

Stewardship⁺



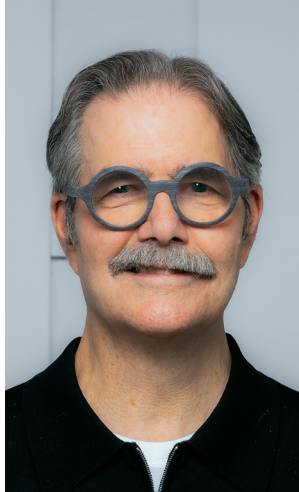
The Generosity Agenda

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The Generosity Agenda



don't think that this will be a huge shock to you, but human beings aren't naturally generous. If sin causes us to live for ourselves, and it does, then one result of this obsessive self-focus is the effect it has on the way we think about and use our money. For most of us, the thing that drives the vast majority of our joys and sorrows when it comes to money is what it's doing or not doing for us. When we think of money, we tend to think first of ourselves: what do I need, what do I want, what dream can this money finance, what would I like to do that I have never done before, etc. I am not suggesting that we are

never generous but that, for most of us, when it comes to money, generosity is a snapshot in a long video of self-interest.



Writing this has confronted me with what a life of generosity really looks like and how much I need to grow. It has exposed patterns of selfishness and waste in my spending habits and made me less self-congratulating in the places where I am generous. During my much earlier and much poorer pastoral days, I bought into the self-excusing delusion that my struggle to give was the result of barely having enough money to live on. But now that I am not as poor, I have found that to be fundamentally untrue.

The biblical story is a generosity story. No words capture the essence of this story better than these:

For God so loved the world that he gave...

JOHN 3:16

Having money in the proper place in your heart and life is not just about good budgeting and freedom from debt; the biblical standard is much higher. You know you have money in the right place in your heart when the culture of acquisition has been replaced in your heart with a culture of generosity, where joy in giving overwhelms joy in getting. Could it be that the primary



purpose for money in your life is not that you would live but that, as God has lavishly done in your life, you would give? Could it be that we need something fundamentally deeper than a commitment to a good budget and

reasonable spending? Could it be that what we really need is a brand-new understanding of the purpose for money, one driven by the gospel story? Could it be that reducing generosity to a commitment to tithe completely misses the point of money in God's gospel economy? Could it be that true transformation of our money lifestyles will only ever begin with the gospel of Jesus Christ setting the agenda for our spending and not a few isolated money passages taken out of their wider gospel context?

The Best Generosity Story Ever



Let's unpack the generosity story, which runs throughout the main body of Scripture. It really is true that the narrative in the Bible is a story of God's giving, giving, and giving again. If you read your Bible through the lens of generosity, you will be blown away by how lavishly generous your Lord is.



The Generosity of Creation

How can you even summarise the incredible gift of the physical creation? Whether it is the beauty of a sunset; the design of animals of every color, shape and size; the beauty of a single flower; the glory of a majestic tree; the patter of rain on the leaves of a tree; the individual timbre of each person's voice; the smell and taste of a thousand different spices; the sweet delicacy of a human kiss; or the magnitude of a mountain range, we have been blessed way beyond our ability to recount. And not only did God create a magnificently interesting, intriguing,

beautiful world, but he designed it to be our dwelling place, and he created us with just the right collection of senses to take it in and enjoy it.

Creation is the generosity of God on physical display for all to see

Understanding generosity doesn't begin with a biblical call to give; it begins with awe at how God demonstrated his generosity in gifting us with the world we live in. It is so gloriously complicated and multifaceted, so deeply

intriguing and entertaining, that we are still unpacking its glory, understanding its functions, and making new



discoveries. And there are times when we all run to the physical, created world to be amazed, to take in its beauty as a retreat from the concrete jungles we have created, or just to take in its peace. Creation is a lavishly generous gift.

But there is more. In creating the world, God created a means by which we would be aware of him and learn things about him. One of the most precious things about the gift of creation is that it was purposefully designed to reveal the most important thing ever – the existence and character of God. Creation is the generosity of God on physical display for all to see.

