

# bible study guide

for

*the power of generosity* by Dave Toyce



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by Karen Stiller and Dave Toyce



# Study 1

## What is generosity?

The generosity journey is looking for more travellers.

*The Power of Generosity*

We have probably all met someone who has astounded us with their generosity. We hear about, or perhaps receive ourselves, some gesture that is out of the ordinary in its goodness and kindness. And we are moved. In some deep part of ourselves we recognize the rightness of the action, large or small, and we wonder if we ourselves could be so selfless.

The story of Liridan, a 10-year-old refugee from Kosovo, is told in chapter one of *The Power of Generosity*. This little boy, who owned nothing but a small piece of chocolate, broke a section in two and shared his only treat with a visitor. “Liridan’s gesture took me completely by surprise,” writes Dave Toycen.

Generosity almost always does.

### Warming Up

1. Why are we often so surprised by generosity?
2. Perhaps you have been touched by the generosity of someone else towards you or your family. Maybe you have surprised yourself with your own generosity to another. Share some of these stories.
3. What do you believe is at the heart of generosity?

### Digging In

*The Power of Generosity* contains many accounts of selfless giving. Some are the actions of high-profile people like Canadian statesman Stephen Lewis and past president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. Most of them are the stories of moms and dads and boys and girls who find it in themselves to give. “It is the attitude of caring combined with the willingness to share that makes generosity available to everyone.” (p.118)

Let’s turn now to an unlikely hero in scripture who proves the point that generosity is available to everyone, even those from whom we least expect it. Read and consider Luke 10:25–37.

1. Although we would all love to believe that in our haste to help the hurt traveller, we would beat even the Samaritan to the rescue, we probably have tasted the temptation of passing by on the other side. Why is it sometimes so difficult to help others and so easy to pass on by?
2. What does this well-known parable have to do with generosity?
3. If the Samaritan did not have bandages, oil or coins to pay the innkeeper, could he still have practiced generosity towards the wounded traveller? How?
4. Generosity is not about throwing money towards any cause that crosses your path. *The Power of Generosity* offers some guidelines to help determine how to use your gifts and resources in the best way possible. How did the Good Samaritan practice prudence with his generosity?

## Where the rubber hits the road

Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

*Matthew 22: 37–40, NIV*

The passage above is known as the greatest commandment and it might be the greatest challenge to many of us.

1. How does loving God first and strongest and then loving our neighbour as ourselves help with our search for the meaning of generosity?

*The Power of Generosity* recounts the experience of Deborah — an amazing story that will stretch the boundaries of generosity for anyone who hears it. Read again the account of this faithful woman from Rwanda who forgave her son’s murderer and adopted him as her own. (pp.101–107)

2. How does Deborah’s willingness to “think the unthinkable and consider the impossible” break down barriers to generosity?
3. Deborah’s strong faith clearly shaped her response to this unimaginable tragedy. What role do you think obedience to God plays in the generosity journey?

## Points of Prayer

- Pray that you will begin to understand what generosity means to God and to living out the Christian faith.
- Pray that your eyes will be opened daily to the opportunities in front of you so that you do not “pass by on the other side” but engage in thoughtful compassion to the world around you.
- Pray for Deborah and the country of Rwanda whose citizens still struggle with the trauma of the past. Healing, peace-building and reconciliation are great needs.

*Dear God,*

*We thank you for your generosity to us. We pray that you would guide us in this journey, revealing your amazing love to us by your Holy Spirit. We pray that we would be empowered more and more to share it freely with others. Freely we have received. Freely we will give. Amen*

## The next stop on the Generosity Journey

On our next stop we will examine together where generosity comes from and then see where it can take us.

## Study 2

### *Where does generosity come from?*

A man has made at least a start on discovering the meaning of human life when he plants shade trees under which he knows full well he will never sit.

*D. Elton Trueblood*

The fiery red hair, the toothy grin, the sharp wit: we notice characteristics that are common to families, passed on from parents to children and grandchildren. They are traits that offer clues we are part of a certain family. And, given that we have been created in God's image, the same holds true for God's family.

The central place of generosity in Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and, of course, Christianity is discussed in the opening chapter of *The Power of Generosity*. "In Western civilization, generosity has strong roots in the biblical concept of a Creator who offers life to humankind as a gift." (p.6) God is generous. From God we learn how to give and receive gifts.

God is the ultimate gift giver.

### **Warming Up**

1. Do you believe that God is the giver of good gifts?
2. Think back, or read again, the biblical account of the creation (Genesis 2). How is God's generosity reflected in the care he took in Earth's creation and in His intimate interactions with the first man and woman?

### **Digging In**

1. Throughout the Old Testament, God continues reaching out to his people with powerful overtures of compelling love. He makes covenants of generosity with his people. What do the two following covenants tell you about God's generous nature?
  - with Noah in Genesis 9:1–3.
  - with David in 2 Samuel 7:8–16.

It is from this covenant with David that God's greatest gift will spring generations later, revealing the heart of God as pure love and pure generosity.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

*John 3:16–17, NIV*

2. The verses above are probably the most famous gift-giving verses in the Bible. What do they say about God's generosity?
3. If we view others as valuable the way God does, how will that affect how we treat them?

