



# Living Generously

STUDY GUIDE

## A TIME TO LIVE AND GIVE GENEROUSLY

### An Introduction

The Bible is a book about giving—with more promises related to giving than any other subject. While the word “believing” appears 272 times, “prayer” appears 371 times, and “love” appears 714 times, the subject of “giving” is mentioned 2,162 times! Jesus talked about living and giving generously more than and often before anything else—with more than half of the parables having to do with stewarding money and worldly goods.

When describing stewardship in the Bible, three words are often used—the first describes God’s standard of giving—a **tithe**—or 10%.

Moses set the standard of giving among God’s people: “A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord” (Leviticus 27:30).

The prophet Malachi reminded us of the only area we’re allowed to test God: “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,” says the Lord Almighty. “Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the Lord Almighty” (Malachi 3:10-12).

Another word commonly associated with stewardship in the Bible is “**give**.” It means to willingly release something that’s been entrusted to our care for a greater or different purpose.

Moses instructed God’s people on God’s behalf: “Do not hold back offerings from your granaries or your vats. You must give me the firstborn of your sons. Do the same with your cattle and your sheep” (Exodus 22:29, 30).

Jesus spoke of the benefits of giving when He said: “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:38).

The third word is **generously**—which describes the mindset that should pervade the steward of God’s resources.

King Solomon writes: “A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed” (Proverbs 11:25).

The apostle Paul instructs us: “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:6, 7).

Earlier this year, we spoke about living generously during the FRUITS message series when we explored John Wesley's Sermon on the Mount Discourse #8—and last month when we discussed giving as a part of our ANCHORS series.

Over the last decade, we've shifted the focus of this time of year away from giving to support the church toward instead teaching each other the value of living generously. There are two ways of living when it comes to the resources God's entrusted to our care—poor stewards who live with hands clenched tightly to something they really don't own—and good stewards who hold what God's entrusted to their care with an open hand so it can be used to bless and water others. The former way tends to be selfish—and often operates out of a scarcity mindset. They're often concerned they'll never have enough regardless of how much they have.

The latter tend to be selfless—and operate from an abundance mindset. They understand God's economy and have learned to be faithful in little or much. Jesus talked about these two kinds of people in the parables of the minas, talents, unjust steward, and the rich man and Lazarus. Living generously sometimes relates to how we handle money, but it always refers to our understanding of how we use and steward all God's given to us—from our homes and cars to our refrigerators and freezers—from our checkbooks and saving accounts to our family recipes and sage advice—from the minutes and hour of each day—to the years and decades of our lives—God owns it all—and calls us to live and give generously.

During this short, two-week series, we'll be looking at, considering, and getting in touch with the value of giving the tithe and encouraging each other to live and give generously.

# WEEK ONE – OCTOBER 22

## LIVING GENEROUSLY - HELPING THOSE IN NEED



Begin by praying – asking the Holy Spirit to guide and direct your time together, to open up God’s Word to you, to grow you in your walk with the Lord and with each other, and to show you how you might apply what you learn in your daily discipleship.

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

God invites us to participate with Him in meeting the needs of hurting and broken people in our world. Our willingness to live and give generously is a reflection of the condition of our hearts.

Living generously is an outgrowth of faithful stewardship—where our maturity helps us recognize God’s invitation to be His agents to relieve suffering in the world. In a day of tight-fisted living, our world needs the Christian community to live and give generously. One truth of human existence proves that if our basic needs are not met, it becomes very difficult to become all to which God calls us. Throughout history, the Christian church has been the one to fund schools, hospitals, rehab centers, food distribution centers, prison ministries, and a wide variety of other “healing-and-helping” resources for those in need.

These chapters in the apostle Paul’s second letters to the Corinthians is an invitation for the relatively wealthy Corinthian church to respond to a special appeal to help the church in Jerusalem—which was under incredible persecution by Jews and Romans. To the Romans, Christianity was illegal. To the Jews, Christians were seen as heretics. As a result, the early Jesus followers were often enslaved or unemployed—and they struggled for the basic necessities of life. They were persecuted and in need. So an appeal went out from the apostles for a collection to be taken among the scattered churches to help those in need back in Jerusalem.

The Macedonians—among the poorest of the poor Christian communities—had already given generously. They exceeded anyone’s expectations—and Paul uses their example as a teaching lesson for the Corinthians who had been slow to respond. As today’s passage unfolds, Paul has told the Corinthians to take an offering—and to be prepared because he’s sending Titus to receive the collection and help carry and deliver it to the church in Jerusalem.

