

Summary

Cultivating a Life Rooted in Christ: Generosity Rev. Jonathan Murray — October 2026

Rev. Jonathan Murray's sermon on Generosity invites the congregation to see giving not as an obligation but as a joyful expression of God's own character. He begins with a provocative question that frames the entire message: "What if in the end we are measured not by what we have amassed, but by what we have given?"

God's Love Gives - It Moves, Acts, and Transforms

Rooted in John 3:16, Rev. Murray emphasizes that God's love is not passive sentiment but active generosity. The Greek word *didomai* ("to give") signals love that initiates change. God gives to "put the world right again," revealing that generosity is woven into the very nature of divine love. Jesus comes not to condemn but to bring life - modeling a generosity that is relational, sacrificial, and transformative.

Joy as the Root of Generosity

Turning to 2 Corinthians 8, Rev. Murray contrasts the wealthy Corinthians with the impoverished Macedonian churches. Despite "extreme poverty," the Macedonians overflowed with "abundant joy" that produced "a wealth of generosity." Their giving did not come from surplus - it came from joy in Christ and a deep awareness that their lives were connected to something larger than their circumstances.

Generosity, therefore, is not about how much we have; it is about the joy that shapes how we give.

Generosity as a Cultivated Practice

Rev. Murray connects generosity to the broader sermon series: cultivating a life rooted in Christ. Like tending a garden, generosity grows through habits, priorities, and daily choices. It is not an optional add-on to faith but a core expression of spiritual maturity. Paul urges believers to "abound in generosity" just as they abound in faith, knowledge, and love.

Your Deep Gladness Meets the World's Deep Hunger

Drawing on Frederick Buechner's well-known insight - Vocation is where your deep gladness meets the world's deep hunger - Rev. Murray expands generosity beyond finances. It includes:

Time offered to someone who needs presence

Hospitality that makes strangers feel they belong

Compassion that sits with the hurting

Resources that support ministries addressing hunger, housing, and hope

Generosity is the way we bring what we have to the places where the world aches.

Sacrificial Giving and Responsible Boundaries

Rev. Murray shares personal stories of financial discipline, illustrating how intentional choices create space for generosity. Sacrificial giving means choosing to go without something desirable so someone else can receive something necessary. Yet he stresses that generosity does not mean neglecting family or giving irresponsibly—it is thoughtful, purposeful, and aligned with God’s priorities.

Generosity That Builds Community and Justice

Paul’s reference to manna in the wilderness reminds us that God’s provision is meant to sustain the whole community. Generosity responds to immediate needs and works to change the conditions that create those needs - feeding the hungry today while also addressing why hunger persists.

Grace as the Foundation

The sermon culminates in Paul’s reminder: “Though he was rich, for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.” Jesus’ life is the ultimate act of generosity—meeting both immediate human needs and offering eternal salvation.

We have received a richness that cannot be measured by possessions: grace, forgiveness, belonging, and new life.

The Call

Rev. Murray closes with a simple but profound invitation: Let God’s generosity shape your own. Let joy fuel your giving. Let your resources - time, compassion, welcome, finances - become instruments of God’s love in the world God so deeply loves.

We have received a richness that cannot be measured by possessions: grace, forgiveness, belonging, and new life.

Transcript

Listen now for the reading of the Gospel from the Gospel according to John chapter 3.

¹⁴In the same way that Moses lifted the serpent in the desert so people could have something to see and then believe, ¹⁵it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up. And everyone who looks up to Him, trusting and expectant, will gain a real life, eternal life. ¹⁶This is how much God loved the world. God gave His Son, His one and only Son, and this is why, so that no one need be destroyed. By believing in Him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. ¹⁷God didn't go to all the trouble of sending His Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. God came to help, to put the world right again.

This is the word of the Lord. God is still speaking.