The Generosity of the Covenant

Hear these amazing words that God spoke to Abraham: “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” (Gen. 12:2–3). The world that God created, that he owns and holds together, is now populated by self-oriented, rebel idolaters, so why would he ever want to bless even one man, let alone the whole earth? Abraham too was an idolater, who lived with no heart toward God whatsoever, yet God came to him and made eternal promises that would alter not only the direction of his

life but also the course of human history. This covenant confounds the normal way we think of things. It confronts us with the fact that God makes covenant with us, with all of those glorious promises, not because of what is in us but because of what is in him.

Thus it is with generosity. Generosity is the result not of the good in the one

Generosity is the result not of the good in the one receiving but in the good-heartedness of the one giving

receiving but in the good-heartedness of the one giving. The God who comes with such amazing promises to



Abraham does so because he is amazingly generous. His response to wayward, idolatrous human beings is to lavish the blessings of his presence and promises on them, blessings and promises that not one of them would ever

have the ability to earn. God's covenant blessings and promises are his generosity on display.

3

The Generosity of Freedom from Slavery

It's the loving generosity of God that would cause him to raise up Moses and harness the forces of creation to be faithful to the promises that he made to Abraham and his descendants. Think about the difference between the Lord's generosity and ours. We often make generous promises to one another, but then we get distracted, tired, and forgetful, lose interest, or realise that we are unable to deliver what we have promised. Our generosity is fickle and often failing, but not the Lord's. His generosity is faithful and persevering, so he never

ever forgets, fails, or turns his back on anything he has promised. So with a generous and faithful heart, the Lord unleashed his almighty power in a display like the world had never seen before and rescued his children from captivity, defeating the feared army of Pharaoh on the way. Because God makes generous promises, he is generous in the use of his power to fulfill those promises.

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4

The Generosity of the Law

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he Israelites were brought out of slavery, but they were poor, traumatised, powerless, ungoverned, and living in a fractured culture.

By God's generosity they had been given life, but they didn't know how to live. So God blessed them with the most wonderful and practical of gifts, the gift of his law. Even as he was giving the gift, their hearts were wandering from him, yet he still gave. This is yet another demonstration of the truth that true generosity is always ignited by what's in the heart of the giver and not by what's in the heart of the receiver.

God laid out to those confused and broken people how to live before him

Generosity is sympathetic and understanding. Yes, the Lord was the Lord of Israel, and he had the right and authority to command their worship and obedience, but there was so much more going on there. In condescending love, God laid out to those confused and broken people how to live before him, how to live with one another, how to handle conflict, how to deal with foreigners and

surrounding nations, what to eat, how to do business with one another, how to properly worship him, how to mete out justice, and a whole host of other things. He gave the law not just as an exercise of his authority but as a testament to the extent of the generosity of his love.

The Generosity of the Promised Land

The spies came back from the Promised Land and said, “It is a good land that the Lord our God is giving us” (Deut. 1:25). You would think that there would have been celebrations of thanksgiving throughout the tribes of Israel. God was delivering on his promise. Not only would they have a home, but a fruitful one where they could live and thrive. But that was not the response of the Israelites, because the people already inhabiting the land were greater and taller than the Israelites, and their cities were fortified. In fear and anger God’s people turned

against their generous Lord, even though he had promised to fight for them. But in spite of all of this, God did deliver the land to them, and he did unleash his power to defeat their enemies.

*His generosity
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Later there would be a palace and a temple in that land, and generations would be born there into lives of prosperity. This lets us know that God is not just generous in the fulfillment

of his promises, no matter what, but he is also lavishly generous in his patience. I have to confess, as I reread



this history once again, that I would have turned my back on Israel in the face of their idolatry at Sinai, but our Lord is not like me. He is patient, kind, and faithful. He doesn't just react to the moment; his generosity has an eye to the

future. His generosity is not just a present gift but also an investment in a legacy. He didn't abandon fickle and fearful Israel, because out of Israel would eventually come his most generous gift, and that gift would change the lives of all who believe.



