



Theme: Living and Loving Generously

“Generous Loving”

Weekly Memory Verse:

“Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God.” – 2 Corinthians 9:11

Spiritual Formation or Family Activity Ideas for the Week: As Thanksgiving approaches, explore the ways you spend and give money and possessions. Gather or create the following: play money, pictures of items a child might want to buy (toys, vacation, junk food) and pictures of ways to give (missionary, charity, church). Assign an approximate purchase price to each item. Pass out play money, giving each family member a different amount. Show your family their choices of items to buy and ways to give. Invite your family to spend their play money however they like by purchasing the items on pictures or giving to places/ people in need. After each person has spent their money, read Mark 12:41-44. Discuss the choices people made. Then choose one way to give money and/or time as a family this month. Ask God to help you become cheerful givers this season and always, showing love as you give.

Monday, November 22 – Read James 1:13-18. Last week we read about how the largely agricultural Israelites gave God their “first fruits,” the early produce from their crops. In today’s passage, James picked up on that idea and said all of us as Christ-followers are the “first crop” from God’s harvest. One sign of that is our generosity, which springs from our Creator, who gives us, “every good gift, every perfect gift.”

-  In various ways, the Scriptures keep reminding us that giving to God is always, “giving back,” not giving something we did not first receive. Scholar N. T. Wright wrote in his commentary *The Early Christian Letters for Everyone*, “James grounds his teaching in what is true about God himself, God the generous giver, the ‘father of lights.’ Everything that truly lights up the world is a gift from him.” Reflect on one or two times when you were most keenly aware that whatever you have in time, talent, money, or anything else is a gift from God.
-  When something bad has happened, straining your faith, have you ever said, (or had someone say to you), “Why is God doing this?” James was unequivocal: “No one who is tested should say, ‘God is tempting me!’” How can James’ assurance that, “Every good gift, every perfect gift, comes from above,” correct and reassure you when you’re tempted to hold God responsible for bad things?

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for reminding me that you are the source of good things, not bad. Let your generosity so fill my heart that I learn more and more how to act like you do. Amen.

Tuesday, November 23 – Read 2 Corinthians 8:3-7. This part of 2 Corinthians is a challenge for Bible translators. The Greek word translated as “grace” is used with a variety of meanings in 2 Corinthians 8-9. Paul urged the believers, who were God’s “work of grace,” to “be the best” by being generous and giving to the offering he was gathering for Christians in Jerusalem who were dying from famine. He told them that believers in other places found it a “privilege” to join in giving. He was confident they’d feel the same way.

 Few of Paul’s readers lived in luxury, allotting offerings from petty cash. The financial position of at least some of the Corinthians appears to have been relatively more secure than that of the believers in Jerusalem. However, according to some estimates, more than 90% of the general population of the Roman Empire lived at, near, or below subsistence level. Whatever your situation, do you see giving as a privilege that moves you to be as generous as possible?

 2 Corinthians 9:11 is our memory verse for this week. The Common English Bible version reads, “You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way. Such generosity produces thanksgiving to God.” Scholar William Barclay wrote in his commentary *The Letters to the Corinthians*, “The New Testament is extremely practical... It never forgets that something new and wonderful enters the life of the [person] who accepts God’s command as his law. But the rewards the New Testament envisages are... not the wealth of things, but the wealth of the heart and the spirit.” When have you found your heart and spirit enriched by being generous?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your grace was not abstract or distant. You gave yourself to change me for the better. I want that change to include counting it a privilege to join in the work of grace that giving for others is. Amen.

Wednesday, November 24 – Read 2 Corinthians 8:9 and 12-15. Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem faced persecution and hardship almost from the beginning. Paul was concerned for them and asked his Gentile Christian converts to give to help the members of their Christian family in Jerusalem. He laid out his ideal for the church: not “class warfare,” but deep-seated mutual concern and burden-sharing. They responded gladly, and he urged them to finish the collection in the same generous spirit Jesus had showed toward them.

 Giving is personal. Paul made it plain that neither God nor he was interested in comparing the amounts various people gave. What mattered more was the spirit in which they gave, in proportion to the resources they had. Discuss with family, and/or with a trusted friend, your reasons for giving. How can you set aside the question, “what’s in it for me?” Instead, how can you give based on how it will help others?

 What standards or guidelines do you use to decide the difference between “wants” and “needs” in choosing what to spend on yourself, and what to give? Have you ever given to an important project even though you felt, “My little gift can’t make much difference,” and then found great satisfaction at having had a part, however large or small, of a worthwhile effort?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I see an item online or in an ad, and my brain quickly changes from, “I want that,” into, “I need that!” Give me your wisdom to have that inner conversation honestly and in a generous spirit. Amen.