Please be seated. So I shared a conversation the other day where a question was posed and it really began a really great, deep conversation. And I want to share that question with you this morning. What if in the end we are measured not by what we have amassed, but by what we have given? And that's right in line with our focus on generosity. Now I suspect if I were to ask you, When you think of generosity, if I can speak, what do you think of? Money. Money, of course. You think about the check that you've written out to put in the offering plate later in the worship service. You think about the contribution that you've made to a local charity. And those things matter. But generosity is not only about our finances. Yes, the church needs those financial resources to continue the ministries. Our neighborhood needs those support, financial support to help build the community. But the churches and the community also need the time we offer, the welcome we extend, the encouragement we give and the compassion we show. Within this sermon series, Cultivate a Life in Christ, we've been exploring those different practices that shape us into people who reflect Jesus. Cultivation takes time. If we liken it to a garden, we prepare the soil, we plant the seeds, we water the seeds, and then we tend what grows. Even those of you with the greenest of thumbs cannot command a garden to grow overnight. The same is true of generosity. We cultivate it through the habits that we practice, the priorities we establish, and the choices that we make day after day. And the scriptures that we read today remind us of how the roots of generosity are deeply grounded in the joy and grace of God. John 3.16, we've heard those words, I'm sure, since childhood, for God so loved the world. But I bet we've heard them so often that we forgot just how extraordinary they are. God so loved the world, not just the people who agree with God, not just the people who believe and live their lives according to God's commands, not just the people who have their lives together or believe correctly or who behave in ways that lift up others. God loves this world. This complicated world, this wounded world, this divided world. The world where people go hungry while food is discarded. Where people experience homelessness while buildings sit empty.

Where communities fracture over politics, economics, race, and religion. God loves this world. And because God's love took action, we know that God's love is not merely a feeling. God gave, as Eugene Peterson translated, to put the world right again. In John 3.16, the author of John's gospel uses the word *didomai*, which means to give. But it's not merely giving a care or giving a feeling. It is giving something that moves for a change. In other words, God's love gave to create an action. That compassion became commitment. John also reminds us that God sent the Son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved. God's purpose is to bring life. Jesus came to reveal a love that gives itself for the world. That love is where generosity begins. If our goal as Christians is to emulate Jesus, that should shape our generosity. But at 2 Corinthians, where Paul brings this truth into the realities of the church life, Paul is appealing to the followers at Corinth to contribute to a collection for the churches in Jerusalem who are experiencing severe hardship. The Corinthians have great material resources. How many of y'all have studied Corinth from 2,000 years ago? Really? No, just kidding. Today the population of Corinth is about 30,000 people. But in Paul's day, it was closer to a half million. So Corinth at that time was five times larger than Athens, the capital of Greece. But it's located on this narrow strip of land, about four miles across. And it has the Adriatic Sea on one side and the Aegean Sea on the other. And just about anything that could be bought, sold, or bartered was going through Corinth. So there was money to be made. That's why people wanted to live there. That's why it was so populous. So if you have goods or products in Italy that you're wanting to get to Turkey or vice versa, you were going through Corinth. Corinth was an incredibly wealthy city. But before challenging Corinth, however, Paul tells them about the churches in Macedonia, where these followers have experienced afflictions and even poverty. And Paul describes this, their giving in remarkable terms, saying, during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity. Think about that combination. abundant joy, extreme poverty, and wealth of generosity. How in the world does poverty overflow into wealth? Poverty by itself doesn't create wealth. I think we all understand that. But Paul shows us that material wealth is not the only kind of abundance. The Macedonian Christians discovered that a joy does not depend entirely on their circumstances. Their joy in Christ has become that source of generosity even in a season of hardship. Their giving does not come because they have everything they need. It comes from a faith that has taught them their lives are connected to something greater than their circumstances. Paul says they gave willingly, even begging for the privilege to participate in the giving. We don't normally think about begging as something that we give. We think of begging as something we receive. But the Macedonian Christians were begging to give. Poverty is not a prerequisite for generosity, but abundant joy is. The only thing necessary to be generous is the abundance of joy. because their generosity was an expression of their joy, their gratitude, their relationship with

