

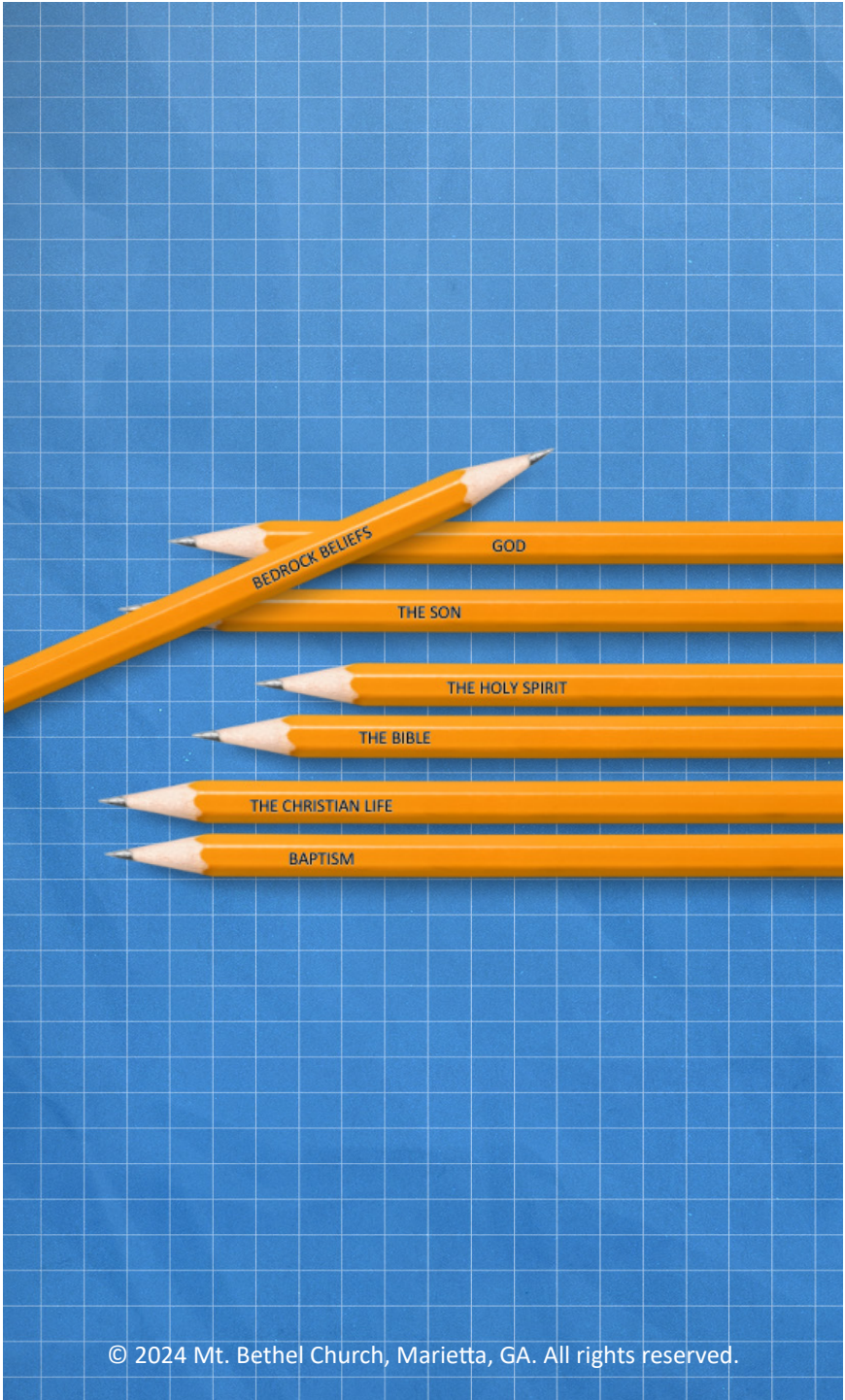
The background is a vibrant blue grid pattern, reminiscent of graph paper. Overlaid on this are various construction-related items: wooden planks, grey panels, and blue patterned strips are scattered across the top and bottom edges. A wooden ruler is visible on the right side, and a pencil is at the top right. The overall aesthetic is that of a construction site or a workshop.

— A Firm — Foundation

THE MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP

The logo for Mt Bethel Church features a stylized, white 'MB' monogram. The 'M' and 'B' are interconnected, with the 'M' having a rounded, arch-like top and the 'B' having a similar rounded top. Below the monogram, the words 'mt bethel' and 'church' are written in a clean, lowercase, sans-serif font.

mt bethel
church



Week 6

Joy-Filled Generosity

By Dr. Jody Ray



"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

(John 15:11)

"They are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity."

