

7 days to becoming a more generous person

Day 1 of 7 • This day's reading

- Psalms 24:1
- Proverbs 11:24-25
- John 3:16

Devotional

What does it mean to be generous?

We should live more simply and give more generously because Heaven is our home. The single greatest deterrent to giving and to living more simply is the illusion that this world is our home. — Randy Alcorn

The principle of generosity is laced all throughout Scripture. In fact, we have the best model and mentor when it comes to generosity — *God*. He sent His Son, Jesus, as a sacrifice for our sins so that we could spend eternity with Him. That is the epitome of generosity. In order to learn how to live generously, we must grasp what it means.

The word *generous* is defined as:

- *Open in giving or sharing*
- *Willing to give help or support*

- *Unselfish*

Generous living is a lifestyle where we are others-focused. It's not a *one size fits all* concept and is not limited to the wealthy, the gifted, the beautiful, or the lucky. It's a journey of our hearts being transformed from "*What can I get?*" to "*What can I give?*" It's allowing God to cultivate a generous heart within us. Much like worship, generosity is the disposition of our hearts.

Psalm 24:1 says that "*the earth is the LORD's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it...*" We think of ourselves as owners. And in our society, that may be true. We own a home, a car, or a pair of shoes. But in God's economy, everything belongs to Him. He is the owner, and we are the stewards. And the people who steward well often are entrusted with more to steward well. It doesn't matter how much we have; it matters what we do with what we're given. It's seeing everything we have as a gift from God. And when we do that, our mindsets switch from "*This is mine*" to "*I'd love to share.*"

Over the next six days of this Bible Plan, we'll discover that generous living goes way beyond impacting our personal finances. We'll also learn how we can donate our time, gifts, talents, words, and possessions to make someone else's life better.

Reflect

- When was the last time you displayed a generous spirit toward someone?
- Take some time now to analyze how you view the things God has blessed you with. Do you see them as gifts from God or as accomplishments and possessions you've earned?
- What is one barrier that stands in your way from being more generous?

Day 2 of 7 • This day's reading

- Proverbs 17:17
- Ephesians 4:11-13

Devotional

Generous with our time.

The measure of a life, after all, is not its duration but its donation.
— Corrie Ten Boom

Living generously doesn't just mean giving money to a cause or a person in need. That's part of it, but there's more to it than just giving money. Giving our time is just as valuable. We can always earn more money, buy more things, and make more friends, but we can never obtain more time. Instead of seeing this as a valuable contribution toward a cause or a person, we often become stingy with it and say, *"I just don't have the time."* We all have the time. The question is, are we *making* time for the important?

What does it look like to be generous with our time? There are a variety of ways we can make a contribution.

Be a mentor.

You may have heard it said that God doesn't waste anything. All of the good things and not so good things we've endured, He will use in the life of another. We must think back to the things that have shaped us into who we are and allow God to use them to impact someone else. The wisdom we've gained from all of our life experiences can assist others on their own personal journeys.

Be a servant.

Serving often gets viewed like it's one of our last options. Most would rather be in front of others, in the limelight receiving accolades, or possibly acquiring some credit for an achievement. The servant does what is needed in the situation he or she is in. Servants willingly reach out to people and offer help to make another's life easier. They aren't concerned with awards or spotlights; they just merely want to serve others.

Be a friend.

Proverbs 17:17 says that *"a friend loves at all times."* Friends are needed when times are amazing and when they are not. It's easy to be with a friend and enjoy that friendship when things are going well. But, when a friend is hurting, instead of trying to put a bandage on their wounds and make them all better, let's instead just be a friend. Our presence in their lives brings a comfort to

them and lets them know that we see them and that we have not forgotten them.

Our time is a commodity we will never get back. What a remarkable investment we can make when we afford some of our time to influence others. We will never know the lasting effect in another's life because we gave of our time.

Reflect

- Do you find that you are more willing to give your time to help or not?
- What is one thing you could do for someone today that would require your time?
- Going forward, look for ways to invest your time into people — perhaps you choose to do *something* for *someone* everyday.

Day 3 of 7 • This day's reading

- Romans 12:4-8
- Galatians 2:20
- 1 John 3:16-18

Devotional

Generous with our abilities.

You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you. — John Bunyan

We've established that generosity goes way beyond our bank accounts. In many seasons of our lives, we will not have the financial means to contribute at all beyond returning the tithe. But that should not stop us from sharing what we do have — *our abilities*.

Whether we learned to do something through lessons or were born with a talent, we all have things in which we excel.

Sometimes these things help us earn a living and when this is the case, it can be hard to contribute such a skill in this way. But how amazing would it be to offer up the abilities and intelligence in a certain area to assist another? Let's think through what we can contribute when it comes to our abilities and make a difference in that way.

