generosity
moving toward life that is truly life

a four-week devotional by

Gordon MacDonaldd
with Patrick Johnson of The National Christian Foundation
Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

1 Timothy 6:17-19
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Moving toward transformation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Moving toward freedom</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Moving toward trust</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Moving toward life</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moving toward action</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Introduction**  2
Generosity...what a simple, splendid word. And how special it is to know that generosity is a gift to us from the first and ultimate giver, God. From the very beginning, He has unfolded His sovereign plan of creation, love, grace, and salvation as an expression of His abundant generosity, and He invites each one of us to participate in this with Him as He continues to move through history.

Inside the soul of every Christian is a God-inspired desire for the generous life, for a life tailored around His example of selflessness and sacrifice. We are all on a spiritual journey, and we are all on a giving journey. Both are filled with growth and movement. We encounter times of expansion. We transition away from the old to the new. We move forward in our generosity, learning to give more and give more sacrificially.

But as with any journey, we get caught in periods of stagnation and decline. The pull of culture and our own flesh often conspire against us to stifle our attempts at living truly generous lives. We need the power of God’s Word, His Spirit, and fellow believers to emerge into a new time of flourishing progression.

God started my family on our giving journey almost six years ago. And quite frankly, it hasn’t been easy. There have been highs and lows, periods of surplus and scarcity, times when I’ve been obedient and times when I’ve failed. Yet God, rich in His amazing grace, has never let me down or let me go. I still push on, moving forward, moving toward true life...the joyful, generous life I believe He is calling me to live.

The act of moving often signifies a passageway to something better. This is certainly what has happened in my family, and this is what I want for you over the next 30 days – to recognize God’s wonderful gift of generosity and how it can transform us and those we influence to become more like Him. Paul described this generous life in 1 Timothy 6:19 as the “life that is truly life.”

So where do we start?
...with an excellent teacher. For years, I’ve admired Gordon MacDonald’s ability to take God’s Word and draw out rich truths of generosity. I knew Gordon’s writings in this book would help all of us move forward in our quest for the true, generous life.

So how do we move?
...day by day, week by week. This book is broken down into four weeklong segments, each containing seven daily devotions. Because generosity is normally best accomplished in the context of community, I encourage you spend the next month reflecting on these devotions with a family member, friend, small group, or church class. Together, you’ll also read twelve “forward thinking” key principles and four incredibly inspirational stories of people that moved toward life that is truly life in powerful ways.

Ok, enough introduction. Let’s move.
week 1

moving toward

transformation
God made the first move of generosity.

And the second. And the third.

From the moment He imparted life to mankind to the climactic gift of salvation through the death of His Son Jesus Christ, God has set the supreme example of radical, sacrificial giving for His followers.

The word sacrifice is so difficult for us to accept, at times. Yet that’s exactly what we must do when we practice generosity: sacrifice something of value to us for the good of another, because we love them. You see, this is what differentiates generosity and giving. Giving can be done begrudgingly and devoid of love. But true generosity is always initiated by love. Because God is love, as our hearts become molded in His likeness, we will naturally move toward a life of greater generosity.

Over the next seven days, we will explore the incredible generosity of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We’ll see in Scripture that just as God is love, God is generous. In fact, His extravagant generosity flows out of His extravagant love. God the Father is the first generous giver, God the Son is the chief of generous givers, and God the Holy Spirit is the ongoing expression of God’s generosity in us.

We will also explore how the early church – comprised of regular people like you and me – was absolutely transformed by the grace of God for lives of radical generosity. Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37) and Mary of Bethany (John 12:3) are two examples of early Christians who viewed their wealth through the eyes of eternity and were determined to live generous lives because of it.

So before we move forward in the act of generous giving, we must move forward in the transformation of our hearts, souls, and minds...a transformation by the truth that God made the first generous move.
God, the first and most generous

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
John 3:16

This verse follows on the heels of a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, a Jewish leader. It was a conversation that happened in the nighttime hours because Nicodemus was not yet prepared to risk his reputation by being seen with the Lord in public.

