

WHOLE-LIFE GENEROSITY DEVOTIONAL

Living in Relationship, Gratitude, and Release

Skye Jethani



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Foreword

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT about why God calls us to live generously?

God reveals my heart, full of mixed motives, when I give:

- To earn God's love.
- Out of guilt.
- To be seen by others.

God wants so much more for you and me in this call to generosity:

- Instead of earning, He wants us to experience His love more intimately.
- Instead of guilt, He wants us to be grateful for His lavish provision.
- Instead of being seen, He wants us to see and respond to other's needs.

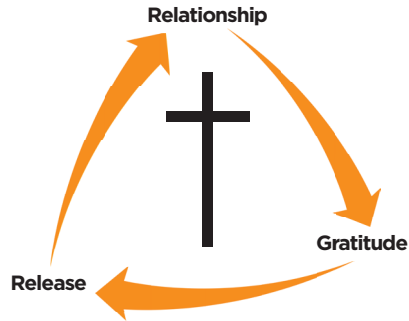
He wants us to be people who experience and practice whole-life generosity, which is defined as *“an overflowing life gratefully released to God for the blessing of others.”*

And here is the secret to this kind of generosity—we have to think of it as a way of living versus just an act of giving. We need to discover the essentials of a generous life.

To help us in this new way, Skye Jethani has masterfully written 28 days of devotions on whole-life generosity. He framed each week around the whole-life generosity cycle.

WHOLE-LIFE GENEROSITY DEVOTIONAL

WHOLE-LIFE GENEROSITY CYCLE™



Here are the topics for each week:

Week 1 Living with God: All of life is lived in relationship with God. That is the beginning point of our generosity.

Week 2 Living with Gratitude: All we have is received with gratitude from God. God is our Father/Provider who graciously gives us all things.

Week 3 Living with Faith: Out of His lavish provision, we overcome our fears of scarcity to give boldly.

Week 4 Living with Generosity: All of our life is released to God for the blessing of others.

You will notice in the center of the cycle is Jesus. As we keep our eyes on Him, our generosity flourishes. And as our generosity flourishes, we become more like Him. This “becoming” process is the highest motivation for a generous life.

Patrick Johnson
Founder, GenerousChurch



Living with God

Day 1

What God Really Wants

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27

EVERY RELIGION seeks to answer the question, “Why are we here?” Unfortunately, some Christians have unknowingly accepted a pagan vision of life that masquerades as a Christian one, and the result is a false understanding of our purpose, and this leads to a warped vision of generosity as well. So, let’s begin to set things right with a simple but essential biblical truth—God does not need you.

Almost every ancient creation myth says that humans were created to serve the gods. We were needed to build the gods’ temples, to provide food to the gods through our sacrifices and to appease the gods’ anger with our prayers and worship. Pagan mythologies said our purpose was to be the gods’ slaves.

This pagan vision of life is turned upside down by what God reveals about Himself in the Bible. Unlike the gods of Babylon, Egypt or Rome, the God of Israel did not need to be fed, clothed or housed by people. “If I were hungry, I would not tell you,” He said, “for the world and its fullness are mine” (Psalm 50:12). And the Bible is clear that God does not live in a temple built by people but has made the whole universe His dwelling place (see Isaiah 66:1). In other words, Israel’s God did not need people. He does not need your service, offerings or your generosity.

That explains why the story of creation in Genesis, unlike pagan creation stories, does not depict humans as God’s

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servants but as His representatives. He made the man and woman in His image and gave them dominion over the earth (see Genesis 1:28-29). That means people were made to rule the earth with God—in relationship with Him and under His authority. And we were created to rule the earth like God—in a manner that reflected His own character and generosity.

If we are to begin the journey toward Whole-Life Generosity, we must abandon the myth that God needs our service or gifts. The consistent message of Scripture is that God does not need you, and any god that requires human help or gifts is not a god worthy of our worship. Instead, the Bible says God wants you. He desires to live with you, and through you to reveal His goodness to the world.

>> Reflect on how you have thought about generosity in the past. What has your view of generosity assumed about your relationship with God?

Day 2

Welcome to the Party

*“Just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you,
[I ask] that they also may be in us.”*

John 17:21

A FEW YEARS AGO I was invited to a private reception at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. It was a delightful but surreal experience mingling with the greatest athletes to ever play the game, especially because I did not know who most of them were. The other guests were intimately connected to Major League Baseball or at least immersed in the game’s history. But not me. I’m not a baseball fan. As the son of an immigrant, I did not grow up playing or watching America’s pastime. So, why was I there? It turns out my wife’s great-great-grandfather was one of the early superstars of professional baseball, and our whole family was invited in his honor.

Entering into a relationship with Jesus is a bit like being invited to someone else’s party; one that started long before you showed up. Some people mistakenly believe that before creating the world God was lonely, like a party host with no guests. So, God made people in order to have someone to love—objects for His affection and guests for His celebration. This view implies that God created us to fill some deficiency in His love or incompleteness in His being. This is silly, of course.

