

A
3-Part
Bible Study
on

Generosity

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The Confidence to Give

Think about some of the most generous people you know. How would you characterize them? Now think about some of the stingiest people you know. How would you characterize them? Do you consider yourself a generous person? What holds you back from being more generous? Sometimes we have the mindset that if I only had more money, I would be more generous. However, generosity has absolutely nothing to do with how much you have. Generosity is an attitude and a state of mind. If a poor person is selfish with what they have, do you think acquiring a large sum of money will suddenly make them generous? Or will they simply be a rich person who is selfish? Someone can be generous or selfish whether they are rich or poor. If the amount of money or possessions we have is not what makes us generous, then where do we look to find the confidence to give?

1. To help answer this question, we will study some verses in 1 Timothy. Who wrote 1 Timothy? To whom did he write this letter? What is the purpose of the letter? (If you are not sure, use a study Bible such as the Concordia Self-Study Bible or Lutheran Study Bible and refer to the introduction section for 1 Timothy.)
2. Read **1 Timothy 6:6–11**. What is meant by “godliness” in verse 6? What reason does Paul give for exhorting godliness and contentment? What do you think he means by this?

3. How does verse 7 help give us a proper perspective on the material things of this world?

4. How do you determine the difference between a “want” and a “need”? When have you blurred the distinction between these?

5. What are some ways that the love of money or material things can lead to grief? According to the example given in verse 10, what is one of the worst things that can happen to someone who is “eager for money”?

6. According to verse 11, rather than riches, what sort of things should a person pursue? How does a person go about pursuing each of these things?

7. Skim through **1 Kings 16:29–17:6** to gain a perspective on the context, and then read **1 Kings 17:7–16**. According to verse 7 (see also verse 1), what was the current condition in the land?

8. Why did Elijah go to Zarephath? Was it by chance that he met the widow?

9. Challenge question: In which part of Israel was Zarephath? Why is it significant that Elijah was sent to someone from a place like Zarephath? (Hint: See Luke 4:14–30, especially verses 25–28.)

10. How much food did the widow have?

11. Did God *need* the widow in order to sufficiently provide food and water for Elijah? (See verses 2–6.) Why do you think God works through people like the widow, or like you?

12. When called upon to be generous, what assurance and promise did God make to the widow? Was God faithful in keeping His promise?

13. Read **1 Kings 17:17–24**. When the widow's son died, what did she believe to be the cause? (Read verse 18 carefully.)

14. When God, working through Elijah, raises the widow's son back to life, how does the widow respond?
15. How could the widow have justified a decision to not be generous to Elijah? How would the widow's story have been different had she chosen not to be generous?
16. Skim **Mark 12:38–40**. How does Jesus characterize the teachers of the law? Would you consider them rich or poor? Would you consider them generous or selfish? What seems to be their motivation?
17. Read **Mark 12:41–44**. How does Jesus characterize the widow? Would you consider her rich or poor? Would you consider her generous or selfish? What do you think was her motivation?
18. How does the widow's story end?
19. Read **1 Timothy 6:12–19**. From the list of things to pursue in verse 11, which one does Paul highlight in verse 12? Why do you think Paul highlights this one?

20. Faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and by God’s grace through faith, eternal life is already ours because of the work of Jesus Christ, which Paul summarizes in verses 13–16. Keeping this in mind, what do you think Paul means in verse 12 when he says to “take hold” and to “fight the good fight”?
21. Reread what Paul says about Jesus Christ in verses 13–16. How would you summarize your confession of faith?
22. What are some of the things in which a person can put their hope, and why is one option superior to the others?
23. How does faith and hope provide a firm foundation for being generous and give us the confidence to give?

While we would like to assume that the poor widow was well taken care of (perhaps by the disciples of Jesus) after she gave everything she had, we do not know from Scripture how her story ended. We do know that she trusted God enough to give generously. Generosity flows from faith. While we do not know our own future, we know that God was generous in giving us His own Son, and we trust that He is faithful in keeping His promise to take care of our needs, giving us the very treasure of eternal life.

Engaged in the Cause

In the last study, we learned that generosity flows from faith in a generous God, which gives us the confidence to give. In this study, we will explore what generosity looks like. Why does God call us to be generous? How does one go about living out a life of generosity?

1. The book of Acts (written by Luke) provides a history of the beginnings of the Church following the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Skim **Acts 4:32–37**. What seems to be at the heart of the generosity of the believers. (See particularly verse 33.)
2. Why do you think the Apostles gave the nickname of “Barnabas” to Joseph of Cyprus?
3. Read **Acts 5:1–11**. Here we have the first recorded sin in the life of the church. When Ananias and Sapphira sold some property, what expectation was placed on them (whether by Peter, the other Apostles, or God) in terms of how much of that money they should give to the church? Why then do you think they lied about their gift?

4. What do the positive example of Barnabas and the negative example of Ananias and Sapphira teach us about generosity?

5. Let's take a look at generosity in 2 Corinthians. Who wrote 2 Corinthians? To whom did he write this letter? What is the purpose of the letter? (If you are not sure, use a study Bible such as the Concordia Self-Study Bible or Lutheran Study Bible and refer to the introduction section for 2 Corinthians.)

6. Read **2 Corinthians 8:1–9**. How wealthy were the Macedonian churches? How does Paul characterize their generosity?

7. What sort of things does Paul highlight in verse 7 in which Christians should excel, and why are each of these things important?

