

GENEROSITY & SACRIFICE

A LITTLE ABOUT GENEROSITY & SACRIFICE

When we watch TV or scroll through social media it feels like everyone is chanting, “More! More! More!” More money, a bigger house, the trendiest clothes, the wildest adventures, etc. The message we get is that our happiness and security in life is grounded in what we can achieve, consume or own. But this chase after more can pull us away from others, push us to focus too much on ourselves and make us believe that we are building our own little castle instead of contributing to the Kingdom of God.

This month we look at a practice from the life of Jesus that pushes against this message by declaring that it is better to give than to receive. The lives of Jesus’ followers are not marked by hoarding our resources but by sacrificially giving to help others. Let's find joy in generosity and sacrifice, because it truly embodies the spirit of Christ within us.

KEY VERSES

Matthew 6:19-33

Mark 8:34-37

Acts 20:35

Luke 10:25-37

1 Peter 4:10-11

Matthew 25:35-40

2 Corinthians 8:7

Mark 12:41-44

2 Corinthians 9:6-10

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.

C.S Lewis



SMALL GROUPS

TREKING TOGETHER

WE ENCOURAGE THESE PRACTICES TO BE PRACTISED TOGETHER. FIND A SMALL TRUSTED GROUP OF PEOPLE, OR EVEN JUST ONE OTHER PERSON, TO WRESTLE THESE IDEAS, BIBLE VERSES AND PRACTICES WITH. WE CAN HELP YOU JOIN A GROUP WWW.THELAKES.CHURCH/GROUPS

WEEK 1 - A GENEROUS HEART

READ AND REFLECT ON MATTHEW 6:19-33, MARK 8:34-37 AND ACTS 20:35.

1. HOW DO THESE VERSES CHALLENGE OUR CULTURAL EMPHASIS ON MATERIAL POSSESSIONS AND PERSONAL SUCCESS?
2. WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS WE CAN CULTIVATE A GENEROUS HEART IN OUR DAILY LIVES?
3. WHAT COULD IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU TO TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW JESUS TOMORROW?
4. IN WHAT WAYS CAN GENEROSITY AND SACRIFICE BE A FORM OF WORSHIP AND TRUST IN GOD'S PROVISION?
5. WHAT CAN YOU TAKE FROM THIS PRACTICE THAT WOULD GROW GENEROSITY IN YOU?

PERSONAL CHALLENGE:

THINK ABOUT SOMETHING VALUABLE TO YOU THAT ISN'T MATERIAL. IT COULD BE A TALENT, A RELATIONSHIP, OR A CHARACTER TRAIT. REFLECT ON HOW YOU CAN BE MORE GENEROUS WITH THIS ASPECT OF YOUR LIFE, WHETHER IT'S SHARING YOUR TALENT WITH OTHERS, INVESTING MORE TIME IN NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS, OR PRACTICING GENEROSITY IN YOUR ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS.



SMALL TABLES

TREKING TOGETHER

WEEK 2 - STEWARDING YOUR TIME & ENERGY

READ AND REFLECT ON LUKE 10:25-37, 1 PETER 4:10-11 AND MATTHEW 25:35-40.

1. RECOUNT THE STORY IN YOUR OWN WORDS FROM LUKE 10.
2. WHAT ARE SOME REASONS A PRIEST AND LEVITE WOULD WALK BY?
3. WHAT ARE SOME REASONS THE SAMARITAN SHOULD NOT HAVE STOPPED?
4. HOW DOES THIS STORY CHALLENGE YOU?
5. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO DIFFERENTLY, OR PRACTICE AFRESH, THIS WEEK?

PERSONAL CHALLENGE:

ASK GOD TO HIGHLIGHT SOMEONE IN YOUR LIFE THAT HE WANTS YOU TO BLESS. HOW CAN YOU INVEST TIME AND ENERGY INTO THAT PERSON THIS WEEK?



SMALL TABLES

TREKING TOGETHER

WEEK 3 - MANAGING YOUR FINANCES

READ AND REFLECT ON MARK 12:41-44, 2 CORINTHIANS 8:7 AND 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-10.

