



"As a pastor I've had people come to me to confess that they struggle with almost every kind of sin. Almost. I cannot recall anyone ever coming to me and saying, 'I spend too much money on myself. I think my greedy lust for money is harming my family, my soul, and people around me.' Greed hides itself from the victim. [Its] modus operandi includes blindness to your own heart... Jesus warns people more often about greed than about sex, yet almost no one thinks they are guilty of it. Therefore we should all begin with a working hypothesis that 'this could easily be a problem for me.'"

Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*

We mark the presence of the Holy Spirit in a variety of ways. There are some who mark His presence through miraculous works like healings and words of knowledge. There are others who mark His presence through manifestations such as tongues or prophecy. Still others mark His presence as John Wesley did, with the sensation of a heart being "strangely warmed."

However, the book of Acts seems to suggest the consistent mark of the Spirit is something quite different: the presence of generosity in the life of a believer. Luke records that the Holy Spirit rearranged the devotions of the early believers, and the result was that they *"had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need."* (Acts 2:44-45) The author Luke even expands this claim a few chapters later: *"There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."* (Acts 4:34-35) The power of the Spirit seemed to change the way that the early believers saw the world around them, and that included their possessions, even as it related to things like security and identity.

The church has traditionally spoken of generosity in three areas: time, talent, and treasure. Each of these will certainly be a part of this practice series. However, the starting point needs to go a bit deeper: We serve a generous God of love who has poured His love out on us, so our generosity must begin with the way that we love those around us. The practice of generosity flows from there.

Both the teachings in this series and the practices in this booklet will focus both on the why and the how of living a generous life. The specific exercises in this booklet will stretch over the next four weeks and will tie directly to the teachings from Sunday morning. You can find the teachings at www.yorkalliance.org/sermons-embedded. We believe that it is impossible to gain the life of Jesus without practicing the lifestyle of Jesus, and Jesus intentionally chose to live in community. Therefore, while many of these practices focus on individual and family actions, they are best engaged, at least through discussion, in community. If you don't currently have a connection to a Community Group or another committed group of believers with whom to engage this material, you are strongly encouraged to get connected to one. You can get more information and sign up at yorkalliance.org/groups.

Our practice guides are typically developed in partnership with a ministry called "Practicing the Way." While PTW doesn't have a specific practice on generosity, I have relied on some of their auxiliary teachings in developing these practices. A few other resources that I have found especially helpful in preparing for this series and would recommend for further study: *Satisfied* by Jeff Manion, *The Treasure Principle* by Randy Alcorn, and *Counterfeit Gods* by Tim Keller, *More or Less* by Jeff Shinabarger, and *Giving to God* by Mark Allan Powell.

The weeks will be laid out as follows:

- Week One: Being Generous with our Love
- Week Two: Being Generous with our Resources
- Week Three: Scarcity and Abundance
- Week Four: Being Generous with our Lives

As much as generosity can and should be processed in community, be very careful of comparisons. As Jeff Shinabarger says, "The definition of *enough* cannot be defined by and for others. It's hard enough to process your own motivations, needs, and desires without trying to evaluate everyone else's. Work on your own personal definition of enough." As you journey through this practice, it's important to recognize that we live in the wealthiest country in the world and are part of the moment in time when the church is the wealthiest it's ever been. We have lots of opportunity to move, even if it's just a few steps.

Week One: Being Generous with Our Love

*“Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.”*

John Wesley, Letters of John Wesley

The philosopher Simone Weil once said that “attention is the highest form of generosity.” As we engage the practice of generosity, we must first admit that we live in a world of almost unimaginable affluence (whether or not that is our individual lived reality), and that there are many for whom radical financial *giving* still doesn’t have a radical impact on daily *living*. When all our attention is focused on dollars and cents, we can miss the fact that we all start with different balances in our accounts, quite literally. However, we all start each day with 24 hours. 1,440 minutes. 86,400 seconds. Every day.

To what or to whom will we give our attention? The apostle John makes the radical statement: “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.” God has given us His love and attention, most specifically through the person of Jesus, and now we are called to share that with one another.

Discuss in Community

Have somebody read 2 Corinthians 3:7-18. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- What jumps out to you in this passage?
- How would you describe the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant?
- If someone is being transformed into the image of Jesus, what are some of the things that will mark their life?
- How does freedom connect with being transformed into the likeness of Christ and living a life of love?

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group. Then, take a moment to have someone read through the individual practice below. As you think about engaging this practice this week, consider the following questions:

Questions for Community:

- How do you feel about engaging the practice of generosity?
- Are there areas in your life where you feel particularly generous right now? Are there areas that you are pretty certain from the outset that God wants to work on?
- What are some things that might need to change in your life for generosity to become a normal way of life?

Take some time to pray for one another. Consider pairing up family units (singles and couples) to help encourage one another in these practices over the next four weeks.

Individual Practice

The tangible practices of generosity must come from a changed and overflowing heart, or they will never become a way of life. Therefore, before engaging these more tangible practices, it’s vitally important to engage practices that help us experience the love of Jesus. As we contemplate the glory of Jesus, as found in any of His attributes, we are increasingly transformed into His likeness.

