

Series: Characteristics of a Dynamic Christian
Title: The Disciple of Giving
Text: Matthew 6:25-34

Introduction

"Among the rich, you will never find a really generous man even by accident. They may give their money away, but they will never give themselves away; they are egotistic, secretive, dry as old bones. To be smart enough to get all that money you must be dull enough to want it." — G.K. Chesterton, A Miscellany of Men

"You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you." — John Bunyan

In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus said, "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? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you, by worrying, can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ``What shall we eat?" or ``What shall we drink?" or ``What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Have you ever noticed that truly generous people are some of the most joyful people in the world? Is that a coincidence? I don't think so. There are a lot of selfish people in the world. But none of them have a deep and lasting joy. Selfish people are usually restless and discontent. Any happiness they experience is generally short-lived.

Devout Christians have learned the secret of generosity and have developed a discipline of giving. The joy of a devout Christian is not dependent on things going their way or getting what they want. Their happiness is rooted in an active relationship with Christ. A spirit of generosity and passion for life flows out of their desire to be more like Christ. Their actions reflect the heart and spirit of God.

If you could describe God in three words, what three words would you use? John said in his Gospel, "God is Love!" Friedrich Nietzsche, on the other hand, said, "God is dead!" What say you?

Devout Christians have experienced God's love and have adopted His spirit of giving for themselves. One of the great themes of the gospels is generosity. Jesus' first

miracle in Cana was a miracle of abundance and generosity. Throughout his earthly life, Jesus blessed people by teaching them, feeding them, healing them, comforting them, and providing spiritual leadership. And even in suffering and death on the cross, Jesus laid down his life in the ultimate act of generosity.

The Gospels are a story about the triumph of generosity. Generosity is at the heart of the Christian life, just as it is at the heart of the Gospel. Through our generosity, we bring the love of God into the life of others in very real and tangible ways. God is by his very nature generous. God wants us to experience his generosity, and in turn, be generous.

God invites us to experience a joyful life of selfless generosity. The world tries to seduce us into living a selfish life. God proposes trust, while the world promotes fear. God gives abundantly, but the world is consumed with acquiring things. God calls us to stewardship while the world clamors for ownership. The world encourages entitlement when everything is really a gift from God. God invites us to look out for our neighbor, but the world tells you to look out for yourself. God operates from abundance while the world hoards everything as if there were a scarcity.

Generosity begins with gratitude. Are you grateful for all the blessings God has poured out upon you? Devout Christians live in a constant state of gratitude! Devout Christians have disciplined themselves to recognize the blessings of God that have come to them through people and opportunities and possessions. They have learned to recognize and discern the goodness of God in the most trying and demanding circumstances of life.

Devout Christians believe that God is good. It's impossible to be angry and glad at the same time! The next time you're in a lousy mood, ask yourself why you're so ungrateful? Because when we step away from gratefulness, we find ourselves irritable, restless, and discontent. The world wants you to focus on what you don't have and tells you you're entitled to bigger and better things. But God invites you to be content with what you do have with a spirit of gratefulness and thankfulness.

I. Devout Christians are Good Stewards

When we speak about generosity, it's usually in the context of stewardship in the areas of time, talent, and treasure. Stewardship is the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to our care.

Our time, talent and treasure are all on loan to us from God. One day you will have to give an account for the way you managed them. The world says to do whatever you want with your time and talent, and as for your treasure—"It's your stuff!" "You earned it; it belongs to you." But when we forget the real source of things, disorder begins to reign in our lives. God wants to lead us out of the chaos of this world and into his divine order. But it all begins with embracing a life of generosity.

Would you say you are a good steward of what God has entrusted to you? Do you take time to pray? Do you read the Bible? The New Testament truth is that you cannot be a generous steward without developing the discipline of giving.

Devout Christians are faithful stewards of God's resources. Devout Christians are generous with their resources because they believe God's supply is inexhaustible. They feel no need to turn to greed because they have put their trust in God's endless supply.

Do you know there is enough food being produced in our world to feed every person on the planet? And yet more than two billion people in our world are starving and lack food right now! More than 20% of the children in the United States live in poverty. There are very few people willing to adopt Mother Teresa's counsel to "live simply so that others might simply live!"

Steven Spielberg produced the movie *Schindler's List*, a film depicting the Holocaust of WW2. At the end of the film, when the war is over, we see Oskar Schindler and his wife fleeing for their lives. Schindler was by no means a perfect man, but what he did was heroic. Still, he felt he had not done enough and thinks he could have and should have done more. Millions around him were doing nothing, but Schindler he knew in his heart that he could have done more. Today there are fewer than four thousand Jews in Poland, but more than six thousand descendants of those Jews Schindler saved are living somewhere in the world. Most of us are far from experiencing the heroic generosity of Oscar Schindler. He went to extraordinary lengths, even risking his own life, to save Jewish lives during the Holocaust. But ask yourself this question, "Would you be ashamed to come to the end of your life only to realize that you could have done so much more for the cause of Christ?" We cannot do everything, but does that mean we should do nothing?

Devout Christians know they cannot save everyone, but they are committed to sharing God's love and grace with those that they can. Devout Christians realize the need is ever-present, and they believe that Christ is the solution for every problem and every person.

II. Devout Christians are Generous

There are so many ways to be generous. Devout Christians are immensely disciplined givers. They look for ways to demonstrate their generosity. Devout Christians are generous Christians. Generosity is their trademark. They are generous with their time, their talent, and with their money and possessions. But their generosity goes way beyond these commonly defined methods of giving.