1. RECOUNT THE STORY IN YOUR OWN WORDS FROM MARK 12.
2. WHY DOESN'T JESUS CARE ABOUT THE AMOUNT GIVEN?
3. WHAT DOES JESUS WANT HIS DISCIPLES (AND US) TO TAKE FROM THIS STORY?
4. WHY IS MONEY SUCH A MAJOR TOPIC IN THE BIBLE?
5. IF SOMEONE ELSE LOOKED AT EVERYTHING YOU SPEND MONEY ON, WHAT WOULD THEY SAY YOUR FINANCIAL PRIORITIES ARE? DOES THAT ALIGN WITH WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN LEARNING THIS MONTH ABOUT GENEROSITY & SACRIFICE?

PERSONAL CHALLENGE:

THINK ABOUT SOME MONEY YOU ARE CURRENTLY SAVING (WHETHER IT'S FOR SOMETHING YOU NEED OR SOMETHING YOU WANT). ASK GOD HOW HE WANTS YOU TO USE THAT MONEY.

WEEK 4

IN THE FINAL WEEK OF THIS MONTH WE WILL HAVE A ONE-OFF MESSAGE ON SUNDAY. IN YOUR SMALL GROUP TIME IN WEEK 4 YOU MAY LIKE TO REFLECT ON THE PASSAGES AND THEMES FROM THAT MESSAGE.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

We're embarking on a journey to cultivate a lifestyle rooted in generosity. We'll be focusing on a few integral aspects: our heart, our time and energy, and our finances. These are the gifts we've been granted, waiting to be shared if we're open to it. However, to truly feel the satisfaction and joy that comes with generosity, we must first comprehend and appreciate what we've already received from God.

Growing a Generous Heart

The foundation of true generosity and sacrifice lies in our hearts. This involves willingly opening our hearts to God and to the people around us, living by the principle of 'loving others as we love ourselves'. This kind of love kindles a desire to give to others, even at a personal cost - even when our generosity isn't reciprocated, even without acknowledgment, even when it's challenging.

Having a generous and sacrificial heart means actively embodying the ethos of 'considering others as more important than ourselves'. Recognizing the extent of God's generosity towards us is crucial in shaping this perspective. His gifts - of love, grace, and salvation - epitomize generosity.

During this season, engage in reflective prayer. Seek God's guidance to widen the scope of your heart, allowing it to be more receptive to the people and their needs around you. Request his help in amplifying your generosity.

In this journey, it's also crucial to recognize any apprehensions we might have about opening our hearts to others. Let's ask God for the courage and strength to conquer these fears. By understanding the magnitude of God's generosity towards us, we can start embodying a joyful spirit of Christ-like generosity ourselves.

- **Daily Reflection:** Spend some time each day in prayer and meditation, focusing on God's generosity towards you. Reflect on His love, grace, and the ultimate gift of salvation. Let these reflections fill your heart with a profound sense of gratitude.
- **Prayer for Openness:** In your daily prayers, ask God to open your heart wider to the people and needs around you. Pray for an increased capacity to be generous in response to the overwhelming generosity you have received.
- **Conquer Fear:** Acknowledge any fears you may have about opening your heart to others. In your prayers, seek God's strength and courage to overcome these fears, enabling you to extend generosity without reservation.
- **Practice Gratitude** Cultivate a regular practice of gratitude, acknowledging the gifts you've received from God and others. Consider "practice stacking", integrating gratitude into another daily habit like having your morning coffee or during your commute. This habit can serve as a daily reminder of the generosity you've experienced, and inspire you to extend that generosity to others.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Giving Your TIME / ENERGY

We all have the same 24 hours in a day. What makes the difference is how we choose to spend it. Growing Generosity means consciously making room in our bustling schedules for others. It's a sacrifice, indeed, because once given, that time can never be reclaimed. Why not ask God to guide you on who you should be investing your time and energy in?

- Try identifying areas in your life where you could scale back to make more room for others. It could be watching less TV, spending less time on hobbies, or setting stricter boundaries to avoid working after hours.
- Use this newfound time to truly be present with someone - it could be a family member, a friend who doesn't share your faith, or someone who could really use a hand.
- Consider using some of this time to give blood, help a friend move, or simply make a phone call to someone in need. Remember, every act of generosity, no matter how small, can make a significant difference in someone else's life.