In our scripture reading for this week, we find these truths regarding living and giving generously:

- 1) ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS**
- 2) IT’S ALWAYS GOOD TO BE PREPARED**
- 3) GIVE GENEROUSLY AND CHEERFULLY**
- 4) REMEMBER—GOD IS FAITHFUL**

## 5) OUR GENEROSITY INSPIRES FAITH AND GENEROSITY IN OTHERS

## 6) WE GIVE BECAUSE GOD GAVE

### RESPOND:

- What do you hear God saying to you in this scripture?
- What does it mean to you to live generously?
- Why is it important to not give reluctantly or under compulsion?
- How does our giving reflect what's in our hearts and our understanding of God?
- How does our understanding of stewardship impact our discipleship?
- What do you sense God is saying to you about stewarding your time, talent, and treasure?
- What do you need to do in response?
- What would be some beginning steps?
- Who do you need to tell in order that they might help and support you?

### CHALLENGE:

Spend this week prayerfully pondering what step God is asking you to take concerning living and giving generously in your life. You've received a commitment card in the mail and have been asked to bring it with you next weekend. The call is to only give what you're willing to be open-handed with and give with a cheerful heart—remembering that God loves a cheerful giver. Do this so that next weekend you'll come prepared with a cheerful heart to make your commitment to the mission and ministry of our church for the next year.

## WEEK TWO – OCTOBER 29

### LIVING GENEROUSLY - PRODUCES MORE THAN ENOUGH



Begin by praying – asking the Holy Spirit to guide and direct your time together, to open up God’s Word to you, to grow you in your walk with the Lord and with each other, and to show you how you might apply what you learn in your daily discipleship.

**READ:** Exodus 35:4-11

Living generously has a multiplying force when it’s combined with the rest of God’s people around God’s mission. When we give in God’s way to support God’s mission, we’ll have exceedingly, abundantly more than we could ever ask or imagine.

God’s standard of giving has always been a tithe—one tenth of whatever way we measure our ability to provide for ourselves: one tenth of crops, one tenth of herds, one tenth of salary, one tenth. The tithe is God’s standard. It’s what He’s asked us to give to grow our faith so we learn to trust Him. Stewardship of God’s resources is foundational to our faith and for our faith.

Occasionally, God’s people are asked to sacrifice—to do something extraordinary for God. On such occasions, God doesn’t expect equal gifts, but He does expect equal sacrifice. This passage records an event in the lives God’s people after their deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Moses had led God’s people out of Egypt, but it would take a couple of generations to get Egypt out of them. One way God changed their hearts and fashioned them into His people was by teaching them when and how to obey His commands and to worship Him.

This chapter records the appeal Moses made for a special offering to be received for the construction of the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle would become the place where God’s Spirit dwelt, where God was worshiped, where sacrifices were made, and sin was atoned for from the time of this offering until King Solomon completed and dedicated the first Temple. The Tabernacle was always set up in the middle of the camp while they were wondering in the wilderness—and toward the center of Canaan when they crossed over the Jordan to receive the Promised Land God had promised them.

One aspect of this offering is it appealed to the whole person—to not only give their possessions, but also their time and talents. It reminds us living generously is about so much more than what we place in an offering plate—it’s basically the offering of all we’re to be used for Kingdom purposes. It has been said, “Living generously is all that we do with all that we have—once we’ve said ‘yes’ to Jesus.”

We come to look at, think about, and get in touch with what Moses’ appeal to the Israelites teaches us about living and giving generously:

**1) GENEROSITY BEGINS WITH A WILLING HEART**

**2) GENEROSITY INCLUDES SKILLS AND ABILITIES**

**3) GENEROSITY IS MOBILIZED BY A WILLING HEART**

**4) GENEROSITY MULTIPLIES WHEN ALL ARE ENGAGED**

**5) GENEROSITY RESULT IN MORE THAN ENOUGH**

**RESPOND:**

- What do you hear God saying to you in this scripture?
- How would you define generosity?
- When it comes to responding to God's invitation to live and give generously, do you find it easy or difficult to do so with a willing heart?
- What tends to get in the way?
- Do you think we understand that living and giving generously involves all our resources—time, talent, and treasure (money)?
- How much time do we devote to asking God what He would have us do with that with which He has blessed us?
- What do you need to do in response?
- What would be some beginning steps?
- Who do you need to tell in order that they might help and support you?