For God so loved the world. Are these words and what follows an extension of the Nicodemus conversation or a comment that flows from it? We do not know. But what is universally accepted is that we are reading some of the most profound of all Biblical truths. God loved...God gave His Son...Whoever believes possesses eternal life. We call it the Gospel. It’s that simple! It’s that profound.

If we wish to become generous givers, then we must know this Scripture intimately. It reminds us that God does not ask of us anything that He has not first done for us. God is the first generous giver. He has provided the highest model of generosity, and He calls for Biblical people to follow.

The generous giver is someone whose heart generates love. It is not a sentimental or romantic love, but a love built on compassion and care, a love that is drawn to the broken and fragmented creatures and conditions of our world. This kind of love values human beings as those created in God’s image. It is accompanied by a righteous anger at systems and forces that perpetuate the suffering and ignorance of others. This kind of love cannot contain itself when there are opportunities to change lives and circumstances for those unable to change their own situation.

Following God’s example, the generous giver gives out of his or her very best. God gave His only Son; we give from the depths of our resources and abilities. We give not a token of our wealth, but sacrificially. As God sacrificed His Son, so we follow and give even those things that are most precious to us in our personal worlds: our time, our convenience, our creature comforts.

Finally, the generous giver is someone who, in a sense, lays the tracks for others to find eternal life. We do not give eternal life (only God does this), but we give that which makes it possible for others to find eternal life. As Biblical people we believe that a solid proportion of our giving should move in the direction of those activities that make Christ known, and help others to know what it means to follow.

It is the will of God that we become generous givers. But He would never ask us to do what He has not first done for us.

What are two ways God has been extravagantly generous to you? What impact have these gifts had on your life?
Jesus, the chief of generous givers

I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

2 Corinthians 8:8-9

Imagine sitting in the congregation when Paul’s letter to the Corinthian people was first read. Are the Corinthian Christians squirming as he pokes and prods at their spiritual resilience? They were a boastful, self-confident people. They reveled in their size, their accumulative talents, the sophistication of their people.

“I want to test the sincerity of your love,” Paul wrote. And how does he do it? By making some comparisons. To the Macedonians, in fact; and apparently, they failed the test.

But then Paul made an even more challenging comparison. “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,” he wrote. Presumably they did, but Paul described it anyway: He who was rich chose to become poor so that you might become spiritually rich. There is here what some might call a transfer of wealth – from heaven to Corinth. Jesus was the chief of generous givers.

The Bible is not easy on us when it comes to this business of generosity. We are instinctively selfish people. At first God set the bar low when it came to mandatory giving: a tithe, ten percent of one’s holdings. However, generous giving is another story. Generous giving starts when it hurts to give. When one moves in the direction of “poverty” in order to make someone else “rich.”

By richness we are not talking about adding to someone else’s net worth. Rather we are talking about spiritual richness or the richness that comes from living the life that God intended for all (not just the privileged) to live. Jesus set the pace in His incarnation and His atonement at the cross. He went from wealth to poverty that we might go from poverty to wealth. That is our model. That is our call.

Think of Christ; think of grace. He came to the world as a “rich” person. As Son of God, He was rich in position; as heir of all the treasures of heaven, Jesus was rich in inheritance. Prior to His incarnation, there is nothing He did not know, nothing He could not do; no one possessed greater amounts of power and knowledge. However, He exchanged all this richness for a form of poverty. “He became poor.” Poor, how? He became the sacrificial Lamb of God and forfeited His life that out of the atoning work of the cross, spiritually poor people (each of us) might become rich.

Genuine Christianity compels the true Christian to become a generous person because the central act of our faith is an act of generosity. “He became poor that we might become rich.” It cost Christ to transfer wealth-of-spirit to us.