Managing Your FINANCES

Jesus often warned his followers about the love of money. He cautioned us because of how swiftly it can ensnare our hearts, minds, energy, time, and passion. However, when used wisely, our finances can become a powerful tool to bless others. Here are some thoughtful and practical ways you could use your resources to extend your generosity.

- Start by asking God to illuminate a financial need around you.
- Consider forgiving a financial debt that someone owes you, if it's appropriate.
- Try carrying around some extra cash in your pocket with the specific intention of using it to bless someone unexpectedly (plan for generosity).
- You could sponsor a child overseas through compassion.com.au or support a local cause you believe in.
- Pay for the order of the person behind you in the drive-through line as a surprise act of kindness.
- Remember to give regularly to your local church, contributing to its mission and the community it serves.
- Invite someone out for a meal or treat them to a coffee. It's a simple gesture that not only addresses a physical need but also fosters connection and community.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Blessed to Be a Blessing

Consider Scrooge's transformation in 'A Christmas Carol'. He didn't start giving because he thought he would gain something in return. He changed because he realized his life of constant consumption and accumulation was lonely, destructive, and ultimately unfulfilling.

In the same way, our journey towards generosity isn't about expecting rewards from God. Rather, it's about understanding and embracing the intrinsic value and joy of giving. The act of giving itself is the reward. Cultivating a generous heart, regardless of the size of our gestures, is a deeply enriching and satisfying way to live.

God doesn't owe us anything more. He's already gifted us this beautiful world, life itself, and his own Son on the cross. His generosity will continue, not because we've earned it, but because it's his nature to give. In response, we give not to receive, but because he first gave us everything.

To keep this perspective front and center, here are four strategies to help us remember that we are blessed to be a blessing:

- **Reflect on God's Generosity Daily:** Make it a practice to meditate on God's unparalleled generosity each day. This reflection will help put our own acts of giving into perspective.
- **Scripture Meditation:** Meditating on Bible verses about God's generosity can help reinforce our understanding that our giving is a response to His ultimate gift.
- **Share Your Generosity Stories in Community:** This isn't about bragging or letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Instead, much like Jesus used stories to teach his disciples, we can share our experiences of generosity as a form of discipleship. By sharing our stories in a humble and honest way, we can collectively celebrate generosity and perhaps find a common cause that our group or community can support together. Remember, it's not about glorifying ourselves but about encouraging one another and giving glory to God.
- **Participate in Communion:** Taking part in communion serves as a poignant reminder of the depth of God's generosity. It recalls the sacrifice of Jesus, who didn't just give a part of himself but gave all - his body and his blood. Each time we participate in this sacred act, we are reminded that our call to generosity is inspired by a God who gave everything for us. This reminder can embolden us to share freely and joyfully with others.



FAMILY PRACTICE

Family Generosity

One significant way to embrace generosity as a family is to assess our luxuries and see where we could make sacrifices to help meet the needs of those less fortunate. This is a practical way to teach our families that, as followers of Jesus, it's not only okay but also noble to make sacrifices for others.

Let's sit together as a family and deliberate on how we can live a bit more 'simply' so that others may 'simply live'. Discuss as a unit which cause you'd like to support. Perhaps you'd like to sponsor a child, contribute to a food bank, donate to an organisation, assist an organisation, or make a difference to a local need.

To financially support your chosen cause, consider what sacrifices your family could make. Here are a few suggestions:

- Temporarily suspend a subscription for a month.
- Plan a low-cost meal once a week for a month (e.g. oats, rice).
- Agree on a three-minute shower rule to save on power bills.
- Encourage everyone to do extra chores to save money.

The essence of our generous action is echoed in 2 Corinthians 8:9: "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 through his poverty might become rich." As followers of Jesus, let's nurture family practices where generosity and sacrifice are a part of our daily lives, just as they were for Him.

Our motive? "We love because he first loved us." This is the heart of a generosity-filled family.