The Generosity of the Incarnation

Perhaps no greater definition of generosity is to be found anytime or anywhere than in the fourteen words found in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son.” The world lay in ruins, broken and groaning because of sin and unable to function as God intended. The world was populated by self-obsessed sinners living as active rebels against God’s presence and glory, but God’s response was not, in righteous judgement, to destroy the world and to start again. No, God’s response was so amazingly generous that it’s hard to wrap our

brains around it. He did not punish in righteous anger, but he gave in redeeming love. He gave the only gift that could rescue people and this broken world—the gift of his only Son, the Lord Jesus.

The birth of Jesus was marked by celebration and suffering. The angels were right to sing their song, because no one had ever before given a gift like this one. This gift had

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the power to change the world forever. This could reconcile people to God and restore the sin-scarred



world to its former glory. This really was the gift of gifts, worthy of a host of celebratory songs. But the birth of Jesus was marked by suffering as well. His cradle wasn't the cradle of a king. There was no fine wood, no silk sheet

or soft, velvet blanket. He was laid in a feeding trough, surrounded by barn animals. Here we are confronted by the fact that generosity is only as good as the extent of its willingness to sacrifice. Here was the King of kings suffering willingly, because it was the only way to deliver the generous promises made for generations. There is joy in generosity, but it is always tempered in some way by sacrifice. So it is with the amazing gift of the Messiah, Jesus.

7

The Generosity of the Cross and Forgiving Grace

This really is the ultimate definition of generosity. There is nothing that could compete with Christ's willingness to suffer injustice, torture, and death for us. What could be more generous than for a perfect man to be willing to bear

the penalty of people who ignore his presence, steal his glory, and rebel against his divine authority? But Jesus wasn't just willing; he found joy in doing so. So it is with generosity, which is never begrudging, never forced, and motivated more by joy than by duty.

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The Generosity of Accepting Love

The generosity of our Lord is so immense that it was not enough for him, by the sacrifice of his Son, to cancel the penalty that was against us. Rather, as an act of tender and generous love, he welcomed us into his family. Because

*We enjoy the
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of his generosity, we don't enjoy just freedom from guilt, shame, and punishment, but along with these we enjoy the full rights and privileges of our new identity as the children of God. God no longer relates to us as a condemning judge, but with the accepting love of a Father. Broken by sin, we never could have earned a welcome into God's family. It is only ever enjoyed as the fruit of his generosity.

9

The Generosity of Scripture and the Church

In lavishly generous grace God exercises his wisdom and power to provide what is needed for our instruction, our protection, and our ongoing transformation. His Spirit instructs us through the Word and the teaching of his church. God

uses the mutual ministry of the body of Christ to encourage, confront, protect, guide, and mature us. He really does generously provide for us everything we need to be what he has called us to be and to do what he has appointed us to do.

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church*

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The Generosity of Daily Mercy

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et with all these gifts, we still have wandering desires and fickle hearts. We still forget him, put ourselves in the center, and live for our own glory. There are moments when we willingly step over his wise boundaries, and we are not free of the temptation to chase after idols. There are times we take credit for what only he could produce and complain about what he has provided. Yet, in the generosity of patient mercy, he doesn't strike us in anger. No, he pours mercy down on us, mercies that are fresh every day and form-fit for the trials,

temptations, opportunities, and responsibilities of each day. There is not a day that we aren't blessed with the generous mercy of the King of kings.

*There is not
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kings*



The Generosity of Eternity

Not only does God generously bless us with spiritual riches in the here and now, but he invites us to an eternity that is rich beyond our imagination. In generous love, he opens to us the doors of the new heavens and the new earth, where sin, suffering, and sorrow will be no more, and we will live in peace and harmony with him and one another forever without end.

