



THE JOURNEY OF GENEROSITY

GUIDEBOOK

PLAYLIST

Music to accompany your reflections and next steps as an act of worship.



*We Believe:
Generosity is worship.*



INTRODUCTION

It should come as no surprise that the great stories of literature often take shape around a journey. Whether it's Odysseus striving to return home, Virgil guiding Dante through nine circles of fire and brimstone, or even small Frodo Baggins carrying a ring to a mountain a world away, stories of journeys capture our collective imagination in a unique way.

That's because journeys are also stories of transformation. Where we begin and where we end cannot be the same.

This guide is an invitation and companion for your own journey. We don't anticipate this journey will require you to physically relocate yourself (though who's to say what God is up to?). Instead, it's a journey of the heart centered on generosity. Like any journey, it may include obstacles and surprises, and because of these things, you'll likely end in a different place than you began.

What is the end of this journey? **Foundationally, the journey of generosity leads to greater intimacy with Christ and to building God's kingdom together—a journey of discipleship.** As with any discipleship journey, we trust that the specifics of your generosity journey are for you to decide with God. Still, we sincerely believe generosity and its many disciplines are core to discipleship and will ultimately shape us to reflect Christ more fully in the world.

Inside this guide are five structured devotionals designed to shape a journey of generosity. Each includes a Scripture to meditate on, a written reflection from someone in the Bethany community, a prayer, and a suggested practice. At the back of this guide you'll find Bethany's **Theology of Generosity** crafted by our pastoral team to support you as you grow in following Jesus.

We imagine you'll spend one week on each theme and prayerfully move through each component. We also encourage you to use this guide with others—whether with your family, your small group, or another setting—because most journeys of discipleship are meant to be done together.

Our invitation to you is to embark on this journey of generosity with a prayerful and humble heart. There may be resistance along the way, but you can trust that Christ walks with you and that God is at work in us as a church community as we set out together.

FIRST STEPS:

Generosity Begins in the Heart

Matthew 6:19-24 (NIV) *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

REFLECTION

Nathan Seppi, Co-Lead Pastor @ Bethany North

Let's start with a game of fill-in-the-blanks. Finish this sentence: The three things you aren't supposed to discuss with company are _____, _____, and _____.

OK, pencils down; let's compare answers: The way I've heard this advice before is that you aren't supposed to talk about politics, religion, and money, which, if I had to guess, was close to your answers as well.

From what we can tell, one of the first times this advice was offered was in 1840 in the book *The Letter Bag of the Great Western*, a collection of letters from passengers on the SS *Great Western*, which serves as a compilation of many of the etiquette norms of that day and age. While many of the other pieces of advice in the book probably seem outdated at this point, it seems that these big three taboos still have a foothold in our modern society.

Of course, this advice in some respects is quite understandable. These topics often get to the core of our values and can start heated debates because they speak to things we deeply care about. It doesn't take long for these topics to evolve past what we can just laugh off, which is perhaps why we often feel uncomfortable when they come up. Unfortunately though, this discomfort and subsequent avoidance of these topics means that, in a lot of ways, we can be deficient in the practice of talking about our core values, which, by extension, means *we can be deficient in the practice of examining our hearts.*

Even if we tend to shy away from these topics, Jesus definitely did not. In fact, when you look at the topics Jesus taught the most, his number one topic of teaching was the Kingdom of God, which has both religious and political connotations. His second-most taught topic was, you guessed it, money. All three of the “taboos” were central to Jesus' teaching. Why? *Because Jesus cares deeply about our hearts.* Indeed, Jesus, throughout His ministry, seems deeply concerned about shaping his disciples' hearts to be after God and God alone, knowing that all else will begin to fall into place when our hearts are aligned with our Creator.

When we talk about generosity, it, by necessity, means we talk about our money. Why? Because we decide how we spend our money based on our values. This is important because it follows that our money can show us what we value. Said another way, *how we spend our money shows us our heart.*

That perhaps is why Jesus doesn't leave it ambiguous in the Sermon on the Mount text about our masters and who our hearts serve. Christ says we can only serve one master and then names our two options: we cannot serve both God and money. “Well certainly there are other things we can serve besides just God and money!” the modern reader might object to Jesus. But Jesus is clear—if we aren't using our money to serve God, it can quickly become an idol in our hearts and take us away from our true calling: to love God with all that we are. This was true of his audience 2,000 years ago and is very true today, as well.