The generous giver knows and understands that giving does not begin until there is sacrifice in alignment with the sacrifice of Christ. The Corinthians apparently never figured this out; the Thessalonians did. Perhaps it explains why one church was always sickly (the bigger and the wealthier church) and the other seems to have had a vigorous and exemplary life.

Describe an example from your life when you have given generously. What impact did this have on both you and the recipient?
Jesus, ultimate downward mobility

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Philippians 2:5-8

When a commander gave his charge to his troops just before battle, it was not unusual for him to cite the exploits of a past hero. He would remind his people of a brave soldier who had given everything – perhaps his own life – in order to win the battle. Nothing motivated men better than the model of a great soldier.

Perhaps this is why Paul turned his attention to Jesus. Asking the Philippians to climb a notch higher in their life together, Paul appealed to the greatest of all generous givers: Jesus himself.

Here is the perfect picture of the generous giving sequence. Jesus, being in the very nature of God, is the consummate picture of wealth as the Prince of heaven. But He did not hold on to what was rightfully His; He relinquished it. Then, having surrendered His privileges, He actually descended from His privileged position in the godhead to become not just a man but a slave. And died not the death of a normal slave but that of a criminal, sacrificed on the cross. From the highest of the high to the lowest of the low. Some have called this ultimate downward mobility.

Who of us could ever attain to this? Yet here we have the perfect picture to what the generous giver is called to – a life of giving that has Christ as its model. But that is not the end. For Paul shifted the picture back to the Heavenly Father. Therefore, God exalted Him (back) to the highest place. This is the resurrection and the exaltation due to Jesus when He ascended into heaven. There He has been given the name above every name. And this one who became a slave and a sacrifice becomes the one before whom all nations bow. He is the one who is ultimately designated Lord of all.

From the highest to the lowest and back to the highest. It is the great hymn of the generous giver. It is the reminder of what great sacrifice there is in generous giving. And it is the promise that the generous giver is never lost from the sight of God. That which is given away is but a small pittance compared to that which will be fully gained when we stand before God and hear Him say to His troops, “well done!”

What are some examples of how Jesus modeled generosity to His followers?
Jesus, God of basin and towel

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God: so He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him.

John 13:3-5

We come to the final hours of the so-called Holy Week. Before the night was over, Jesus would be – as He had warned – in the hands of angry men who did not rest until He had died.

And yet, there we find Jesus, in a borrowed room where He could spend His final hours with His friends and disciples. Judas – just hours from committing his heinous act – was there. So were the rest of the twelve. None of them was in touch with the ethos of the hour. Only the Lord “knew that the time to leave this world” had come.

It was in these moments of the Passover meal that we read, “(Jesus) now showed them the full extent of His love.” In a sense Jesus had been showing His love in escalating ways throughout the previous three years. His love had been demonstrated when He picked these men out of the rawness of their lives. He had seen in them qualities that no one else would have seen. He had stayed with them through their failures and betrayals. He had shown patience when they cowered in fear, embarrassed themselves in their selfishness, and reverted to the worst of human nature in arguing about who was the brightest and best. Love is the only word that describes the inclination that the Savior had toward this unruly group. And tonight, here in this upper room, they had shown few signs that everything they learned had yet reached their hearts.

He washed their feet!

The Son of God (read these words slowly and carefully) stripped Himself of His clothes, took the basin and the towel, and set Himself to washing.

Aspiring generous giver, take note. What qualifies as an act as truly generous has relatively little to do with the amount of money one gives. Generous giving begins with the posture of total humility. Here we find the Incarnate Prince of Heaven, of whom the angels sing, who sits at the right hand of Almighty God as Lord of all Creation: on His knees before ordinary men, washing the dirt and grime of Jerusalem’s pathways off their dust-encrusted feet. This picture must be riveted into our hearts. It shows us what we must become.