(2 Corinthians 8:2)

Introduction

What is joy?

This may seem like an elementary question to be asking. However, if you were to place these words in a Google search, you would probably be surprised the number of people around the world who are asking this same question. Online, across many fields of study including psychology, theology, anthropology, and even countless thought leaders all weigh in on the topic of joy.

Joy, for the follower of Jesus Christ, is a deep and abiding sense of gladness, contentment, and delight that transcends circumstance and is rooted in the hope and assurance found in a relationship with Jesus Christ. Unlike happiness, which is often tied to external events or experiences, Christian joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that springs from an inner confidence in God's faithfulness, love, and sovereignty.

On the deepest level, the best way to live with more joy in our lives is to enter into a relationship with Jesus. Jesus promises that He will fill us with His joy when we abide in Him (John 15:11). Growing in our relationship with Jesus and experiencing this constant source of joy is an ongoing process. One practical and overlooked move we can make to grow in joy is to be more generous. That's right, joy and generosity are connected.

Generosity is a Byproduct of Living with Joy

In 2 Corinthians 8:2, Paul praises the work and the generosity of the Macedonians when he says, "They are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity." For the believers in Macedonia their joy led to greater generosity even in the midst of their extreme poverty. This seemingly paradoxical statement unveils a profound truth about the nature of giving – that it transcends material circumstances and finds its roots in the abundant joy that comes from a heart transformed by the love of Christ.

The joy-filled giving that Paul speaks of is not contingent upon one's wealth or abundance but rather stems from a deep understanding of God's grace and a desire to reflect His love to others. It is a giving that flows from a heart that has been touched by the immeasurable riches of God's kindness, leading to a joy that surpasses all earthly limitations.

As we delve into the concept of joy-filled giving, we are invited to explore the transformative power of generosity, the joy that springs forth from selfless acts of love, and the profound impact that giving can have on both the giver and the recipient.

Day 1 | Week 6

The Characteristics of Biblical Generosity?

By: Dr. Jody Ray

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne... (and) the King will say to those on his right, ‘For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me.’”

(Matthew 25:31, 34-36, NIV)

Day 1 | Week 6

The Characteristics of Biblical Generosity?

When we think of biblical generosity our minds go directly to financial giving – a weekly tithe to the church. However, when we look at generosity from a biblical perspective, we see that it goes much deeper than the amount of money we're willing to give.

There are at least five characteristics of Biblical generosity that we are going to delve into this week. They are... 1) Compassion; 2) Cheerfulness; 3) Sacrifice; 4) Gratitude; 5) Stewardship.

Compassionate Generosity

Let's start by taking a closer look at compassion as it relates to biblical stewardship. Generosity in the biblical context is closely tied to compassion for those who are in need. The Bible encourages believers to care for the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed, and to extend help and support to those who are less fortunate.

In Matthew 25:31, 34-36, Jesus shares a powerful parable that calls us to embody compassionate generosity. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to actively engage in acts of mercy and selfless giving, reflecting the love and compassion of our Savior.

He describes the King (representing Himself) welcoming the righteous into His kingdom. He attributes their inclusion into His kingdom because of their acts of compassion and generosity as evidence of their genuine faith and righteousness.

Jesus reminds us that when we extend a helping hand to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned, we are ministering to Jesus Himself. Our compassionate generosity is not only an expression of love towards those in need, but it is also a direct reflection of our love for Christ.

Compassionate generosity involves more than just giving material resources. It encompasses showing empathy, kindness, and care to those who are suffering or marginalized. It means being willing to inconvenience ourselves for the sake of others, sharing what we have, and extending a welcoming and loving spirit to those who are often overlooked.

The Theology of Compassionate Generosity

In this passage there are also three theological principles that we need to understand and incorporate into our daily lives:

1. **Compassionate Action:** Jesus highlights the importance of compassionate action and practical expressions of love. The righteous are commended for their tangible acts of kindness and generosity toward those in need. This underscores the inseparable connection between faith and works in the Christian life.

2. **Identification with Christ:** Jesus reveals that when His followers minister to the marginalized and vulnerable, they are ministering to Him. This teaches that compassionate service to others is an expression of love for Christ Himself. It emphasizes the intimate connection between our relationship with Christ and our care for those in need.

3. **Kingdom Inheritance:** The righteous are invited to inherit the kingdom prepared for them since the creation of the world. This illustrates the eternal significance of living out compassionate generosity and the promise of a future reward for those who exemplify Christ's love through their actions.