Use your skills.

This typically includes skills we learned — maybe in college or on

the job training. Handymen, plumbers, and electricians can offer to help others who would otherwise not be able to afford a certain service. Those who studied accounting or are just good with finances can offer needed assistance in this area to others. People in the medical field often offer their skills to people who may not be able to afford such care. Where do we excel? What comes easy for us? We can use our skills to lighten someone else's load.

Use your gifts.

These are the qualities we possess from God's hand. We didn't do anything to get them — *we were born with these gifts*. Some of us entered this world in a good mood and have proven to be quite the encouragers. Or perhaps God gave us the ability to organize or administer tasks and events. We've been called a "*prayer warrior*" because we spend hours throughout each week lifting up the burdens of others in prayer. Our gifts were given to us to share with others.

Use your talents.

Our talents are usually something we trained for. Lesson after lesson, year after year, we spent time honing this in order to do it excellently. It could be singing, dancing, playing an instrument, competing in a sport, making people laugh, or a variety of other talents. These are areas where we can show our generous spirit by sharing them with others for no compensation.

No matter if we were born with a talent or obtained it from years of practice, we have something to offer another. God can take our abilities and use them for His purposes.

Reflect

- Have you ever considered that giving of your abilities is generosity?
- Write down some of your skills, gifts, and talents. List one thing you could in each area to give to someone else.

Day 4 of 7 • This day's reading

- Ephesians 4:29
- 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11
- Hebrews 3:13

Devotional

Generous with our encouragement.

Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless. — Mother Teresa

Words have power. While they may not physically injure us, they can most definitely harm our spirits. What if we choose to be light bringers in this world that seems to be in ample supply of discouragement? What if we spent our days looking to be courage transplanters in order to brighten someone else's life? So, let's make sure that our words and actions bring encouragement instead of tearing people down.

Here are some ways that we can deposit kindness into a person's day:

If you think a kind thought, say it.

This is probably one of the harder things for people to do. Either

because we don't consistently think nice things about people or we are afraid of how someone will respond. Will they say "*thank you*" or will they cast away our kindness because it makes them feel uncomfortable when they are complimented or encouraged? We can't allow either to deter us from being obedient to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. If we are compelled to encourage someone with our words, let's speak it.

If you see a need you can meet, do it.

We see people in need everyday. It could be the mom with a screaming toddler at the grocery store who left her wallet at home and can't pay for her groceries. If we have the financial means, let's help her. Maybe it's the elderly man who can't seem to pick something up or open a door. Chances are we can help him. Needs do not need to be huge to make a difference in someone's life. We can be a source of encouragement in the smallest of acts.

If you see a burden, pray for it.

Most of us wish we prayed more for other people. But we just don't. We say, "*I'll be praying for you*" and then we don't and end up feeling awful that we didn't. Instead of saying what we will pray for, let's actually pray. We could even pray in that very

moment...*in public!* We have no idea what that kind of action will do for someone. Or we could just pray silently and then send a follow-up text saying, “*I prayed for you today!*”

May we have eyes to see the opportunities and ways to impact someone today and everyday. They are all around us.

Reflect

- Does encouraging others come easy for you? Why?
- Of the three suggestions above, which one will you begin to incorporate into each day to build up someone?
- Before you finish the day, encourage someone.

Day 5 of 7 • This day's reading

- Matthew 6:19-21
- Hebrews 13:16

Devotional

Generous with our possessions.

The world asks, "What does a man own?" Christ asks, "How does He use it?" — Andrew Murray

As Christ followers one of the things that deceives us is thinking that the earth is our home. *It's not.* We were made for Heaven. We all want to spend our eternity in Heaven, but if we're honest, we don't really want to die in order to get there. So, we stockpile experiences, possessions, and money while we are in our temporary lodging in an attempt to make it feel like home. When we do, our heart's devotion goes astray. This prevents us from living generous lives.

In the Bible, Jesus spoke in parables 39 times. Eleven of them were about money and possessions — *almost one-third of His parables*. Clearly, Jesus knew this would always be an issue that we would struggle with. The pull of material possessions on our hearts is strong. We ask God to bless us and then when he does, we take that blessing and we make it our God. And when Christ

returns to earth one day, every single possession we own and amount of money we have will automatically amount to nothing.

We are told in the sixth chapter of Matthew not to store up treasures on earth but instead, to store up treasures in heaven. Jesus said that our heart will be where our treasure is. Just how much of our lives are we wasting pursuing earthly possessions?

Chances are that we all have plenty of things in our lives that we can part with. One in eleven Americans pay over \$90 for a storage unit each month. (1) We are storing more things than ever and the storage unit industry has gone well into the billions of dollars. What is the remedy for our battle with materialism? *Giving*.