Who is the most generous person you’ve ever known? What impact has he or she had on your life?
The Holy Spirit, the outpouring of God’s love into our hearts

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.
Romans 5:5

From time to time in the Scriptures, we are reminded that generous giving began in the heart of God. It is at the very core of the effort God made to redeem mankind through the work of Jesus at the cross.

“God has poured out His love into our hearts,” Paul wrote. We cannot afford to consign these words to mere theological rhetoric. Paul had experienced this love. Having been raised and trained in a law-conscious frame of thought, he knew what it was like to feel as though he could never measure up. He knew the debilitating demands of a religion that said that one was never good enough.

And then he had come into touch with the grace of the God of Jesus Christ. This was a dimension of Israel’s God he’d never known. And once he became aware, he never stopped extolling the praises of a God who led with His love, His generous love. And that is what most of this chapter is about.

This was not a conditional generosity that flowed from heaven. “When we were still powerless,” Paul wrote, “Christ died for the ungodly.” These familiar words threaten to pass over our heads without the contemplation they deserve. They offer at least two messages to us. The first is that we were and are loved by God, through Christ, even though we have done nothing to deserve His affection. In fact, we have often thwarted that love, much as a teenager who irrationally rebels against his family.

The second thought is equally important: The God who gives to us so generously has provided a pattern of giving for us to adopt. At the heart of our giving is a certain mindset: We are to give to the one in need, the one who is weak, the one who is oppressed not because they beg us to do so...and not because they promise to praise us or flood us with appreciation...and not because we expect immediate results. But we give because we love!

What happens to our gift once given is between the receiver and God. It was ours to give, and our expectations and conditions stop there. If there is return, appreciation, or some remarkable result, so be it. We are permitted to delight in such a moment. But this is not why we give.

We give because God gave. We give as God gave. And we give as generously as God gave. And that requires great maturity and obedience on our part.

What does your current giving reflect about your understanding of God’s grace (unmerited favor) in your life?
The early church: a generous ethos

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of His possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had... There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Acts 4:32-35

Luke, author of Acts, traces the growth and development of the first church, stopping occasionally to give us a paragraph of commentary or overview of how things are going. This is one of the places. It is a general description of the ethos of the followers of Christ who lived in Jerusalem.

Once again liberality of spirit dominates the description. And there may be a reason for this. Luke is writing to a specific audience that knows little if anything about giving. It is a world that is dominated by an unfeeling, self-centered perspective toward the poor and the needy. If one has been shaped by such a world, then these characterizations of the early Christian community are astonishing.

Centuries before Plato had advocated a community that might live with everything held in common. But it had never really happened.

It was just an idea. But now it was happening! There were people who were actually so committed to one another that they had embraced each other as family.

It is a remarkable thing to be able to say, “there were no needy persons among them.” It was this mind and heart perspective that would explain much of the success of the early church. In a heartless world, the generosity and service of the first Christian generations was such a stunning contrast that people everywhere sat up and took notice. It is fair to speculate that Christian generosity and service did more to win people to the Gospel of Christ than all the preaching that was done.

We are told that people liquidated possessions, brought the proceeds to the apostles, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. And as if we needed to personalize this outflow of Christian love, Luke focuses attention on one man, Joseph – soon to be known as Barnabas. He epitomizes what is going on. Selling a field, he brought the entire amount to the apostles with the apparent charge that they should use it for anyone who was struggling.

Generous giving is the foundation of the Christian movement. It was there from the very beginning. Not that well organized – as we shall soon see – it nevertheless was the overflow out of hearts that had found the mercy of Christ. And as they had received mercy, so they felt compelled to give it in practical ways. And Barnabas is the first performer. Watch him! He is what God wishes every man and woman to be.

Read the Malawi story (next page) and answer: What are some tangible ways that today’s Christian church can model the generosity of the early Christian church?
Generosity is incredibly attractive. Whittier Area Community Church in Southern California experienced this truth recently. Its leaders had a collective vision to build a hospital for orphans in Malawi, a densely populated country in South-Central Africa.