Jesus cares about what we do with our money because Jesus cares about our heart. It follows then that, as we learn to be generous with our money (and our time, and our gifts, and everything else), we will come to have a heart that serves God alone. Let us learn to continue to be generous, and in doing so, may we come to understand why Jesus said: “Blessed are the pure of heart” (Matthew 5:8a).

PRAYER

*God, who, in Your generosity, teaches us to be generous,
You who knows well all that clamors for our heart's attention,
Give us the courage to live generously with our resources
so that our hearts can be purified little by little.
Amen.*

PRACTICE

In the book *The Freedom of Simplicity*, Richard Foster offers a practice of simplicity in response to asking if our heart is about God and God alone. He frames it as a “tiny experiment” that many can do “with genuine profit as God prompts us,” helping us in bringing clarity around if God or the treasures of the world has our heart.

We can go through our home, find one possession that we value, and consider, “Am I growing too attached to this object? Is it becoming a treasure to me?” Having examined our hearts before the Lord, let us give it away. We must not rationalize by saying, “But after searching my heart I know that it is clearly not a treasure to me, and so I don’t need to give it away.” If it is truly not our treasure, we will not mind in the least giving it away; and if it has become our treasure, we will want to give it away for our soul’s sake. Also, we will pray for the person who receives our little gift, that it will be a blessing, and not a hindrance, to his or her walk with God.¹

We believe generosity contributes to joy that aligns us with the heart of God and heightens our awareness to respond to the needs in our spheres of influence.

¹Foster, Richard J. 1981. *Freedom of Simplicity*. San Francisco: Harper & Row (pp. 139–140).

SUSTAINING THE JOURNEY: Generosity is Fueled by Gratitude

Psalm 24:1 (NIV) *The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.*

REFLECTION

Taylor Greer, Executive Pastor of Reconciliation & Justice

While driving and listening to the radio recently, I heard something that stuck with me: it is developmentally impossible for a toddler to share. As the proud auntie of two toddler nieces, this immediately resonated. These sisters, like most toddlers, have a deep sense of what is “mine,” and sharing is a daily challenge. They know what they want, when they want it, and how long they want to keep it. That word, “Mine,” gets repeated constantly.

In our family, we've found a kind of workaround: the older one offers a trade, often in an “Indiana Jones” fashion—replacing the desired object so swiftly it's almost like nothing changed. It's amusing, exhausting, and very human.

And yet, it's not just toddlers. That mentality doesn't naturally fade with age. Even as we continue to grow—from child, to teen, to adult—we're shaped by a deep-rooted sense of ownership.

I was reminded of this sense of ownership while moving. Every item I owned was packed into boxes, tubs, and cars—an inventory of my things. But as I unpacked, I began to reflect: What does it mean that these things are *mine*?

When I view something as *mine*, my care for it is often motivated by how it serves me—my comfort, my identity, my control. Ownership can reinforce a self-centered relationship with our resources.

But Scripture challenges this.

Psalm 24:1 declares, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.” If that’s true—if everything belongs to God—then nothing is ultimately mine. I’m not the *owner*. I’m a *steward*.

Jesus taught that our treasure reveals the location of our hearts. He pointed us toward building not with wealth, but on the solid foundation of God’s Word. His teachings on God’s Kingdom redirected people from ownership to stewardship, from accumulation to generosity.

As Christians, we’re called to reorient our lives around these truths. Everything we have originates with our generous Creator, and that changes how we relate to everything we have. We don’t earn or possess as a matter of status. We receive and we steward, taking care of what we have as God’s provision for us and for others.

Stewardship leads us into a posture of gratitude. Our hands are open—to give and to receive—according to the will of the One to whom everything belongs. When I stop seeing my possessions as “mine,” their ultimate value is no longer in how they serve me but in how they can serve God’s purposes. And what is God building? A kingdom marked by love of God and love of neighbor. A kingdom where generosity replaces hoarding, and faithfulness replaces fear.

Of course, this isn’t easy. We live in a society that prizes material success, where the cost of living is high and the “good life” is often defined by what we own and spend. To live from a posture of gratitude and as stewards in such a world is deeply countercultural. It complicates things. It asks us to question not only how we live, but why we live the way we do.

But in this tension, we find an invitation: to trust in God’s provision, to live with gratitude, to hold our resources with open hands, and to live generously—just as we have received generously from our Creator.