The Scriptures reveal a very different picture—an eternal, divine party of unimaginable love and joy that existed long before humans arrived on the scene. Although it is hard to grasp, the Bible speaks of God living in relationship

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with Himself. He is a community; a party of three and yet eternally one. Scripture gives us a stunning, and admittedly mind-twisting vision of one God eternally existing in three persons—God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit. A full exploration of the doctrine of the Trinity is more than we can do in this devotional, but it is so foundational to our understanding of the Christian life that we cannot ignore it either.

The Christian belief in the Trinity means that God did not need to create us in order to express or receive love. Instead, He created us—and all things—from the overflow of the love shared between the Father, Son and Spirit. This is what separates the Christian vision of God from all others. We believe that relationship is central to God's being and central to our life with Him, and that has important implications for how we see ourselves and the source of our generosity.

If God did not create us because He needed to be loved or worshiped, then we can only conclude God created and redeemed us because He wanted us to share in the love that has been enjoyed between Father, Son and Spirit since before the world began. This helps us understand Jesus' prayer: "Just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, [I ask] that they also may be in us" (John 17:21). Jesus invites us to share in the life and love of the Trinity. He wants us to join God's party and live in perpetual communion with Him.

Just as God created us from the overflow of love experienced within the Trinity, our generosity is also to be the overflow of the love experienced in our relationship with God.

>> In the past, would you say your acts of generosity were rooted more in a sense of obligation or in the overflow of your relationship with God?

Day 3

Love Comes First

And behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Matthew 3:17

I ONCE SAW a bumper sticker that said: "JESUS LOVES YOU." Beneath it in a smaller font was added: "Then again, He loves everybody." While meant to be humorous, the sticker highlights an interesting dilemma. We want to be impressed and even overwhelmed by God's love for us. It should inspire our worship and provoke our obedience, but can we still be motivated by His love if it is indiscriminate? If every player gets a trophy, is mine still special? If God loves everyone, am I still special?

That question reveals a subtle error in our thinking. If we are claiming God's love as a way to elevate our value above that of others, then we have misunderstood the nature of divine love. Throughout the Bible we find God selecting people not because they are worthy of His love, but precisely because they are not. The fact that God loves a sinner like me makes Him special, it does not make me superior.

We fail to grasp this because the world has shaped us to think all love is conditional; that it must be earned. Therefore, when we hear, "God loves you," our inclination is to believe it's because we are more deserving than others. God's love, however, is unlike the world's.

Consider the Father's love for Jesus. At the moment of His baptism in the Jordan River, the voice of the Father spoke from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." The Father's love for Jesus may not surprise

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you, but the timing of His declaration should. The Father said He was pleased with the Son before Jesus ever preached a sermon, before He performed any miracles, before He called a disciple or confronted a Pharisee, before He overcame the temptations of the devil, before He endured the humiliation of the Romans or the suffering of the cross. At that time Jesus had not yet completed any of His messianic calling. The Father declared Jesus' identity as His beloved before He had accomplished anything. The Father's love came first, not the Son's obedience.

Like Jesus, God's love for you is unconditional; you cannot earn it. We have already explored how God does not need your sacrifices or service, and He does not require your worship or devotion. That also means you cannot deserve or demand His love. It is a gift, generously and lavishly offered and totally undeserved. And far from elevating you above others, knowing God's love ought to amaze and humble you.

Ultimately we do not obey our heavenly Father or practice generosity so that He will call us His beloved. It is precisely the opposite. He has already declared you to be His beloved child, and when the miracle of that unconditional love saturates into your being, it will propel you to obey, serve and give. God's love comes first.

>> What are ways you tried to earn God's love in the past? How is this conditional vision of His love evident in the way some people practice generosity?

About the Author

SKYE JETHANI is an award-winning author, speaker, consultant and ordained pastor. He also serves as the co-host of the popular Phil Vischer Podcast, a weekly show than blends astute cultural and theological insights with comical conversation. Skye is the president of Measure the Clouds, a non-profit organization helping a post-Christian generation discover a ravishing vision of life with God. He also leads SkyPilot Media which develops multi-media resources for use by churches, colleges, and community groups navigating the intersection of faith and culture.

He has been a sought-after consultant for groups facing challenges at the intersection of faith and culture, such as the Lausanne Movement, the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and the Interfaith Youth Core. He has authored five books and numerous ebooks, and he writes an email-based daily devotional for the smartphone generation called With God Daily. He lives with his wife, Amanda, and their three children in Wheaton, Illinois.



GenerousChurch equips leaders in churches to unleash whole-life generous disciples. Generosity in Scripture has a much more robust meaning than simply giving money. It is much richer and deeper than we often think and an important key to spiritual formation. Through leadership development, generosity resources, coaching events and other innovative tools, we help church leaders dig deep into the value of Whole-Life Generosity. And through our process, we help these leaders bring new vitality to the church by unleashing generous disciples.

Whole-Life Generosity is an overflowing way of being and living rooted in a vibrant relationship with God that gratefully releases all in love to bless others. It's what God does and it's how we want to live. Learn more at www.GenerousChurch.com