Today, let's take a moment to reflect on how we can embody compassionate generosity in our daily lives. Perhaps it's reaching out to a friend in need, volunteering for one of our local mission partners, or simply offering a listening ear to someone who is going through a difficult time. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to the needs around us and give us the willingness and compassion to respond in love.

Questions for personal reflection:

1. Why are Christians called to be compassionate?

2. Do you consider yourself to be compassionately generous?

3. What one thing can you do today to start your journey to be a compassionately generous person?

Day 2 | Week 6

Cheerful Giving

By: Dr. Jody Ray

“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 9:7, NIV)

Day 2 | Week 6

Cheerful Giving

Are You a Cheerful Giver?

In this verse, the Apostle Paul addresses the Corinthian church, providing guidance on the attitude and motivation behind giving. He points out cheerful giving is central to this passage, emphasizing the voluntary and joyful nature of generosity.

Paul begins by emphasizing the individual nature of giving, highlighting that each person should give according to what they have personally decided in their heart. This underscores the importance of personal conviction and intentionality in the act of giving. It speaks to the idea that giving should be a thoughtful and deliberate decision, reflective of one's own willingness and conviction.

This verse then highlights the manner in which giving should take place. It emphasizes that giving should not be done reluctantly or under compulsion. This underscores the principle that giving should not be driven by external pressure or obligation. Instead, it should flow from a willing and joyful heart, free from coercion or reluctance.

The idea of being a “cheerful giver” as characteristic of biblical generosity

is highlighted in the phrase “for God loves a cheerful giver.” This phrase captures the essence of the verse, emphasizing that God takes delight in those who give with a joyful and willing spirit. It reflects the idea that the attitude and motivation behind giving are as significant as the act itself. A cheerful giver exemplifies a heart that is willing, eager, and joyful in the act of giving.

The Theology of Cheerful Giving

Consider these theological principles that underscore the relevance of being a cheerful giver.

1. Reflection of God's Character: being a cheerful giver is rooted in the very nature of God. Throughout the Bible, God is portrayed as a generous and cheerful giver. For example, John 3:16 states, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.” The cheerful giver reflects the character of God, who gives generously and joyfully. It demonstrates an alignment with God's nature and a willingness to emulate His attributes.
2. Expression of Faith and Trust: The act of cheerful giving is a tangible expression of faith and trust in God's provision. It reflects a deep-seated

trust in God's faithfulness to meet one's needs and an acknowledgement that all good gifts ultimately come from Him. By giving cheerfully, individuals demonstrate their confidence in God's sovereignty and provision, affirming that their security and well-being are ultimately in His hands.

3. Transformation of the Heart: Cheerful giving is not merely an external action; it reflects an internal transformation of the heart. The act of giving with joy and gladness demonstrates a heart that has been touched by the grace of God and transformed by His love. It reflects an attitude of gratitude and a recognition the abundant blessings received from God, leading to a joyful response of generosity.

4. Participation in God's Redemptive Work: Cheerful giving is an active participation in God's redemptive work in the world. By giving joyfully, individuals align themselves with God's mission of love, mercy, and compassion. It enables them to be instruments of blessing and agents of transformation in the lives of others, thereby contributing to the advancement of God's kingdom on earth.

5. Impact on Community and Relationships: The theological relevance of cheerful giving extends to its impact on community and relationships. A cheerful giver fosters a spirit of unity, generosity, and selflessness within the body of believers. It strengthens the bonds

within the community, promotes a culture of sharing, and nurtures a sense of interconnectedness and mutual care among God's people.

A cheerful giver reflects the nature of God, expresses faith and trust, signifies a transformed heart, enables participation in God's work, and fosters community and relational bonds within the body of Christ. In this way, cheerful giving stands as a foundational principle that shapes the identity and mission of the local church.

Questions for personal reflection:

1. Why do you think God loves a “cheerful giver?”

2. How does a person become a “cheerful giver?”

3. How does your giving through the local church impact God’s redemptive plan?

Day 3 | Week 6

Sacrificial Giving

By: Dr. Jody Ray

“But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.’”

(Mark 12:42-44, NIV)

Day 3 | Week 6

Sacrificial Giving

What is Sacrificial Giving?

In Mark 12, we encounter a remarkable demonstration of sacrificial giving from a poor widow. As Jesus and His disciples observed the temple treasury, they witnessed people making their offerings. Many rich people contributed large sums of money, but it was the inconspicuous action of a destitute widow that caught Jesus' attention and admiration.