Devout Christians not only have a spirit of generosity but a spirituality of being giving people. Their generosity reaches deep into every corner of their lives. Being generous is not just something that they do; it is a part of who they are! They can't help themselves; their giving is not primarily motivated by external circumstance or need but rather prompted internally by the Spirit of God!

Devout Christians are generous parents and grandparents. Their neighbors and colleagues acknowledge them among the most generous people they know. They are also generous with their praise and their appreciation. They are generous with their encouragement, and they are generous with their compliments.

The average Christian may consider being generous, but Devout Christians look for opportunities to be generous. They are generous because they have a profound sense of gratitude to God for all the blessings he has given them. Devout Christians see themselves as recipients of the incredible generosity of God. They want to express their gratitude by following Jesus' example of generosity to others.

The discipline of generous giving is a vital part of being a dynamic Christian. But sharing your possessions is only part of it. Devout Christians are generous with virtue. Dynamic Christians love people! They show their love for people by giving of themselves. They demonstrate their love for God through generous praise and sincere gratitude. They love to spend time with God. They pray. They read the Bible. They regularly go church to worship God, and they intentionally honor the Sabbath.

Devout Christians are generous with their patience and kindness. They are not jealous or envious. They aren't full of pride and don't boast about their accomplishments. They are not selfish or rude. They don't demand to have things their own way. They aren't moody or irritable or touchy. They don't hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do them wrong. They are never glad about injustice but rejoice whenever the truth wins out. They are virtuous and loyal, no matter what the cost. Their love is so deep and generous that they will always believe in you, always expect the best of you, and always stand their ground defending you.

The scope of their generosity goes well beyond that of the average Christian.

III. Devout Christians Give What They Have

Most everyone thinks they are generous; that is until they have to part with some of their time, talent, or treasure. Some think that those who give the most do so because they have the most. But statistically, that is just not the case. Usually, the most generous givers are not those with the largest bank accounts or unlimited resources. Jesus said the woman who gave two mites out gave any of the other contributors.

Devout Christians don't find the time to do things for God; they make time to do it. They surrender themselves to the will of God and look for opportunities to share God's love and grace with others. Very often, it's the busiest people who are the most generous with volunteering their time.

If you can't measure it, you can't change it. Measurement is key to personal growth. Some things are difficult to measure—like how generous you are with your patience or forgiveness. Other things are easy to measure, such as how generous

you are with your money. But there is something that binds all these together. Those who are unwilling to be generous with their patience or forgiveness probably aren't generous with their money either. People who are not generous towards God are not usually generous towards others. There may be many ways to express your generosity, but they are all interconnected and flow from one heart.

What if God were to ask you to be a more generous person. Would you be willing? Many people think that generosity is only about money. But nothing could be further from the truth. Generosity goes much deeper than that. Giving money is only where it all starts. However, money is a tangible way to measure your generosity. If you can't be generous with your money, you'll never be generous with your heart. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

There are many ways to be generous, but generosity will always cost you something. Nothing will relieve us of our need and responsibility to give financially. Do you know that Jesus said more about money than he did about any other subject? You will never become more generous unless you begin to understand the spiritual value of money.

Paul writes about this in 2 Corinthians 9:6, "But this *I say*: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one *give* as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: "HE HAS DISPERSED ABROAD, HE HAS GIVEN TO THE POOR; HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER." Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! (2Co 9:6-15 NKJV)

Devout Christians develop a practical spirituality that includes their money and causes them to become the most generous people in the world. Their generosity is both authentic and measurable.

Conclusion

The path that devout Christians take to become more generous with money is often called tithing or giving 10 percent of their income to God. How much should you give? I don't know. Only you can answer that question. I do know that tithing is deeply rooted in the Old Testament. The New Testament's prescription is much more difficult. In the New Testament we are encouraged to give according to what

we have; the more we have, the more we should give, and we almost all have so much more than the people of Old Testament times.

According to research by the Barna Group, only 8 percent of Christians tithe on their income. In 2007, Christians in the United States gave less than \$1,500 on average to their church or various charities. And that figure has decreased since then to less than \$800 a year in 2019. That means the average believer has not made the correlation between giving and receiving when it comes to their faith in God.

Devout Christians know that God is not stingy when it comes to giving out His blessings, and they follow His example of generosity. Devout Christians believe they can never out-give God! They are courageous givers because they know that the more generous they are, the more joy and rejoicing they will experience because of God's generosity towards them.

I have never met anyone who felt they had enough. It doesn't seem to matter how much you have; you always tend to think you need more. The average Christian tends to give away only a fraction of their surplus, and most give what they never really needed to begin with.

Sacrificial giving costs us and requires us to go without something. Think about God's sacrifice to provide salvation. The poorest among us has enough to be generous. Where do you stand when it comes to giving? Here's a simple way to measure it.

Take some time this week to calculate what you gave to the church last year. (You can always get a giving statement from the church if you need one.) Calculate what percentage your giving was in proportion to your annual income. For instance, if you made 30,000 dollars last year and gave 3,000 dollars to the church, you gave 10 percent of your income. One percent would be 300 dollars. Once you have determined that number, I challenge you to give at least one percent more of your income this year than you did last year each year until you reach 10 percent.

We have goals for everything in life. So why not set some generosity goals for yourself this year? You will be amazed at how this approach to generosity will change you. So how generous do you plan to be? Will you be average or devout?