It really is true that the great redemptive narrative is itself the world's best and most important generosity

*It really is true
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important
generosity story*

story. This means that your hope in life and death rests on the fact that your Lord is a bountifully generous King, who sent his Son to set up a kingdom marked by its generosity of love, grace, forgiveness, daily mercy, and the faithful supply of all we need. So when he invites and calls us to seek his kingdom rather than work to store up physical earthly treasures, he is calling us not just to value spiritual things more than we value

earthly things, but to be part of his generosity mission on earth. So much of the way sincere Christians look at money, finances, and budgeting seems to miss this gospel theology of generosity.

Without this gospel theology of generosity, discussions of money become about how to steward what God has given you, how to keep out of debt, how to fulfil your contracted financial obligations, how to have financial stability, how to anticipate your financial needs upon retirement, and how to ensure that you give God a tithe. None of these things is wrong, and all of them are helpful in some way, but the whole plan is devoid of the larger considerations of the call to be God's ambassadors on earth. The normal plan is functionally devoid of gospel perspective and vision, and because it

is, it focuses money and finances on personal need rather than on God's grand gospel agenda.



Could it be that when it comes to finances, we have the whole thing upside down? When we think of

money, we tend to think of it as God's primary means of providing for us and, oh, yes, he has called us to give. Could it be that Scripture teaches that God's primary purpose for money is that we would be tools of his generosity mission on earth, and, oh, yes, he also uses it to daily provide for us? Matthew 6:19–34 sets up a clear contrast between storing earthly treasures while obsessing about personal needs and seeking God's kingdom. Jesus teaches that financial sanity begins with believing that you really do have a heavenly Father who will supply what you need. The radical message of Jesus is that that burden is his and not ours.

God's promise to provide everything that we need is all over Scripture. Consider these passages:

And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 4:19

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.

MATTHEW 6:31–32

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

MATTHEW 7:11

Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!

LUKE 12:24

Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food?

JOB 38:41

The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

PSALM 34:10

So because God has taken the primary burden of provision off our shoulders and placed it on his own, we are freed to have a grander vision for our money than just personal provision. Our heavenly Father knows what we need and has promised to provide it. Therefore, by his generosity, we are free from financial self-focus and free to be part of his generosity mission on earth. God loves a cheerful giver because he is the ultimate cheerful giver, and whenever we live generously, we not only honour his generosity to us but, through our generosity, we point others to him.

As we've noted, God's goal for our financial life is that it would be driven by the grand call of his kingdom, not by personal need and provision. When we reverse

*It is a call to
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that order, we never end up celebrating God's generosity and committing to a generous life. If, with our money, we start with ourselves, we will never escape the endless needs, wants, and demands we place on our money. Our money will be dominated by self-focus, and we'll try to somehow squeeze God into

the plan. We will seek our welfare and hope we have something left for his kingdom, instead of seeking his kingdom and believing that, as we do, he will faithfully provide.

This is not a call to quit paying our bills and to stop buying groceries. Rather, it is a call to examine our financial lives and make sure that we have the order right. Second Corinthians 5:14-15 tells us that Jesus came so that those who live might "no longer live for themselves." Since the DNA of sin is selfishness, the

huge money temptation we all face is that our thoughts, desires, and decisions about money will be dominated by what we want, what we think we need, and how we feel at the moment. You could argue that the sole



reason that money is a problem for any of us is the selfishness of sin. And you could further argue that this side of eternity, when it comes to the use of money, the kingdom of self will always compete for our wallets with the kingdom of God.

Like everything else in life, we need more than a set of sound financial principles and rules. What we really need is rescue and surrender. We need to be rescued from ourselves by a powerful and gracious Saviour, and we need to surrender to his wise and loving plan for us and our money. We can't be satisfied with a better budget that has a line item for a tithe if that budget continues to be driven somehow, someway by self-interest.