8. In verse 9, how is Jesus Christ an example of generosity?

9. Skim through **2 Corinthians 8:10–9:5**. Paul talks about “eager willingness,” particularly its connection with follow-through, its relationship with what one has, and how it contrasts with giving “grudgingly.” What lessons can learn about generosity from Paul’s discussion? Pick a few verses from this section that highlight important truths concerning generosity.

10. Paul and Titus were coordinating donations for Christians in Jerusalem. Who are some of God’s people in need in your community and in other parts of the world, and what efforts are being coordinated to help them? How can you engage in these causes?

11. Skim through **John 4:1–33** to gain a perspective on the context, and then read **John 4:34–38**. The Samaritan woman expresses a concern over having an adequate supply of water. How is this similar the primary concern of the disciples immediately afterward? (See verses 31–33.)

12. How does Jesus use the topic of water to lead the Samaritan woman into a more important discussion? How does Jesus use the topic of food to lead the disciples into a more important discussion?

13. In John 4:34, Jesus says that His “food” is to do the will of the Father and to “finish His work.” In verse 38, Jesus indicates that many before the disciples have been doing this “work,” which the disciples now carry on. Skim John 4:39–42. How is the work of the Father being accomplished in verses 39–42? In what way does this work continue today? How can we personally participate in this work of the Father?

Generosity should be authentic and from a heart of eager willingness, never forced or done grudgingly. In living out generosity, we do not seek recognition for ourselves, but rather serve as an example of encouragement (like Barnabas) to others around us. The Macedonian churches and the church in Corinth were eager to assist the distressed Christians in Jerusalem as Paul and Titus coordinated the gathering of funds for them. In the same way, we can look for opportunities to assist people in need, and often such efforts are coordinated by the church. While providing necessities such as food and water for those in need is important work, even more important is the eternal salvation of the world. After His ascension, Jesus called on us to continue to go and make disciples. God invites us to carry on His work by sharing the Gospel of Jesus with people who need to hear this message of God’s free gift of forgiveness and eternal life. As we seek to be generous, the Gospel is the most important cause in which we can be engaged.

Reaping Much

In the first study, we read from 1 Timothy 6:6, “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” What sort of gain can we expect from being content and generous? To help answer this question, we will begin by looking at the final years of the Old Testament.

1. In 445 B.C. Nehemiah, who had been living in exile along with many other Jews, was allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls and to serve as governor. Nehemiah emphasized to the Israelites the importance of their tithes and offerings (see Nehemiah 10, particularly verses 37–39). When Nehemiah returned to Persia in 433 B.C., the people reverted back to some of their old habits. What is a tithe? What is the difference between a tithe and an offering?
2. Malachi was the last prophet in the Old Testament, and God called him to respond to His people after Nehemiah went back to Persia for a time. Read **Malachi 3:6–12**. Compare verse 6 with James 1:17. What do these verses reveal about God’s character?
3. How did the people go back to old habits regarding tithes and offerings? How was this “robbing” God? Why do people today sometimes lack generosity and withhold tithes and offerings?

4. How is withholding tithes and offerings “robbing” God? How does this image of “robbing” God impact your perspective on tithes and offerings?

5. In verse 10, God calls on the people to “test” Him. Can you think of other times in Scripture God calls on people to test Him? (See Deuteronomy 6:16 and Matthew 4:7 or Luke 4:12.)

6. What does God promise in response to faithful tithing?

7. Have you tested God through faithful tithing? If so, what was the result? If not, what has been holding you back?

8. In the last study, we learned about the generosity of New Testament churches from Paul’s letter of 2 Corinthians. Picking up where we left off in the last study, read **2 Corinthians 9:6–11**. What does verse 7 about the importance of attitude in regards to generosity?

9. What promise does Paul share from God in verses 10–11?
What does this tell us about the source of generosity?
How does this compare to the promise in Malachi?
10. Read **2 Corinthians 9:12–15**. According to Paul, what are the two main goals of generosity? What does Paul suggest should accompany the “obedience” of being generous?
11. What do you believe Paul means by God’s “indefinable gift” in verse 15?
12. A gift typically has a cost paid by the person giving the gift. Read **John 19:16–30**. What was the cost of God’s “indefinable gift”? How does this demonstrate the generosity of our God?
13. In John 4:34 from the last study, Jesus said that His “food” was to do the will of the Father and to “finish His work.” In what way did Jesus ultimately “finish” this work of the “Father”? (See John 19:30.)

14. In John 4:38, Jesus talks about how we “have reaped the benefits” of the work of the Father through His people, and ultimately through His Son. What is the benefit we reap from Jesus finishing His work on the cross, and how do we receive this benefit?

15. Why does God call on us as His disciples to continue to make more disciples? As we carry on this work, how are we being generous?

God provides all that we have, and ultimately all that we have belongs to God. Of all that we have that belongs to God, how much do we dare keep for ourselves? 90%? Do you think you can outdo God when it comes to generosity? God challenges us to test him in generosity. He promises that if we faithfully give back to Him with a sincere heart of generosity, we will reap much in return as God continues to bless us with His generosity. God demonstrates the extent of His generosity by giving His very own Son, and through this great sacrifice, God generously gives us forgiveness and eternal life. May we generously share this message of God’s free grace, seeking out those who can reap much from this Gospel.