Whether we have a storage unit or not, we have many possessions that can be shared with those in need. We probably have plenty of items that we can give away.

- Used clothing and shoes
- Previously read books
- Kitchen supplies
- Jewelry
- Electronics

- Unused furniture
- Home décor
- Food
- Household appliances
- A car

Today is a great day to begin going through our possessions with someone else in mind. Those items that we think we *might* use or *might* wear could be the answer to someone's prayer. Not only will removing the clutter bring freedom, but we will have the chance to bless someone else with something that is merely taking up space in our lives and homes.

Reflect

- Do an inventory on your heart. Do you own your possessions or do your possessions own you?
- For the next three weeks, find five things each day that you can give away to someone else.

Day 6 of 7 • This day's reading

- Malachi 3:10-12
- Luke 21:1-4
- 2 Corinthians 9:6-8
- 1 Timothy 6:10

Devotional

Generous with our money.

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

We mentioned in day six that there are hundreds of references about money in the Bible. We can learn just about everything we need to know about this topic from it. While money is not a bad thing, the love of it most definitely is.

Randy Alcorn said, *“Wealth will either leave us while we live or leave us when we die. No exceptions.”* Yet, even though we know we will not leave earth with money, we somehow tend to focus on accumulating it while on this earth. We acquire it in an attempt to feel more secure, to appear more important, and to expand our list of possessions.

As we learn to manage our money, trusting God with the tithe is at the top of the list. The first tenth of our income is called the *tithe*. We return the tithe to our local church and trust God to multiply it for His glory.

Many people think that tithing is being generous. It's actually not a matter of generosity but of obedience. Tithing is simply returning what doesn't belong to us. Since God is the owner of everything and we are merely the stewards of it, how kind of Him to allow us to steward the other 90% of our income the way we see fit.

This is where generosity comes in.

In order to become generous with money, we must recognize our own blessings so that we will notice the needs around us. When we see what we already have, we tend to walk in gratitude, knowing full well that what we have is more than enough. That allows our eyes to be opened and the grip on our finances to loosen so that we can become the conduit God desires to funnel His provision through to others.

So, let's start gradually increasing our percentage above 10% in order to become the generous givers that God can use. We can:

- Give spontaneously.
- Support ministries above our tithe.
- Send a bag of supplies to a teacher.
- Leave a large tip for a restaurant server.
- Purchase baby items for young mothers.
- Give a family a gift card to the grocery store.

There really is no limit to what God can do through our obedience to Him. The more we give, the less money has a hold on our hearts. We were meant to enjoy money and things in life, not love them. Instead, we are called to love people and one of the best ways is to help meet their financial needs.

Reflect

- When was the last time you said no to something you wanted in order to be financially generous toward someone else?
- What is something you could adjust in your monthly spending to meet others' needs?

Day 7 of 7 • This day's reading

- Acts of the Apostles 20:35
- 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Devotional

The blessings of a generous life.

Stewardship, giving, and generosity are not synonyms.

Stewardship is a role, giving is an act, and generosity is an attitude. — Dave Briggs

The quote above really does explain the relationship between stewardship, giving, and generosity. *We are stewards who give with a generous spirit.* When we do, our lives will be filled up so full that we won't be able to contain the blessings. But being generous to get something out of it is never the point. We don't decide to give our money, time, or encouragement so that we can get something in return. But, one cannot ignore the blessings from God when we live our lives to be a blessing to others.

If you search the internet for how generosity changes the giver's life, you'll find a plethora of studies showing that it is nothing but a benefit. There are studies that show being generous lowers one's blood pressure, reduces anxiety, makes marriages better, extends our lives, and just makes us happier overall. (1) Rarely, does

anyone become poor or miserable by living generously. It just does not work that way.

Perhaps the reason there are favorable outcomes to our giving is because we are not focused on ourselves. When we fixate on our own issues, struggles, and challenges, we cause inner turmoil that will end up manifesting itself in our lives in different ways.

Even in times of personal scarcity, generosity can be vibrant. In fact, it's in the times that we don't think we have much to spare that we grow in our generosity by choosing to give. In difficult times, it's easy to become professional receivers. Instead, let's become professional givers. In order to see our heart's change from a scarcity mentality to an abundant outlook, we must take our minds off of ourselves and consider others. This is the most effective way to grow generosity in our hearts.

Jesus said, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."* May we awake each day with hearts and minds full of gratitude for what God has done in our lives and in turn, look for opportunities to sacrifice for someone else's benefit.

That is generous living.

Reflect

- Do you consider yourself a generous person?
- What steps do you need to take today in order to begin living a lifestyle of generosity?