The church’s leaders were convinced that God was calling them to collect a special Christmas offering to build the hospital. Yet when they determined that to build such a structure would cost $160,000, they became discouraged because the church’s largest-ever Christmas offering in their 35-year history was just $25,000.

Yet they pressed on.

The leaders cast the vision to the congregation, and the whole church got involved in amazing ways. Children set up Malawi lemonade stands in their neighborhoods to raise money. One couple gave the money they previously had set aside for infertility treatments to provide for African children, instead. One woman gave up a full month of physical therapy to join in the contagious spirit of generosity that swept over the church. And on and on. The stories were countless.

Yet, it wasn’t just the church members that got engaged. Believers in other congregations and even non-Christians from around the community learned about the Malawi hospital plan. New conversations sparked to life, and soon, giving commitments and words of support began pouring in from everywhere.

At last, the Christmas offering day came. Instead of $25,000 or even $160,000, on that one day Whittier raised over $500,000!

There was such an outpouring of generosity from both within and outside the church that its senior pastor, Bill Ankerberg, later exclaimed joyfully, “Generosity is the new evangelism!”

Indeed it is. But at the same time, this contagious spirit of unbridled generosity has historic roots, most notably in the book of Acts. And like the early Christian church, this modern day church attracted the attention of the world through its abounding pattern of giving.

This causes one to think: How effective would our churches be today at winning the world for Christ if we all displayed the same generosity as the early church...as Whittier Area Community Church?

>>> Watch a video version of this story at GenerosityBook.com
Mary – the fragrance of giving

Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

John 12:3

This account in the life of Jesus takes place during what is traditionally called Holy Week. Only a few days separate what is described here from the arrest and trial and crucifixion of our Lord.

A dinner was being held “in Jesus’ honor,” at the house of Lazarus in Bethany. Once again, it is noted, “Martha served.” Once an activist, always an activist.

But Mary was there as well, once again at the feet of Jesus. This time the emphasis was not upon listening but worshipping. And her worship was expressed in an act: the pouring of a pint of expensive perfume on the feet of the Lord.

The western and modern mind must bend to fit this story in order to appreciate what was being said here.

The washing of another’s feet was an act of ultimate reverence. It is more than a practical act of cleaning the dirt off of dusty feet. It was a signal of worship and adoration. And to do it not with water but with expensive perfume, and to use her hair rather than a towel, compounds the honor to a level we can hardly imagine.

Mary was a consummate generous giver. First, the value of her gift was truly sacrificial. For most women, this perfume was considered something of an insurance policy, something of value stashed away to live on when everything else was gone. If it was not used in this fashion, it was to be employed as a burial perfume, an honorable anointing of the dead.

The value of Mary’s gift revealed a level of unbridled devotion. Mary offered not only her treasure to the Lord, but also her public commitment. Her actions made it clear that Jesus was her Lord, and that by her actions she wanted everyone to know her life was in His hands.

Lastly, Mary’s gift was an unmistakable witness. The odor of the spent perfume filled the house. No one could be unaware of what she had done, and in Whom she believed.

In a world (both then and now) that often obsesses over techniques and ideologies, Mary is a refreshing woman. She did what others only talk about: she walked her talk. Her love for the Lord had no limits. What she had, what she was, what she could do: Everything was given to Jesus.

How is giving an act of worship and devotion to God in your life?
week 1 discussion

The following is a summary of the ideas and questions from this week’s devotions. Use them for personal reflection or small group discussion, and consider journaling to record your thoughts and impressions.

forward thinking

Which of these “forward thinking” points has the most meaning for you? Least meaning? Why?

- God is the first and most generous giver.
- We are most like God when we give.
- When we give, the world takes notice.

impact from the Malawi story

What was the most important thing you learned from the Malawi story? Have you personally experienced the attraction of generous giving? What do you believe God’s role is today in shaping the generosity of His children?

reflection questions

1. What are two ways God has been extravagantly generous to you? What impact have these gifts had on your life?

2. Describe an example from your life when you have given generously. What impact did this have on both you and the recipient?