This widow's offering was meager by material standards – just two small copper coins. However, its value didn't lie in its monetary worth, but rather in the depth of her sacrifice. The widow, despite her poverty, gave all she had to live on. Her act of giving was an embodiment of sacrificial love and trust in God's provision. She didn't hold back, but instead, she gave with a wholehearted devotion that reflected her reliance on God's faithfulness.

The widow's sacrificial giving challenges us to reflect on our own attitudes toward generosity. Are we willing to give sacrificially, not just from our surplus, but out of our genuine need? Sacrificial giving isn't confined to monetary donations; it encompasses our time, talents,

resources, and compassion. It's about relinquishing our sense of ownership and recognizing that everything we have ultimately belongs to God.

When we give sacrificially, we emulate Christ's selfless love and exhibit our trust in His provision. Our acts of sacrificial giving can bring about profound impacts, both in the lives of others and in our own spiritual growth. It is through sacrificial giving that we open ourselves to experience the boundless blessings of God's kingdom.

Three Steps to Becoming a Sacrificial Giver

1. Surrender: The first step to becoming a sacrificial giver is to surrender our possessions, time, and talents to God. Is Jesus Lord over your finances, time, and talents? The poor widow demonstrated complete surrender by giving all she had to live on. Similarly, we are called to surrender our resources to God, acknowledging that He is the ultimate provider and that everything we have ultimately belongs to Him. This act of surrender reflects our trust in God's faithfulness and provision, leading us to give sacrificially with a joyful and open heart.

2. Generosity: The second step is to cultivate a spirit of generosity. The widow's sacrificial giving was a demonstration of her generous heart, despite her meager means. As we seek to become sacrificial givers, we are called to embrace a generous attitude, recognizing that our giving can make a significant impact, no matter the size of our offering. Generosity flows from a heart that is grateful for God's blessings and desires to bless others in return.

3. Trust: The final step is to trust in God's provision. The widow's act of giving revealed her deep trust in God's care and provision for her needs. In the same way, sacrificial giving requires us to trust that God will honor our generosity and meet our needs according to His riches and glory. Trusting in God's provision frees us from anxiety about scarcity and empowers us to give sacrificially, knowing that our ultimate security lies in God's faithfulness.

Questions for personal reflection:

1. Why is sacrificial giving so important to God?

2. What is the heart attitude of the person who gives sacrificially?

3. Which of the three steps in becoming a sacrificial giver do you need to mature in?

Day 4 | Week 6
Gratitude in Giving

By: Dr. Jody Ray

“One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him – and he was a Samaritan.”

(Luke 17:15-16, NIV)

Day 4 | Week 6

Gratitude in Giving

Gratitude is at the Heart of Our Giving

In Luke 17:15-16, we encounter a powerful account of gratitude and giving. Jesus had healed ten men suffering from leprosy, yet only one of them returned to express profound gratitude. This man, a Samaritan, displayed an overwhelming sense of thankfulness as he fell at Jesus' feet, praising God with a loud voice. His response serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of gratitude in how we give not only in our words but also in our actions.

Gratitude lies at the heart of our giving, serving as a catalyst for selfless and sacrificial generosity. When we recognize and appreciate the blessings we have received from God, it naturally compels us to respond from God, it naturally compels us to respond with a spirit of generosity and giving. Just as the Samaritan man's gratitude overflowed into worshipping and honor God, our gratitude should manifest in our giving, reflecting the depth of our appreciation for God's goodness and provision in our lives.

The Attitudes of Gratitude

As we examine our own attitudes toward giving, let's consider the following aspects of gratitude in how we give:

1. **Recognize God's Blessings:** Take time to reflect on the countless blessings and provisions that God has graciously bestowed upon you. Whether they are material, relational, or spiritual, acknowledging these blessings cultivates a heart of gratitude that naturally leads to a desire to give back to God and others.
2. **Express Thankfulness:** Like the Samaritan who returned to express his gratitude, let's make it a habit to express our thankfulness to God for His goodness and faithfulness. Our words and actions of gratitude serve as a testimony to God's work in our lives and inspire others to respond with generosity and thanksgiving.
3. **Give Cheerfully:** Remember from Day 2, the Apostle Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 9:7 that "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." Gratitude fuels cheerful giving, as we joyfully offer our time, resources, and love in response to God's abundant grace.

Why Should Gratitude be the Motivation of Our Giving?