Thursday, November 25 – Read Ephesians 5:15-21. We hope you find much for which you can be grateful on this Thanksgiving Day. In the ancient world, as today, some people tried to numb themselves from life’s pains with alcohol or other escape mechanisms. That can be a downside especially on feast days like Thanksgiving. To Christians in Ephesus, Paul wrote that psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, and continually giving thanks to God were a much better choice with better life results.

🙏 The Message paraphrased Paul’s counsel in verses 18-19 this way: “Drink the Spirit of God, huge draughts of him. Sing hymns instead of drinking songs!” Can gratitude to God be in any way “intoxicating,” even habit-forming? Have you ever been in that condition, and if so, what was the experience like? What are some of the life benefits of a “gratitude habit”?

🙏 Researcher Robert Emmons wrote in his book, *How Gratitude Can Help You Through Hard Times*, “I asked people with debilitating physical illnesses to compose a narrative concerning a time when they felt a deep sense of gratitude... It was evident from reading these narrative accounts that gratitude can be an overwhelmingly intense feeling.” What can help you, even during whatever challenges you currently face, to sense the power of gratitude?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you know my circumstances. Remind me that your life on this earth was not an easy one, but you made it a good and generous one. Help me to do the same. Amen.

Friday, November 26 – Read Psalm 118:5-6 and 28-29. Psalm 118 was the last “hymn of praise” Hebrews sang at Passover as they recalled God freeing Israel from slavery in Egypt. Mark 14:23-26 showed that Jesus, on the dark night just before his arrest and crucifixion, likely sang, “The Lord is for me—I won’t be afraid. What can anyone do to me?” and “Give thanks to the Lord because he is good, because his faithful love lasts forever.” Even the darkness gathering around him couldn’t stop him from praising God’s eternal goodness.

🙏 The Psalmist asked, simply yet profoundly, “The Lord is for me... What can anyone do to me?” To what extent are you able to trust that God is indeed “for” you? How much stronger is your level of trust on a sunny morning when all is going well than on a cold, gray day when you’ve received sad news? During a year full of good news, personally or globally, than during a tough year?

🙏 Robert Emmons wrote in, *How Gratitude Can Help You Through Hard Times*, “It is vital to make a distinction between feeling grateful and being grateful ... We cannot easily will ourselves to feel grateful, less depressed, or happy... being grateful is a choice... that endures and is relatively immune to the gains and losses that flow in and out of our lives... this perspective is hard to achieve—but my research says it is worth the effort.” How did Jesus singing Psalm 118 just before he faced the cross show his choice to be grateful? How can you nurture gratitude for even basic gifts like shelter, food—and life itself?

Prayer: Loving Lord, my goal is to remember that you are for me, so I won't be afraid. My goal is to never forget that your faithful love lasts forever. I don't always reach that goal, yet. I ask your continued presence with me to help me grow toward the goal. Amen.

Saturday, November 27 – Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19. We saw on Tuesday that most people in the Roman Empire lived around subsistence level. But there were 10% or so who did much better than that financially. Obviously, some of them who had lots of money were members of Timothy's church. Paul didn't want this often-temporary wealth to blind them to God, "who richly provides" for our well-being. He'd seen people lose their faith when money was their life's highest goal (see 1 Timothy 6:9-10). He called Timothy and the members he served to a different view of "wealth." He said to actively "do good, to be rich in the good things they do, to be generous, and to share with others" was the best way to lay a good foundation for life today and in the future. Those choices would empower them to take hold of "what is truly life."

 So much around us insists that money is key to a fulfilling life. We are easily convinced that the more the better. As scholar N. T. Wright wrote in, *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters*, "Every advertisement, every other television program, many movies and most political manifestos are designed, by subtle and not-so-subtle ways, to make us say, 'If only I had just a bit more money, then I would be content.'" What are the main drivers of the way you live? What life goal(s) are you pursuing with all your might?

 Verse 19 of today's reading said a wealth of good deeds, generosity, and sharing allow God's people to, "take hold of the life that is truly life." Have you ever felt enough inner emptiness to make you reexamine your idea of what is "truly life"? When have you discovered that generosity and sharing are keys to a life truly worth living? What steps can you take today to limit the urge to look to mainly to money for happiness, fulfillment, and ultimate security?

Prayer: Generous, joy-giving God, you gave me the gift of physical life. You offer me the best, richest kind of inner life, built on generosity and caring. Help me to take hold of that gift and never let it go. Amen.