Practice #1: Read and meditate on the love of God in Scripture. Choose one of the following passages each day and meditate on the love of God in it: Exodus 34:6-7, Psalm 23, John 15:1-17, 1 Corinthians 13.

Practice #2: Meditate on the love of Jesus in the gospels. Read through one of the gospels (Luke is a good place to start for this exercise) and intentionally recognize the way that Jesus shows love to others.

Practice #3: Sit in the silent love of God. Contemplate the Trinity and His love for you, and then think specifically about His love, His joy, and His peace being directed towards you. Next, contemplate His love, His joy, and His people being directed towards other in your life. Finally, contemplate what it would look like for you to become a person of love and joy and peace.

Week Two: Being Generous with Our Resources

“One way to combat the grip money has on my heart is to consistently, faithfully, and generously give it away. The most anti-accumulation thing an affluent person can do is to systematically give money away. The discipline of giving frees my heart from a growing infatuation with my stuff. Giving is the natural outflow of the thankful heart. Sharing is living in step with a God whose heart is wildly generous. As Christians we rarely say, ‘no’ – but instead say ‘later.’ ‘I really desire to become a person of deep generosity, but just not now.’ But months become years. And later keeps getting delayed. Therefore, begin now. Begin now based on the clarity that God has already given you.”

Jeff Manion, Enough

If your boss tells you “job well done,” it often translates to a promotion, a bonus, or at least some kind of public accolade. Our modern world, however, is so individualistic and independent that we can often miss the language of the Bible that clearly gives us a “job” and places God as our boss: we have the job of a steward. Psalm 24:1 declares that all the earth belongs to God. His call, then, is for us to steward that which He’s given to us. That’s not solely, or even primarily, about how much we give or where we give it—as Randy Alcorn notes, “He doesn’t look just at what we give. He looks at what we keep.”

Being generous with our resources is a tell-tale sign that we know from Whom our resources have come and to Whom everything belongs. When we understand those things, generosity is the natural outflow of our lives!

Discuss in Community

Have somebody read Luke 18:18-30. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- What jumps out to you in this passage?
- What character do you resonate with in this story? Why?
- Why do you think Jesus asked the man to sell everything he had and give the money to the poor?
- Why was the man sad? How does that tie to the difficulty that Jesus taught for those with wealth to enter the kingdom?

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group. Then, take a moment to have someone read through the individual practice below. As you think about engaging this practice this week, consider the following questions:

Questions for Community:

- How was the experience of meditating on the love of God last week? Do you feel it impacted your heart in any way?
- Do you know anyone who has given to the point of really feeling the loss but still having joy and not regretting the gift? Have you ever experienced that personally? Tell the story.
- How do you see your faith integrating into your finances? Are they separate, connected, or only vaguely related? Why?

Take some time to pray for one another. Consider pairing up family units (singles and couples) to help encourage one another in these practices over the coming weeks.

Individual Practice

As we move toward the more tangible practices of generosity, you are encouraged to continue the practices from Week One as a foundation for these additional practices each week. As you approach each week’s practices, some of them will likely feel impossible at the outset. Don’t dismiss them right away, but instead, prayerfully consider ways that God might make a way for the practice to happen, or a creative alternative to the practice that fits your situation.

Practice #1: Look at your life and commit to changing one thing that will allow you to be more financially generous. Do it, and give accordingly.

Practice #2: Choose an organization or non-profit that you want to bless, and then either designate income over and above your normal giving or do something to generate resources to give to that organization.

Practice #3: Create a blessing fund, either in your budget or through a practice like #1. Designate money in that fund and look for ways that God is calling you to use those resources to be a blessing to those around you.

For each practice, don’t simply “do” it, but pay attention to how your heart responds, and take time to evaluate why that is happening.

Week Three: Scarcity and Abundance

"For me, and for many of us, our first waking thought of the day is 'I didn't get enough sleep.' The next one is 'I don't have enough time.'

Whether true or not, that thought of not enough occurs to us automatically before we even think to question or examine it. We spend most of the hours and the days of our lives hearing, explaining, complaining, or worrying about what we don't have enough... Before we even sit up in bed, before our feet touch the floor, we're already inadequate, already behind, already losing, already lacking something. And by the time we go to bed at night, our minds are racing with a litany of what we didn't get, or didn't get done, that day. We go to sleep burdened by those thoughts and wake up to that reverie of lack... This internal condition of scarcity, this mind-set of scarcity, lives at the very heart of our jealousies, our greed, our prejudice, and our arguments with life."

Lynne Twist, The Soul of Money

The question of "enough" is a challenging one, and one tackled head on in Jeff Shinabarger's excellent book More or Less. However, if we're not careful, it can be a question grounded in the wrong mindset. Our goal is not to reduce our wants or increase our resources, but to learn contentment. Paul wrote that he had learned to be content in all things (Phillipians 4) and that pairing godliness with contentment is even better (1 Timothy 6). Contentment is cultivating a heart that is satisfied, not because I've gotten everything I want, but because my heart is trained to be joyful and at peace even when I don't have everything I want.