Let's consider these two key theological principles that underpin the connection between gratitude and giving:

1. Response to God's Grace: Grace is central to the Christian faith, because it emphasizes God's unmerited favor and love extended to us through Jesus Christ. Gratitude in giving is a response to the grace we have received from God. As recipients of God's abundant grace, we are moved to respond in thankfulness and generosity toward others. Our giving becomes an expression of our appreciation for God's grace, as well as a way to extend that grace to others.

2. Imitation of Christ: Gratitude in giving is also rooted in the example of Jesus Christ, who demonstrated sacrificial love and generosity throughout His earthly ministry. As Christians, we are called to emulate Christ's selfless love and compassion. Our gratitude motivates us to follow Christ's example by giving sacrificially and generously, reflecting the character of our Savior and serving as His hands and feet in the world.

Let's strive to cultivate a heart of gratitude in how we give, allowing our thankfulness to permeate our generosity and selfless acts of giving. May our lives be a testament to the transformative power of gratitude, inspiring others to join us in honoring God through our giving.

Questions for personal reflection:

1. Why is Gratitude at the heart of Christian giving?

2. Name five blessings you have received from God?

3. Which one of the attitudes of gratitude do you need to mature in?

Day 5 | Week 6

Stewardship of Giving

By: Dr. Jody Ray

“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. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”

(2 Corinthians 9:6-8, NIV)

Day 5 | Week 6

Stewardship of Giving

Is God First in Your Life?

If we answer this question with a “yes” then He must be first in our finances, our families, and our faith. There are many blessings that go along with tithing. But it is the action of putting God first and trusting Him that initiates the blessings.

Here’s the thing, as we journey through life, we are constantly faced with the challenge of prioritizing our time, resources, and energy. It’s easy to become consumed by the demands of our finances, family, and faith, often leading us to prioritize the temporal over the eternal. However, the Word of God reminds us of the importance of putting God first in every aspect of our lives, including our finances, family, and faith.

1. Finances: We are often tempted to prioritize our own desires and needs above all else. However, the Bible teaches us the principle of sowing and reaping. When we sow sparingly, we reap sparingly, but when we sow generously, we will reap generously. This principle extends beyond just financial giving; it encompasses our entire approach to stewardship. By putting God first in our finances, we acknowledge that all we have comes from Him, and we seek to honor Him

with our resources. Do you tithe? If not, what percentage of your income do you give to your church? You may be thinking, “I can’t afford to tithe?” You will never be able to afford to tithe until you start tithing. We can always afford to give if we give first.

2. Family: Our families are among the most precious gifts that God has entrusted to us. It’s essential to put God first in our families by centering our homes on His love, grace, and truth. This involves prioritizing prayer, worship, and the study of His Word within our households. By doing so, we ensure that our families are built on a foundation of faith and that Christ remains at the center of all we do.

3. Faith: Putting God first means surrendering or will to His and seeking His guidance in all things. It means trusting His provision, seeking His wisdom, and obeying His commandments. When we put God first in our faith, we demonstrate our reliance on Him and open ourselves to experience His abundant blessings and grace.

The Principle of Sowing and Reaping

The principle of sowing and reaping is a foundational truth woven throughout the pages of Scripture. It reminds us that the actions and attitudes we sow into our lives and the lives of others will yield a corresponding harvest. The Apostle Paul was encouraging the Corinthian church to embrace giving, assuring them that God is able to bless them abundantly as they do so.

Sowing

Sowing is an act of intentional planting. In the context of our lives, it involves the deliberate investment of our time, resources, and energy. What we sow can take many forms, including our finances, kindness, love, forgiveness, and service to others. Sowing generously requires a heart that is open, selfless, and obedient to God's leading. When we sow generously we are sowing seeds of blessing and transformation in the lives of others and in our own lives.

Reaping

Just as a farmer reaps what he sows, we also reap what we sow in our lives. When we sow sparingly, we limit the potential for a bountiful harvest. However, when we sow generously, we open ourselves to the abundance of God's blessings. These blessings may manifest in various ways including spiritual growth, fulfilled promises, provision, and the joy of seeing lives impacted by our acts of generosity.

Cheerful Giving

God loves a cheerful giver. When we give with joyful and willing heart, we reflect the generous nature of our Heavenly Father. Our giving becomes an act of worship and gratitude, acknowledging that all we have comes from Him. As we give, we trust in His provision and sovereignty, knowing that He is faithful to bless and multiply our gifts for His glory.

Questions for personal reflection:

1. What areas of your life are you presently sowing seeds?

2. Are you sowing sparingly or generously?

3. How can you cultivate a spirit of cheerful giving and generosity in your actions and attitude?



OUR MISSION

To lead people to trade the pursuit of more
for a life worth pursuing in Jesus Christ.



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