PRAYER

God, guide us in Your loving generosity. You created all there is, not because You needed it or planned to use it to advance yourself, but because You overflow with love. May Your generosity shape us as we take the steps to consciously assess our relationship with our resources so that we can live with gratitude, steward with intentionality, and be part of Your generosity. Amen.

PRACTICE

Spend time with gratitude this week. What is your attention drawn to in your life? Make a list and consider: How might your areas of gratitude be resources to steward as a blessing for others? What's a step of stewardship you can take this week?

We Believe:

Generosity is a lifestyle that is more than an act; it's a way of being.

(more on pages 19–20)

NEW HORIZONS:

Generosity Keeps Us Kingdom-minded

Philippians 3:20 (NIV) *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.*

REFLECTION

Michelle Woody, Director of Worship @ Bethany North

In the sweltering Atlanta summer of 1976, my father came to the United States of America from the country of Iran. Like many hopeful young people around the world, eager for opportunity, his intentions were to get an education and then return to his beloved family and home country. Unbeknownst to him at the time, the complete political and societal upheaval of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the Hostage Crisis of 1981, and a long, horrible eight-year war against Iraq would soon alter his plans. The home he knew was never the same, and the suffering dealt to his people and culture are still palpable today.

He made a life in the US, graduating with a Masters in Engineering and becoming an instructor of mathematics at the University of Alabama. He married my mom, had me, and at some point in my childhood that I can remember well, was able to apply for citizenship. I remember how significant it was to be given the opportunity to be interviewed and take the test, how much my dad studied, how emotional it was to go through the naturalization ceremony. He was now a citizen of the United States of America, and with it, had all of the rights, responsibilities, and protections of the laws of this country. The generosity of this opportunity has remained for him a great source of gratitude and purpose.

In Philippians 3:20, Paul writes, “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.” In his days on earth, Jesus talked about “the Kingdom of Heaven” more than any other

topic. Entire seminary classes and books have been devoted to this subject, and a quick Google search could bring up the extensive list of applicable Scriptures. But to suffice as a very brief summary, we can know this: *The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, is coming, is countercultural to the kingdoms of the earth, and we are citizens of that Kingdom.*

You don't have to look far to know that geopolitical citizenship is a significant part of our lives. We are all citizens of a specific country, and many around the world are seeking refuge in new countries. But I wonder how many of us, at our time of becoming a Christ follower, realized that we were about to become citizens of another place? In an even more transformational reality than claiming a new national identity, we would now take on the purpose, the ways, the rights, the laws, *the generosity* of the Kingdom of Heaven. This citizenship leads us to an entirely new way of thinking about our lives, with a singular aim—to see His Kingdom come.

If we're honest, even the most devout believers among us are mostly building our own little kingdoms. We study, work, save, and try to get top-notch jobs so that we can have the most comfortable lives possible for ourselves and our families. Ah, the American dream! Of course, we all hope to build good lives here on earth, but what if having a Kingdom perspective means expanding the reach of our resources to be more about building His Kingdom? When we consider the generosity of God to give us Kingdom citizenship, we are compelled as Christ followers to see our finances, skill sets, homes, and time as gifts to use to further God's Kingdom. Can you imagine the impact that could be possible if we each live into this Kingdom way? May it be so with us!

PRAYER

Lord, help us to see the world around us with Your generosity and purpose in mind, and until you return, and earth and heaven are once again united, let us pray as Your Son prayed, "Let Your Kingdom come, let Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Amen!

PRACTICE

Take inventory of your resources by making a list—your time, homes, skills, finances, etc. Consider: what have you been using your resources to build in your life? What is one gift in your life that you could intentionally use to help build the Kingdom of God?

THE ROAD AHEAD:

Generosity Pursues Justice

Luke 19:1-10 (NIV) *Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.*

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

REFLECTION:

Jonathan Nolasco, Associate Pastor @ Bethany Green Lake

Like many others who grew up going to church, I learned about the story of Zacchaeus in Sunday School. It was taught as a fun story about a “wee little man” who wanted to see Jesus so badly that he scurried up a tree in order to get a better view of Jesus passing through town. Jesus sees Zacchaeus, invites himself over to his home, and as a result, Zacchaeus declares that he will give half his money to the poor and pay back four times the amount to anyone he has cheated. It’s a beautiful story that celebrates the transformative power of encounters with Jesus. But it’s also a story that invites us to pursue repentance, generosity, reconciliation, and justice.

Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector whose wealth came from exploiting the poor by charging them more taxes than they owed. He had participated in and benefited from an oppressive system of tax collection that kept people in debt and poverty. But, because of his encounter with Jesus, he had a radical change of heart, which expressed itself in concrete action. Zacchaeus expressed his repentance not merely by feeling bad for his sins, but with a generous justice that sought to repair the harm his sins had caused. In his book *Subversive Witness*, Dominique Gillard writes that, “Jesus transformed a person who oppressively violated community into an advocate of justice and an indispensable member of God’s family.”²

How might we, as God’s people, live generously such that our giving helps repair unjust systems and relationships? How might our own encounters with Jesus change our own hearts so that we, like Zacchaeus, express our repentance through generous justice? Perhaps we could reflect on housing in our area and how our current system has made it difficult for people, particularly those from historically marginalized communities, to enjoy a fair share of the resources of God’s creation. What if this broken system could be repaired by a people transformed by God’s generosity? We may sometimes feel like our generosity can’t make a meaningful change to the widespread and deeply entrenched unjust systems that surround us. But in God’s Kingdom, the radical generosity of even one person is enough for Jesus to proclaim, “Today salvation has come to this house.”

PRAYER

God, we thank You for all that You have entrusted in our care. Forgive us for the ways in which we have failed to use what You have given us to seek Your justice. May our generosity advance Your mission to reconcile people to each other and to Yourself. Amen.

PRACTICE

Reflect on the source and history of your own wealth and that of your family. Invite God to show you how you might steward what you have to repair unjust systems and relationships in your communities.

² Dominique Gillard, *Subversive Witness: Scripture’s Call to Leverage Privilege* (2021: 131).

THE DIRECTION:

Generosity Leads to Transformation

2 Corinthians 3:16-18 (NIV) *But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

REFLECTION

Richard Dahlstrom, Teaching Pastor Emeritus

Quiet time. Bible reading. Meditation. Three kinds of prayers. Four kinds of loves. 9 types of Enneagram personality to understand (and fix). Serving. Giving. Volunteering. Extra-curricular reading. The right supplements. Counseling. Group therapy. Cross fit. Slow food. Sleep. Sitting is the new smoking. Doctrinal wars over sexual ethics and politics.

This kind of life is exhausting. It's often the case that we're approaching our lives as consumers to get what we need for our whole lives: spirit, soul, and body.

If you're like me, you're often looking for the right combination of products and practices that will lead to the kind of life Jesus spoke of in John 10:10, which is life filled to overflowing so that we've the capacity to bless others, not just get by. I want that. You likely do, too? And yet, the consumer life often leaves me feeling exhausted while my deficiencies remain, or even get magnified, through my search for the magic formula to wholeness.

With the caveat at the outset that I don't want to take anything away from the miracles of modern medicine and all the liberation that comes when the right meds and therapy are offered for the right situations, I also need to suggest "transformation consumers" run the risk of trying to fix

presenting problems without ever getting to the core issue. Here are two truths from the Bible that cut to the core clearly and quickly, with one easy next step for each of us:

1. Transformation is something that happens to us, not something we do. In our text, we're told that we're being transformed. Over time, we'll reveal the glory of our Creator with greater and greater clarity in our daily lives. But "being transformed" is very clearly a passive thing that's done to us.
2. Our responsibility is to take any veils off our faces—things like pride, blame, anger, shame, and bitterness—and simply do this one thing: Look for, and gaze on, the glory of God.

You find it in the text of the Bible. You find it in fellowship with others where there's authenticity, compassion, love. You find it in creation at both the micro level of a tiny ant and the macro level of galaxies.

Wake up and pay attention! Glory is abundantly everywhere! Then give thanks, and keep your eyes open for how Christ's overflow in and through you can bless others. Christ's generosity is the source of our generosity. The gift you'll receive for this: *transformation*.

By all means, let us take our meds and build our habits, but don't skip this simple and foundational truth!

PRAYER

Holy Spirit, thank you for the truth that it is your work in us that leads to transformation. We release our efforts of control and accomplishment and lean in to receive your life, Jesus. May we walk in your generous ways. Amen.

PRACTICE

Take time to reflect on the ways you have been "consuming" in order to make change happen in your life. Focus on one area or make a list. Now choose one thing or action in particular, and commit to fasting from it for the week ahead. As you abstain from this thing, ask yourself how you can use the resources it would normally require (time, money, energy), and turn those resources back towards God in a reflection of God's generous character.

THE CORE OF OUR JOURNEY

A Theology to Ground Us.