A New Paradigm

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e need a brand-new way of thinking about money, a way that is rooted in the gospel story and its narrative of the lavish grace of God, most powerfully pictured in the amazing gift of the Lord Jesus. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God frees us from our bondage to ourselves (in terms of money, that means always starting with our interests and concerns) and he frees us to find our identity, meaning, and purpose in him. He calls us to embed our personal money stories in the larger generosity story of Scripture. This means resting in the fact that he has committed to provide everything we need (not want) and accepting that he calls us to be part of his mission of grace. So we view our money not primarily through the lens of personal provision, but through the lens of God's generosity mission on earth.

Isn't this exactly the kind of fundamental shift pictured in Ephesians 4:28? Read these words carefully:

Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

EPHESIANS 4:28

Notice Paul doesn't say, ". . . so that he will have a more legal way to provide for himself." The shift is from stealing (self-focused) to working in order to be able to give (God- and others-focused). The self-centered thief is not meant to become the self-centered worker. God's grace is radically transformative and has the power to free us from viewing money as our means to get and begin to see money as our means to give.

The money he provides for us is a means of making his invisible generosity visible. We become the physical representatives of his generous, providing grace. We become the hands that bring real help to those in need. We become one of the primary means God uses to fund the work of his generous kingdom of love and grace.

That cheque that allows a husband and wife to spend a

needed weekend together away, or that gift that

sends a young person on a missions trip, or that gift of someone's annual college tuition, or the money to buy groceries for a mum and children who are suddenly without a husband, dad, or income are all ways we participate in God's mission of goodness, generosity, and grace.

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visible*

In the same way that God gives you rationality so you would know him and emotions so you could love him, he gives you money so that you will have an actual physical means of passing on the beauty of his generous grace. When it comes to our finances, God calls us to stop beginning with ourselves and hoping there's

money left for him and to willingly accept that the main purpose for our money is to fund lives of generosity in worship and service of him. Shouldn't those who constantly acknowledge the incredible generosity of the Lord be the most joyfully generous community



on earth? Shouldn't the lavish blessings we have received become the blessing that we willingly and freely give? Shouldn't our celebrations of affluence be transformed into lifestyles of generosity?

May God, in faithful grace, continue to liberate us from our bondage to us, and in so doing, liberate our wallets from their bondage to self-focus – freeing us, with our money, to represent our generous Saviour well.

Review and Reflect



- 1 God's generosity in creation is meant to overwhelm us with his majestic glory and fill our hearts with gratitude. How is this demonstrated in Psalm 104?
- 2 Read Genesis 12:2-3; Exodus 6:2-8; 34:10-35; and Hebrews 8:3-13. How is the generosity of God seen in the covenants he makes with his people?
- 3 How has God shown his generosity in each of the following:
 - The law
 - The incarnation
 - The cross
 - The Bible
 - The church
- 4 Why can we rightly describe God's mercy as generous?
- 5 Paul Tripp writes, "We need a brand-new way of thinking about money, a way that is rooted in the gospel story and its narrative of the lavish grace of God, most powerfully pictured in the amazing gift of the Lord Jesus." Explain what this means, in general, and how it has impacted you personally.

Heart reset



As we finish our study of generosity, it would be good to rest our hearts in God's work and meditate on his heart towards us and our right and proper response to him.

Psalms 34:8–10

Matthew 7:7–11

John 3:16

2 Corinthians 5:14–15

Ephesians 4:28

Philippians 4:14–19

Want to read more?

This content was originally published as a chapter in the book *Redeeming Money: How God Reveals and Reorients Our Hearts* by Paul Tripp.

You can find out more at www.paultripp.com, where you can [purchase the book](#) and access other resources by Paul Tripp.

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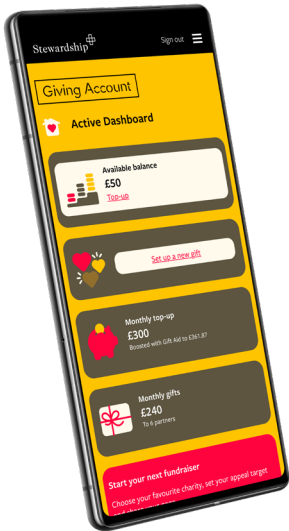
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