Discuss in Community

Have somebody read Luke 12:22-31. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- What jumps out to you in this passage?
- How do the birds and the flowers relate to your life from Jesus' perspective? How does that make you feel?
- When you hear that 'your Father knows what you need' what is your response? Why is that?
- What does it look like practically to seek God's kingdom first, and for these other things to be added to you?

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group. Then, take a moment to have someone read through the individual practice below. As you think about engaging this practice this week, consider the following questions:

Questions for Community:

- How has this practice been going for you and your family?
- What are some ways that you could practice gratitude and contentment over the course of a normal week?
- What typically increases your sense of gratitude? Your sense of contentment?

Take some time to pray for one another. Consider pairing up family units (singles and couples) to help encourage one another in these practices over these last few weeks.

Individual Practice

The movement toward an abundance mindset is never about having more, but counter-intuitively, giving more away. It's only when we recognize the abundance of God that we can give of ourselves and our resources generously.

Practice #1: Tithing is a principle that has been a part of the church from the time of the giving of the law to Israel. It's never been intended to be a hard and fast rule (even the ancient Israelites gave far more than 10% when every part of the law was followed!), but it's a helpful guideline. Consider whether or not you are currently giving 10% of your income. If you are, reflect on your *giving*—should you be giving more? If you're not, reflect on your *living*—how might you get to the point where you are?

Practice #2: Do a brief inventory of your time during a normal week. Where do you see opportunity to capture wasted time and instead use it to pursue Jesus in a new way or love others practically?

Practice #3: Consider an act of radical generosity. It might involve your financial resources, your time, or your gifts—or it might fuse two or three of those together! How might you take what you've been given and make a major impact to someone else or in the world around you? While you might not be able to complete this act in a single week, plan how you could be radically generous, and then put a plan in place to do it!

Week Four: Being Generous with Our Lives

"I've heard people say, 'I want more of a heart for missions' I always respond, 'Jesus tells you exactly how to get it. Put your money in missions—and in your church and in the poor—and your heart will follow. Do you wish you cared more about eternal things? The reallocate some of your money, maybe most of your money, from temporal things to eternal things. Watch what happens.

*As surely as the compass needle follow north,
your heart will follow your treasure."*

Randy Alcorn, The Treasure Principle

Every museum has a curator. The job of a curator is to evaluate the many different pieces of art that are available for display and to determine the best way to show them. Some end up in a back room, saved for another time. Some are in a hallway or a space that doesn't have the best lighting. And some pieces, of course, are placed in the premium spots. All of this is done to tell a specific story, and to make sure that the most important pieces end up in the most important spots.

However, for the average museum goer, we are not well versed on the relative quality of the art or the story that's being told. We simply experience the curated museum. The pieces that are given the best spots are the ones that we most often find are capturing our attention—not because we are budding art critics, but because the curator did a good job of placing the right pieces in the right places. In the same way, being generous with our lives is a result of emphasizing the right values in our day to day lives and allowing the generosity of heart to naturally flow.

Discuss in Community

Have somebody read Matthew 6:19-24. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- What jumps out to you in this passage?
- Based on Jesus' teaching, why is it so important to guard your heart as Proverbs 4:23 suggests?
- What are some of the areas where you've placed your treasure, and how has that translated to your heart/loves?

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group. Then, take a moment to have someone read through the individual practice below. As you think about engaging this practice this week, consider the following questions:

Questions for Community:

- Have you sensed any change in your heart during this practice? If so, what kind of change are you noticing?
- In what areas would you say you are at least moderately generous? In what areas would you say you aren't really very generous at this point?
- What are some ways that you could arrange your life in order to develop generosity as a regular way of life?

Take some time to pray for one another. Consider pairing up family units (singles and couples) to help encourage one another in these practices as we wrap up this practice.

Individual Practice

As we get to the end of this practice series, the hope is that patterns would start to develop that would effect long-term change, making us more generous people. This last practice is intended to be more "fun" and will last several weeks. This is also a great time to go back to previous weeks to engage practices that you missed.

This practice is taken from Mark Scandrette's book "Practicing the Way" of Jesus and is called "Have2Give1."

Practice: Look at all of the stuff you own. Determine at least six categories of "stuff" that you will target—one category per week for as long as it takes to get through the categories you've identified. After determining categories, you'll take inventory and, as the title of the experiment suggests, give one away for every two that you have. Clothes, kitchen items, books, movies, shoes, sports equipment, furniture, technological items, bank accounts (yes, that radical!) and even cars are fair game. Make wise decisions about what to do with all of that stuff. Targeted donations, sales with the money being donated, etc. Beyond decluttering, the point is to recognize how much more we have than we actually need, and how to live open-handedly and generously, seeking the Kingdom instead of our security or the stuff of this world. (Matthew 6:33)