3. What are some examples of how Jesus modeled generosity to His followers?

4. Who is the most generous person you’ve ever known? What impact has he or she had on your life?

5. What does your current giving reflect about your understanding of God’s grace (unmerited favor) in your life?

6. What are some tangible ways that today’s Christian church can model the generosity of the early Christian church?

7. How is giving an act of worship and devotion to God in your life?
“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10).

In light of this verse, doesn’t it stand to reason that the love of giving money moves us away from all kinds of evil, too? It certainly does, and freedom from evil is a beautiful thing.

The dangers of money and wealth often wreak havoc in our personal relationships and professional ambitions. And tragically, the same can happen in our local churches and the overarching Body of Christ itself.

Throughout His life and teachings, Jesus issues definitive warnings for those of us who have accumulated any sort of surplus of financial resources. It is as if He is saying...Watch out! Treat your money as though you were handling fire or even dynamite. Use it wisely and safely, and harness its energy to do good by disposing of it freely and joyfully. Properly managed, one “dynamite blast” of generous giving can erode the foundations of poverty in a third-world community. One blast can crack away at the spiritual darkness that many individuals and communities around the world currently face.

Yes, under God’s guiding hand, money that is strategically and generously given can do all of those things and more. But, of course, we live in a fallen world...one in which our culture and our money conspire to own us. They constantly whisper (and sometimes scream) that more is better, and they relentlessly attempt to carry us further away from the “true life.”

In this week’s devotions, we’ll learn about some of the hindrances of giving. Fear, worry, greed, loss – these and many more can easily distract us from a pattern of consistent, joyful generosity. Yet it’s comforting to know that Jesus tackled such issues head on during His ministry. So this week you will be studying His teachings warning about the pitfalls of your money and your “stuff.” And by moving away from these pitfalls, we’ll naturally move toward the freedom that comes with the true, generous life.
“It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

In this one simple sentence, Jesus expresses a truth so deep we could spend eternity trying to plumb its depths. Like many of Jesus’ sayings, it’s a paradox. Our human nature screams out just the opposite: *It is more blessed to receive than to give...accumulation is better than distribution!*

Ultimately, the true life of generosity requires trust on our parts... trust that Jesus’ words from Acts 20 are true and that our sacrifices will result in beautiful rewards for us and the recipients of our gifts – sometimes here on earth, and sometimes reserved for us in heaven. In short, generosity comes down to an act of faith in Him who not only first modeled the practice of joyful giving, but also promised the blessings that come alongside.

So far in our devotionals, we’ve learned that by dwelling on the generous nature of the Trinity and the generous ethos of the early church, our hearts and minds can undergo transformation. We’ve learned about the freedom that generosity brings from the entanglements of wealth. And now it’s time to reflect on a truth so compelling, that when we really “get it,” it takes our breath away: God promises great opportunity to those who give from a pure heart.

Over the next week, we will explore God’s unblushing promises of opportunity in response to our generosity – joy, eternal reward, life prosperity, contentment, community, and freedom, to name a few. Yet we must have faith and trust in Him that such promises will come true.

God blesses us with His money for a short time on earth, He empowers us with the Holy Spirit to equip us to give generously, and then He rewards us in so many ways when we trust Him, follow through, and give.

What a tribute to His amazing grace!
Everyone can “excel in the grace of giving” (2 Corinthians 8:7).

But how often do we recognize and celebrate those who do? We read the books of excellent Christian writers, we download and listen to sermons from excellent Christian preachers, we know the names of the excellent leaders and visionaries from today’s Christian parachurch organizations, and we worship God alongside the music of excellent Christian musicians.

But who is known for their excellence in giving? Which famous figures come to mind? Which everyday people from within your own church walls and in your sphere of influence can truly be called excellent in their giving?