The following theology is a combination of scripture, narrative, and practice that shapes Bethany's approach to generosity as a discipleship practice at our church. We will keep this in front of us as we grow together, in this season and the next.

BETHANY'S THEOLOGY OF GENEROSITY

All that we have is a gift. Consider that creation was made for us to inhabit and bless the Lord with a response of gratitude. Humanity was given a garden, a place to inhabit and tend and steward with our vocation. It was good. We were placed there in relationship vertically with a God who had formed us in God's very image and horizontally with human love that was "flesh from flesh" (Genesis 2:23). It was very good (Genesis 1:31).

Our lives are lived in response to revelation from God through God's creation and in the life of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The good life, the very good life, is living in a generous response to God's revelation as we faithfully step deeper into relationships that are marked with gratitude. This kind of generous living cultivates stewardship within us.

As followers of Jesus, we want to become generous like Him. Jesus modeled a life of radical generosity—not only with material things, but with His time, grace, and presence. A significant portion of Jesus' parables in the gospels had a teaching on the connection between money and possessions and the spiritual life. Jesus didn't just teach generosity—He embodied it. As His followers, we are called to reflect His generous heart in our relationships, resources, and daily lives.

Jesus isn't just calling us to give more—but to love Him more than our stuff. Giving reorients our hearts to Kingdom values because He taught that, “where our treasure is, there our hearts will follow” (Matthew 6:21). Living generously will take a lot of forms, but it will always ask us to authentically evaluate our own sacrifice in order to honor the Lord who sacrificed for us.

Generosity calls each of us to give back to the Lord with all that we place value in: our money, our time, our resources, our focus, our heart. We have been blessed, and we are called to bless God through our generous response. Wise stewardship of our lives and resources is an essential part of a Christ follower's journey.

CORE VERSES

Matthew 10:8 *Freely you have received, freely give.*

2 Corinthians 9:7 *Each of you should give what you decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

SCRIPTURE NOTES

In the Old Testament (e.g., Genesis 14:20, Numbers 18:26, Deuteronomy 14:22, 2 Chronicles 31:5), there is a clear theme of giving personal and shared resources to God. First fruits and tithes were two types of offerings. First fruits were a symbolic portion given at the start of the harvest to honor God's priority. Tithes were a measured tenth given later, once the full yield of the harvest was known, to sustain worship and care for the vulnerable.

In the New Testament (e.g., 2 Corinthians 9:5-7, Luke 6:38, Matthew 22:15-22, Acts 4:32-35), we see generosity broadened to sharing openly with others and prayerfully discerning what belongs to God. Jesus' teaching about giving to Caesar and to God reminds us of ultimate allegiance: everything we have is God's.

While the New Testament does not command tithing as a law, we continue in this spiritual tradition through our financial gifts and tithes as a discipline of generosity. In our context, gifts are financial offerings made infrequently but intentionally. Tithes are regular and recurring gifts (e.g., monthly, quarterly, annually), often expressed as a percentage of income.

WE BELIEVE

- Generosity is worship (Hebrews 13:16).
- Generosity is a lifestyle of stewardship, that is more than an act; it's a way of being (1 Peter 4:10).
- Generosity frees us from self-sufficiency (1 Timothy 6:17-19).
- Generosity contributes to joy that aligns us with the heart of God and heightens our awareness to respond to the needs in our spheres of influence (2 Corinthians 9:7-8).
- Generosity is missional, mobilizing the Church to be the presence of Christ in the world (Matthew 5:16).
- Generosity is countercultural, entrusting God with our resources for the good of the world and trusting God to meet our own needs (Matthew 6:19-21).
- Generosity has a generational impact as one generation models to the next how to give back and care for the needs of the world (Psalm 145:4, 7).

GENEROUS GIFTS ARE

WORSHIPFUL: An offering is a praise back to the God who gave us His all.

REGULAR: Like any spiritual discipline, regularity and commitment ground us.

FIRST: We honor God's priority in our lives, reflecting Christ who loved us first.

SACRIFICIAL: We are called to give in ways that reflect Christ's self-giving love.

THOUGHTFUL: We prayerfully discern how and why we give, led by the Spirit into generosity and compassion.

The background features a light gray field with intricate, wavy, contour-like lines in a slightly darker shade of gray. On the right side, there is a vertical bar composed of four distinct color segments: green at the top, followed by a tan or light brown section, then a red section, and finally a blue section at the bottom.

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