salvation through Jesus. And so Paul is taking the story about the Macedonian Christians and challenging the Corinthians. Because if the Macedonians can participate generously during their hardship, surely the Corinthians can consider how they might respond out of their abundance. Now here's where that message reaches and challenges us. How do we recognize what we have been given and how we might use it faithfully? In verse 7, Paul uses that word abound and encourages the Corinthians to abound in generosity just as they have excelled in faith and eagerness and knowledge and love. In other words, generosity is not some optional extra. It's part of the fullness of cultivating a life in Christ. We may know scripture, participate in worship, pray faithfully, and understand fully what we believe. But Paul asks us to consider whether our faith is also visible in what we give, what we share, instead of clinging to a material possession. A mature Christian life increasingly reflects God's character. It's acting in ways that God acts. Presbyterian minister and writer Frederick Buechner, one of my favorite quotations by him, Vocation is where your deep gladness meets the world's deep hunger. Vocation is where your deep gladness meets the world's deep hunger. And I love that because we connect what gives us life with what will feed the world around us. Perhaps your deep gladness is teaching. if you can inspire and empower someone to learn and discover the confidence to learn, perhaps your gift is hospitality, which yours is, by the way. It's not your only one, but it is. You know how many comments came back from yesterday's event about just how welcoming, how hospitable you are? And that was from only 36 people. Imagine until that secret gets out. But when you can make a stranger feel like they belong, that's hospitality. Perhaps you have those financial resources that support ministries addressing housing and hunger or other community needs. Perhaps your gift is the ability to sit with someone who is hurting and grieving, not trying to fix, just to sit and listen. The world's hunger is not only physical. There's that hunger for connection, identity, dignity, opportunity, friendship, hope. And generosity invites us to bring what we have to the places where that hunger is felt. Last year our session designed a new mission statement. At FPCL we welcome all to love, share, serve, and grow in Christ. Generosity touches all of that. We love share and serve by giving ourselves to relationships, by recognizing that our resources are not meant only for our private benefit, by putting generosity into practice. The biblical practice of tithing, you may have heard this before, traditionally refers to giving one-tenth of one's income. And for many Jesus followers, that is the goal to which we try to get to. For those who may already be there, it becomes that starting point that sparks further generosity. Now, my connection here is I don't know what the Macedonian Christians, the percentage they were giving, but it could not have been from what was left over. Paul's emphasis is not on some mathematical formula. He's focusing on what happens when generosity becomes a genuine priority rather than something we consider after everything else. Do we make room for generosity in our lives or do we give only when there is something left over? That's where it becomes

sacrificial giving. It means the generosity has an effect on the choices that we make. We make those choices to spend less on something we might want so we can support something another person needs. I told you last week that my wife and I went into Financial Peace University with Dave Ramsey's course about 13 years ago. We had accrued some credit card debt. We decided we wanted to change how we were using our money. So we took a look at our grocery bill. This was one change we made. And instead of buying what we wanted, we made a meal plan for breakfast, lunch, and dinner for two weeks. And we only bought the items that fed that meal plan. We were able to cut \$400 a month. No, we weren't overspending. But we took that \$400 and we applied it to the credit card bill, and when that credit card bill was done, we didn't change our spending. We didn't go back to how it was. We suddenly had \$400 a month that we could give. We could have gotten something else we wanted, but that is what that sacrificial giving means. It means identifying ways that you can go without, because it's not a need, in order to meet a need that somebody else has. But I wanna be very clear on this. Sacrificial giving does not mean neglecting our families, ignoring our own needs, or giving beyond what is responsible. Generosity is not the absence of boundaries. It's the intentional use of what we have to serve God's purposes beyond ourselves. We're not expected to give everything away. We're not expected to give everything away. We're invited to consider what's necessary versus what is merely desirable. Sometimes the most generous decision we can make is to not acquire something else, but to recognize that we have enough. Paul goes a little bit further beyond this individual charity. In verses 13 and 14 of 2 Corinthians 8, he explains that he does not want relief for one group in order to become a hardship for another. And he uses an interesting example, connection that the people of Corinth would have known. It was the wilderness journey where God was providing manna in the wilderness. The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little didn't have too little. That manna was God's provision for the people traveling through that wilderness. Some gathered more, others less, but the community as a whole received what it needed. Paul draws on that story to remind the Corinthians that abundance is not intended to become an excuse for indifference while someone else goes without. Generosity is about responding to immediate needs and generosity is about working to change the conditions that create those needs. We can provide food for that hungry neighbor and we can work to change the situation of why there isn't accessible food. We can help someone facing eviction and we can ask why stable housing is so difficult to obtain. both immediate compassion and lasting change. A person who is hungry today cannot wait for a long-term solution. But if we care about our neighbors, we also care about why hunger persists. The question of our generosity applies to our money, our time, our skills, our relationships, our influence, our resources that we entrust to Christ's ministry through FPCL. How might FPCL use what we have to make God's love visible throughout Littleton, beyond these church

walls? How might these resources be used to strengthen our neighbors, the hope of our neighbors, the dignity, the opportunity? All of these are not distractions from the life of faith. They are the ways we follow Jesus into the world that God loves. All of this is grounded in grace. Paul highlights this by saying, the generous acts of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, for your sakes he became poor, that by his poverty we might become rich. It is grace upon this vulnerable human life. God became vulnerable, walked among us, ate with those others ignored. touched lepers who would not be welcomed or received or touched by anyone else. Jesus gave himself for the life of the world both the immediate needs while he was here walking among us as well as the eternal salvation of our world. We have received a richness that cannot be measured by possessions. The gift of grace, forgiveness, belonging and new life with God. So may we receive God's love with gratitude and may that feed that generosity to become one of the ways in which we live. Amen.