If we look for such people with intentionality, odds are we’ll find them. Some people have the Spiritual Gift of giving, and the trail of their natural generosity is not hard to track. Others may have found it difficult to develop consistent patterns of giving, but they persevered and now set a wonderful example of the generous life.

Often the stories of great giving do not come from people of extraordinary wealth. True, there are philanthropists who have distributed vast sums of money to people and institutions worthy of their gift. But great giving is not determined by dollar amounts but by the amount of sacrifice. And once that standard is used, the playing field becomes level between the rich and the poor. In other words, one does not have to be rich to be a generous giver.

Over the coming week, we’ll discover how everyone can excel in the grace of giving as we look at seven principles that can ignite a lifetime of generosity. We’ll begin by making sure our hearts are framed with proper motives, next we’ll focus on the importance of incorporating love into our giving, and then we’ll explore the disciplines of secrecy, focus, and planning...all with the goal of finishing well when it comes to our giving.

And this pursuit will help lead us to the life that is truly life – true life for us, and true life for those that are blessed by our generosity.
1. God is the first and most generous giver.
   “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

2. We are most like God when we give.
   “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.” Philippians 2:5-7

3. When we give, the world takes notice.
   “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of His possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.... There were no needy persons among them.” Acts 4:32-34

4. Generosity helps free us from the dangers of money.
   “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?” Matthew 6:25

5. The antidote to materialism is generosity.
   “Then He [Jesus] said to them, ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.’” Luke 12:15

6. Generosity leads us to greater dependence on God.
   “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” Luke 16:13

7. Great blessings accompany the generous life.
   “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35)

8. Generous givers experience a life full of joy.
   “We want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.” 2 Corinthians 8:1-2

9. God’s power abounds in a community of generous givers.
   “All believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.... And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” Acts 2:44-47

10. Everyone can excel in the grace of giving.
    “But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see that you also excel in this grace of giving.” 2 Corinthians 8:7

11. Giving accomplishes great things when done in love.
    “If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.” 1 Corinthians 13:3

12. Excellent planning leads to excellence in giving.
    “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7
Now is the time for growth in your generosity. Now is the time for you to keep pushing on, moving forward, moving toward true life... the joyful, generous life that God is calling all of us to live.

So how do we move? Reread pages 86 & 87 and dwell on these three principles from that day’s devotional:

1. **Gain Perspective** – Acknowledge that God owns everything. He is the ultimate owner of all we possess, and we are merely stewards of those resources here on Earth to further His glory.

2. **Commit to a Percentage** – Make a firm decision to start today giving a percentage of your income that is small enough to be reachable but big enough to stretch you. Then, commit to grow that percentage each year.

3. **Identify Priorities** – Brainstorm and document a plan of action for your giving. Decide where God is calling you to give (to your church, to the poor, for evangelism, etc.), and outline your plan for how you will make that happen.

**action step: complete the giving agreement**

(opposite page)
Gordon MacDonald – Best-selling author, speaker, pastor, and teacher, Gordon MacDonald has authored numerous books, including *A Resilient Life*, *Who Stole My Church*, and *Ordering Your Private World*, which won the prestigious Gold Medallion Award. Gordon speaks at numerous conferences for church and business leaders and is presently Interim President of Denver Seminary. He is also an Editor-at-Large for *Leadership Journal*. The MacDonalnds live in Canterbury, New Hampshire.

Patrick Johnson – As Vice President of Church Services with The National Christian Foundation, Patrick Johnson works with church leaders in raising the overall tide of generosity and serving givers. He and his wife, Jennifer, have been married for 17 years, have four children, and attend Perimeter Church in Duluth, Georgia.

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Inside the soul of every Christian is a God-inspired desire for the generous life – a life tailored around His example of selflessness and sacrifice. But this generosity is often dormant. How do we shake ourselves from complacency to experience the joy of giving?

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life that is truly life.

1 Timothy 6:19