



Generosity

Generosity began with the Father's promise. When Abram first discovered the Lord, he was described as a Blessing. Several thousand years later through a wild and twisted, messed up story, we would discover that the very essence of this blessing was Jesus the Messiah, a generosity to every nation. Acts 3:25-26 states: It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the nations of the Earth shall be blessed.' For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.

Read: Genesis 12:1-3

Quote of a Sage:

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

-1674 by Thomas Ken

Contemplative Prompt:

He gives us every breath. He offers every heartbeat. On forgetful days, we assume our hard work or drive is what will sustain us. Sometimes the Father's generosity is overshadowed by corporate ladder climbs or the Portland tiny-house dream. However, He is the one who offers our life to us: where we were born, who are families are, our abilities to make money, or our need to receive help from others. But- the Lord's generosity is more than what we consume or possess. He generously gives himself to us in the person of Christ, a relationship that overcomes fear, or pride or even death. This is generosity: to know the Father and Jesus the one He has sent. Thank him for his revelation to you!



Generosity - God's generous provision

The Lord took Israel out of a land of slavery and placed them into a land of provision. In this experience, the work on their part was to remember. He makes the food. He crafts the materials for re-purposing. He even gave them their bodies, and health to enjoy all of this provision. Similarly, the Lord is generous in walking us out of slavery into his freedom. This doesn't always look like Israel's "land of plenty", but it does mean a closeness with God Himself, living as the very blessing of God towards others.

1 Peter 2:9- You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Read: Dt. 8:7-14

Questions for Reflection:

1. How do you feel materially blessed by Christ today? How about in relationship with Him?
2. In what areas of your story does pride creep in? Do you hoard wealth? Do you forget the Lord? Do you avoid generosity?
3. What stories in your life help you remember his closeness with you?

Talk about your thoughts with a friend

Quote of a Sage:

"In the midst of prosperity, the challenge for believers is to handle wealth in such a way that it acts as a blessing, not a curse... When God provides more money we often think, This is a blessing. Yes, but it would be just as scriptural to say, "This is a test."

— Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for your many gifts and the generous ways you provide. Keep me from pride in everything I possess and pursue. Reveal what you call me to give away. What's the best that you ask me to sacrifice? What do you ask me to enjoy? Without your presence in this conversation my tendency leans towards both greed in what I want, and guilt with what I keep. What I most deeply want is to walk through this with you, to be free in my giving and free in my receiving. In all of it help me. Carry me out of this abundant land of slavery, into your abundant land of generosity.



Generosity: Openhanded

When you find yourself on the giving end of any offering, it's hard not to make it about you and your stuff—your money, your time, your talents, your sacrifice. However, when you're on the generous end, what you offer is never as important as how.

We don't image God by the mere act of giving. Even a criminal will give, if the potential payoff is big enough. It is only the expression of generosity—a wholehearted, other-focused, open-handedness—which distinguishes God's people from a grasping, consumer-minded world.

The widow of Luke and Mark's gospels surely knew that two mites—despite it being all she had—would go unnoticed among other more substantial gifts. She wasn't trying to impress anybody. Still, Jesus saw her, and called the disciples' attention to her, because He understood that generosity happens when an impression has already been made—on the heart of the one offering the gift.

"Too many have dispensed with generosity in order to practice charity," Albert Camus said. It is the heart driving the hand to liberality, and not the other way around. The gift of the widow is not her two mites, but the extravagant grace with which she tossed them away.

Read: Luke 21: 1-4

Questions for Reflection:

1. What could the rich men at the temple learn from the poor widow and how would it change their giving?
2. When are you most likely to give out of abundance? When are you most generous and sacrificial? Why?
3. We think of God as rich, but in what ways is He most like the widow?

"In terms of the number of coins, it was clear that the wealthy gave more in total to the temple and to the worship of the Lord than the poor. Yet Jesus indicates that when God considers how much people give to His kingdom, He considers not the monetary sum, but the intent of the heart and the sacrifice made. The widow... is praised because though her gift was small in amount (one-thirty-second of a day's wage), it represented a true sacrifice on her part. The wealthy contributors, at least on that day, were giving out of their abundance—they gave up nothing in order to contribute their sums; their donations did not really cost them anything... John Calvin [says], 'Whatever men offer to God ought to be estimated not by its apparent value, but only by the feeling of the heart.'" (www.ligonier.org)

Prayer:

Oh Abba, I confess that letting go of myself, my time, and my resources is not always easy, and I often look for a way to make it comfortable and less of a sacrifice. Make me more openhanded and openhearted with people and You. Amen.



