receiving something as a gift.

Jesus said he came to give us abundant life and one of the most important ingredients of this abundant life is generosity—looking for ways to share your money and your time, your talents. It happens when you go from “I ought to give” to “I get to give.” When instead of trying to figure how much you can afford to give, you start asking how much do you really need to keep.

Maybe you're thinking that you would be generous if you had more money. You really want to give to others but with inflation and high prices, right now you're just trying to get by and you don't have anything left over to give to others. I understand that, but here's the thing: the biblical principle is true whether you have a little or a lot—it is still more fun, more blessed to give than to receive, so if you want a blessing, determine that you'll give, even if you think it is small.

There are so many benefits promised for those who are generous. Jesus said, *Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you* (Luke 6:38). Generosity will bring you joy and be a lot of fun, and Jesus said it will come back to you. My Daddy use to say, “Honey, you can't outgive God,” and that is so true. I don't know how it will come back to you or when, but Jesus said it will be poured into your lap. But note that it makes a difference whether you give with a teaspoon or with a shovel.

Can I challenge you to ask God today: What do you want me to give to someone today, this week? I think he'll put someone on your mind and then if you will obey, it will make your day! That I can promise you.

### Day Three

I'm addressing our “culture of more” that gets stronger all the time—the belief that contentment and fulfillment and happiness are for those who have a lot of money and “stuff.” But the Bible's principle of generosity is exactly the opposite.

Remember the parable Jesus taught about the rich man who had an abundant harvest and decided to build bigger barns so he could store his surplus grain. He said to himself, *You have plenty of grain 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?*” And Jesus gave this warning, *This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God* (Luke 12:19-21).

Jesus is telling us that earthly success can cause great spiritual failure. If you've been thinking that more money would solve all your problems, think again. There are many stories of people who won a big jackpot and it ruined their lives. So, be careful what you wish for, as they say, and hold your money loosely. Be generous whether you have a lot of money or not so much. If you were to come into a lot of money, you have no idea how much that could change your life for the worse.

Think of this: how long did the “happiness” last after you bought that new thing you wanted so much? That car, or that house, or that new outfit, or that expensive vacation. Didn't last as long as you thought it would, I imagine. But in contrast, the joy that you experience when you meet someone's need, when you support your church, when you give to a worthy charity doesn't go away. The “thank yous” and difference you can make in someone's life are priceless and lasting.

The Apostle Paul told the believers in Corinth: *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously* (2 Corinthians 9:6). Generosity should be a trademark of all of us who are Christ-followers.

## Day Four

If you want to be a generous person, how much of your income should you give? Often Christians say 10% - a tithe— is what we should give, and that's a good place to start. But a study shows that only about 25% of Christians in the United States give that much.

This is what C. S. Lewis had to say about how much we should give:

I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusement, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our giving does not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say it is too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot because our commitment to giving excludes them.

I don't know about you, but that convicts me. How often have I denied myself something in order to give to others? Probably not often. But I think we should give this careful thought and prayer. Lewis points out that there's no one answer for everyone, but the standard should be: Give more than you think you can.

When you decide that you want a different attitude toward generosity and in obedience to Christ you want to take it to the next level, you are in for unexpected joys. Even if you approach this new attitude with some caution, maybe even some fear you might overdo it, I am confident you will never regret the new adventure of deciding to give, even to the point of giving sacrificially.

I challenge you, as I do myself, to make a decision to give more than you're giving now. Discover this true joy of generosity. Maybe you can deny yourself that expensive coffee you buy everyday, and give that money to the Lord. Or shop a little more carefully at the grocery store or deny yourself that new outfit. I simply remind you of what Jesus said, you will be blessed more than you can imagine when you tune your heart to be generous.

## Day Five

I've been talking about generosity this week—the joy of being a truly generous person. I want to remind you that God gave first. You know the verse, John 3:16: *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.* That is the ultimate example of generosity. Jesus condescended to earth, leaving the glory of heaven, sacrificing all that was rightfully his, to provide eternal life for us.

So, when we choose to be generous, even sacrificially generous, we are following Jesus for sure, showing the same attitude he had, learning the truth that it is more blessed to give than to receive. And after all, everything we think we own is just on loan to us. God owns it all and we are simply stewards—caretakers. Psalm 24:1 says that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, which includes everything you have! So when you decide to give some money—to be generous—you're really giving away someone else's money, right? And that is truly fun.

As Christ-followers, when we come to the place where we truly believe that we are possessionless, we don't own anything, everything we have is given to us both to meet our needs and then to share with others, we are moving into new growth in God's grace and new joy as we obey God's Word.

To make the point that we are on this earth for a very short time compared to eternity, Randy Alcorn gives the illustration of drawing a line across a piece of paper, then go back and make a dot with the tip of your pen just above the beginning of line. The dot represents your time here on earth—whether that's a hundred years or less. And as you're in those years, it seems like a long time. But compare the long line representing eternity to the dot you made. It's like a nanosecond. Randy says, "Live for the line, not for the dot."

So, I close with this reminder from the Apostle Paul from 2 Corinthians 9:7: *Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* If that were all the Bible told us about being generous, it should be enough, don't you think? God loves a cheerful giver, and a cheerful giver is cheerful because she or he has learned that there is great joy in being generous—there is great joy in taking God at his word and obeying him.