

Summer at Definition: Spiritual Practice - Generosity

Welcome/Intro

Personal Story

Context: One of the most impactful teachings from the way of Jesus in my life is the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7. In Matthew 6, Jesus addresses the issues of security, provision, and possessions. And at the core of His teaching is this question: “Who/What are you trusting in?”

Matthew 6:19-24 NLT

Before we know it, we begin building a life around money, possessions, the “lifestyle” we want for our family, the wants slowly become needs, every raise or bonus we get at work is spent. And eventually and unintentionally, our life is filled with anxiety and worry about all the things I need to do to maintain this life I’ve built.

But I love Jesus’ response to this, in fact, it’s one that I’m reminded of constantly.

Matthew 6:25-34 NLT

You’re probably thinking “that sounds great, I want to live that way!”
But how do I do it? How can I live this kind of life?
How can I walk in this worry free life that Jesus is talking about?

I think the deeper question here is actually, “how do I allow God to form me into a kingdom-minded follower of Jesus who has everything they need?”
The answer is **GENEROSITY**.

Big Idea: Generosity is not what God takes from us, it’s what He forms in us.

But before we go any further, I want to define what I mean by generosity as a spiritual practice. **Generosity is the intentional practice of surrendering a portion of our money, energy, time, and resources as an act of trust in God.**

Today, I want to share 3 things that I believe God is trying to form in us through the spiritual practice of generosity.

1. Generosity grows our trust in God Matt 6:19-24

Explain: At its core, generosity is an act of surrender. It reveals who/what we actually trust in. Because whether we realize it or not, everything we have belongs to God. We are not owners, we are stewards or managers of all that belongs to Him. But for most of us, we've believed that it all depends on me. I've gotta make it happen. And that means generosity is not a financial/time/resource issue... **It's a trust issue.**
It's a heart issue before it's a head issue.

All of us want to believe that God will provide for us, but if we're honest, we usually trust more in our ability to earn, manage, and control our own lives. And this is where generosity becomes so powerful. Because it confronts that illusion of control in our lives.

Illustrate: Think about your budget (home or business), think about your schedule or your calendar. On the surface, we can see them as just organizational tools... things we use to manage our lives.

But I think they are more like **spiritual mirrors that reflect what we value and trust.** Many of us feel tension when it comes to generosity/giving - money or time. Not because we don't have anything to give, but because we don't feel like we have enough to be able to let it go. That tension you feel reveals a **struggle to trust.**

Personally, I'm really into budgets and spreadsheets. I've managed my own budget basically since I started working at 16 years old. Growing up I was taught to tithe (to give the first 10% of my income to my local church).

And for the amount of years that I have tithed, I have always thought about giving to be an expense, just like the utility bill, the rent or gas for the car.

At the end of 2020, I was working on my 2021 budget and listening to a teaching about generosity and felt like the Lord prompted me to shift some things around.

Before: Income (taxes), then Expenses (bottom was giving), then Savings/Investments

After: Income (taxes), THEN Giving, then Savings/Investments and Expenses are last.

In other words: Generosity comes first. Trust comes first. God comes first.

Argue: Proverbs 11:25-28 NLT

Apply: The challenge: Give your best, not just what's left.

1. For some, take a look at your calendar and see what you are giving priority to/what are you giving your time to. (Maybe you work 5 hours less each week so you can join a community group and invest in your relationships, attend your kids soccer game, have a date night with your spouse, go to core and join a serve team, be home, rest)
2. For others, take a look at your budget (some of y'all need a budget) and be honest about what you actually value/where your treasure really is. (Start giving, give to a local

organization that supports a cause important to you, buy a set of tires for that person who can't afford them, buy someone's lunch or coffee)

What you might find is that where your treasure is (your time /money/ possessions), your heart will be also. Your heart follows your treasure!

2. Generosity produces contentment Matt 6:25-32

Explain: A scarcity mindset tells us to store, keep and worry because we don't think there will be enough. We look around at what others have, compare it to what we have and we start to worry. However, when we learn to be generous with our time, resources, and money... we can shift to an abundance mindset recognizing that God will certainly care for you, and that he already knows all your needs. That mindset shift can produce a greater sense of contentment with where we are/what we have/who we are.

Illustrate: Let me give you a simple picture of this. I want you to imagine two lists:

On one side: I want you to think about what God has already done.

On the other: What I still want.

What's on your list?

If we're honest, we tend to want to live in that second list. We know God has been good to us, we trust him to a certain extent but we feel like something is still missing. And if we are not careful, dissatisfaction with our current life creeps in.

When we try to answer: "how much is enough?" it's always "just a little more".

Argue: **1 Timothy 6:6-8 NLT** **Philippians 4:11-13 NLT**

Apply: The challenge: Reflect on what teaches you to be content.

1. Practice gratitude (on Shabbat) - write down the list you were thinking about earlier.
2. Be honest about your wants and your needs. Not everything you say "yes" to is good for you or for your spiritual growth. Learn to ask "if nothing changes, would I still be satisfied?"
3. Practice a "no spend week" - intentionally choose not to buy from the "want list"/ Amazon wish list/ random spending (this is my weakness).

3. Generosity leads to fulfillment Matt 6:33-34

Explain: As we grow in our trust for God and as he produces a Godly contentment in us, this leads us to a full life... a life full of purpose, meaning and significance.

We start to live for something greater than ourselves. We seek God's mission, we build God's kingdom above all else, we live a life more closely aligned with God's will for us.

We have a peace that money can't buy, because we believe the promise that he will give us everything we need. And then that sense of purpose and fulfillment allow us to be a blessing to those around us in ways we would have never imagined.

God wants to bless us, but he also **wants his blessings to flow through us.**

Illustrate: As you begin to live this way, I believe you will experience a shift.

(Visual Illustration: Jar w/ a spigot - facing solid side, then spin around)

For some of you, you've approached generosity like this jar:

1. You've got some/enough for you, the lid is sealed shut - nothing comes in or out.
2. Others: The lid is off, God's blessing is coming in but the fuller it gets, the more anxious you get because you're worried about protecting it/not spilling it.
3. Jesus is inviting us to live in a different way... not as a jar but as a dispenser.

A way through which God's generosity flows. There is a constant flow, it's not waiting to be filled before it gives. It's always ready to receive and equally ready to give.

Generosity produces fulfillment, because God is the one who is filling us! He is filling us full for our blessing and the blessing of those around us. And honestly it's just so much more fun. The moments when you give are the most fun and impactful. There is a unique joy that comes when your life becomes part of someone else's story.

Let's be generous with our time, money and resources!

Argue: **2 Corinthians 9:6-8 NLT**

Apply: The challenge: Do 1 intentional act of generosity this week that costs you something. Not convenient. Not easy. Something meaningful.

1. If you need help: In the lobby - "Act of Kindness" Cards
2. Serve someone who cannot repay you - groceries, prepare a meal for someone, invite someone for coffee

The point is, go do something for someone else and come back to tell me how it felt. Because every act of generosity is a declaration: **"I trust God over everything else."**

The Gospel

Generosity is not what God takes from us, it's what he forms in us.

Invitation