Generosity: Undeserved

We call a gesture or gift “extravagant” when we know or believe that 1) it is more than we deserve, 2) it is more than we can repay, 3) it cost the giver dearly.

An invite to a party—even a good one—may not seem like an overgenerous gesture. After all, doesn’t a longstanding relationship with the host entitle us to an invitation? And no one with any class expects to be repaid for throwing a party, do they? A get together should only be as fancy as your wallet allows, so if the host can’t afford it, that’s not our problem, right? Our response to the average invitation is, “Let me check my calendar and my other commitments. If nothing better comes up, I’ll show up.”

The Pharisee’s believed their Jewish descent entitled them to a place in the Kingdom of God, but they had no regard for The King. They were occupied and preoccupied with position and power on earth, not with doing good and storing up treasure in Heaven (Luke 14: 14).

The Gospel is very good news about an extravagant gift we don’t deserve, we can’t repay, and one that cost The Giver all He had to offer it to us. It is not an invitation to a party, but to THE party. In His parable, Jesus warns those listening that the cares of this world—ambition, influence, and wealth—would keep them from the only thing that matters, the privilege of being with The Father in Eternity.

Read: Luke 14: 12-24

Questions for Reflection:

1. How would the poor view an invitation to the banquet versus the rich? Why does that matter?
2. Why do you suppose The Gospel is not seen as an extravagant gift by some people?
3. The host in the parable is angry that his invitation was rejected. Why?

“In this parable observe the free grace and mercy of God shining in the gospel of Christ, which will be food and a feast for the soul of a man that knows its own wants and miseries. All found some pretense to put off their attendance. This reproves the Jewish nation for their neglect of the offers of Christ’s grace. . . The want of gratitude in those who slight gospel offers, and the contempt put upon the God of heaven thereby, justly provoke him. The apostles were to turn to the Gentiles, when the Jews refused the offer; and with them the church was filled. The provision made for precious souls in the gospel of Christ, has not been made in vain; for if some reject, others will thankfully accept the offer. The very poor and low in the world, shall be as welcome to Christ as the rich and great. . . Christ’s house shall at last be filled. . .”

-Matthew Henry

Prayer:

Oh Lord, when I forget that my salvation is nothing I earned or deserve or could purchase for myself, may Your Holy Spirit convict and then correct me. I want to be grateful always for Your tender extravagance. Amen.



Generosity: Thank You

Gratitude is the soul friend of Generosity. If generosity is the opening flower of one heart to another, then gratitude extols the fragrance of that offering. Our parents teach us to say please and thank you, but gratitude unites us, through our words, to the giver.

In expressing our gratitude, we do more than just acknowledge someone's benevolence has reached us, and we go beyond merely declaring the goodness of the gift.

When the apostle Paul received supplies and gifts from the believers in Philippi, he saw their generosity as a way of sharing the burden of his suffering, as well as connecting them to God by allowing themselves to be a vehicle through which God expressed His love for Paul. Also, because they remembered Paul and his needs, God would remember them and their needs, not according to Paul's ability to repay them, but according to God's ability to repay.

Generosity makes us nervous, not just because it is openhanded, but more so because it is open-ended. We are exposed when we open ourselves up to care for others. It is not unreasonable to want our efforts acknowledged, even if we're not expecting them to be rewarded. In his expression of gratitude, Paul not only appreciates the church of Philippi's kindheartedness, but promises that God Himself has seen it, and will return it.

Read: Philippians 4: 10-20

Questions for Reflection:

1. Who are the true beneficiaries of Philippi's generosity?
2. Do you feel empowered by God to remain content during difficult or challenging times?
3. Read Hebrews 12: 2. How is Philippi's generosity similar to Christ's?

What bonds of gratitude I feel
No language can declare;
Beneath the oppressive weight I reel,
'Tis more than I can bear:
When shall I that blessing prove,
To return thee love for love?

Spirit of charity, dispense
Thy grace to every heart;
Expel all other spirits thence,
Drive self from every part;
Charity divine, draw nigh,
Break the chains in which we lie!

From "Gratitude and Love to God" by William Cowper

Prayer:

My Father, I am humbled when I remember to be grateful for all that You are and all that You do. I confess that I spend way more time saying "please" than I do saying "thank you." Forgive me for that. Teach me to trust in You and not in specific outcomes. You have always taken care of me, and You have never left me. Amen.