### **Where the rubber hits the road**

1. Ponder Ephesians 2:4–10. Jesus is portrayed as a pure and powerful gift from a loving God. When were you first able to see Jesus as a gift in your life?

## Study 3

### *Why should I be more generous?*

Come to see money not as a passport to luxury but as a dangerous encumbrance, and you will not find it so ridiculous to give to whomever wants to borrow.

*John Boykin*

A life was changed one rainy day at a bus stop in Vancouver. Raymond Chan, former Canadian Secretary of State for Asia, received the gift of encouragement and welcome from a woman who was a stranger to him, but clearly no stranger to generosity. A newcomer to Canada was made to feel like an outsider no more, and a young man's future opened up a little wider.

“What she did was an act of kindness based on an attitude of generosity. Reaching out to others is an approach to life that has tremendous implications.” (*The Power of Generosity*, p.11)

We all know the warmth, gratitude or the downright thrill of receiving an unexpected gift. It is clear that those who receive the offerings of time, money or spirit from another person receive a blessing. But there is a saying of Jesus that pops up on pillows and framed cross-stitch everywhere: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35, NIV)

Is it really?

2. Sharing the gift of our faith is a central, although often neglected, part of Christianity. It is the heartbeat of Christian generosity. How could you help support each other in this aspect of the generosity of faith?
3. Psalm 111:4 says, “He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and compassionate.” Many of the stories in *The Power of Generosity* involve grace and compassion on the part of the generous one. Was there a story in the book that especially moved you?
4. Where *does* generosity come from?

### **Points of Prayer**

- Thank God for his generosity.
- Ask God to give you the heart of a gift giver.
- Pray for those you know who are in need.

*Dear God,*

*You are the greatest giver of the greatest gift, Jesus Christ. We thank you for that gift and what it means to us eternally, and what it means to us now. Show us how we can share that gift with others. Amen*

### **The next step on the Generosity Journey**

Now that we know that generosity flows like a river from the very heart of God, we can see why it is so very good to sail upon it.

## Warming Up

1. Sometimes we may have acted out of generosity and nobody thanked us or recognized our efforts. If that happens too much it can make giving less thrilling. Discuss this challenge.
2. We tend to think of the blessing that comes from giving as a fleeting, warm fuzzy feeling that evaporates almost as quickly as it arrives. Do you think that is the type of blessing that Jesus meant when he said “It is more blessed to give than to receive?” Could he have meant the deep personal transformation that occurs when we put others before ourselves?

## Digging In

1. Read and consider the passage known as “the Beatitudes” in Matthew 5:1–16. The word beatitude mean “declaration of blessedness.” In what ways will Jesus’ followers be blessed?
2. *The Power of Generosity* is filled with testimonies of people who have tasted the blessing that comes from selfless giving. Do you have a story of living with a beatitude attitude that you can share?
3. Jesus described his followers as the “salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” Salt is meant to season and light is meant to shine. If generosity comes from God—and we are his people—how do these verses encourage God’s people to practice generosity?

## Where the rubber hits the road

Personal growth through generosity won’t happen unless we are prepared to go places that may make us feel uncomfortable.

*The Power of Generosity, p.53*

1. How could being generous make a person uncomfortable?
2. At times, it may be more comfortable to focus on what God gives to us—instead of what God requires from us. How does receiving deeply of God’s love empower you to give deeply of yourself and your resources to others?

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

*Ephesians 5:1–2, NIV*

3. What reasons to be generous can be found in these verses from Ephesians?

It seems that as we increase in generosity we grow as Christians, and (hopefully) as we grow as Christians we increase in generosity. Profound personal transformation is one of the possibilities of generosity. As we taste the joy of giving it becomes part of who we are, and we become closer to who we were created to be. That is a good reason to be generous.

4. Read Jeremiah 22:15–16 for an Old Testament view of generosity. In the New Testament, James 1:27 says, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” Based on these verses what is the relationship between generosity and knowing God?
5. For people who know they don’t get everything right in their lives (and that’s most of us)—how can these verses encourage us to keep walking on the generosity road?

You may be saying right now, “What does God want from me?” Sometimes we ask that with happy expectation, other times with hands flung up in despair. We’re not the first to ask it. We won’t be the last. An answer is provided in Micah 6:8. “The Lord God has told us what is right and what he demands: see that justice is done, let mercy be your first concern, and humbly obey your God.” (Contemporary English Version)

### **Points of Prayer**

- Pray that God will show you what he requires of you in the area of generosity.
- Ask him to give you the courage and the trust to respond.
- Thank God that he is able to do just that.

*Dear God,  
You are the leader on this generosity journey. You have shown us what is good. We pray that our eyes will be opened to the opportunities in our families, our towns, our nations and our world to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with you. Amen*

### **The next stop on the generosity journey**

As we become more generous we are transformed more closely into his likeness. As we are changed, so is the world. What difference does generosity make? Let’s find out.

# Study 4

## *What difference does generosity make?*

It is clear that becoming generous has profound personal implications for the giver. As we practice generosity we grow and expand our own spirits. We grow closer to God and mirror his love to a hurting world. And the world benefits.

The story of Gladys Staines and her family is a powerful one (pp.95–96 in *The Power of Generosity*). Gladys' husband, Graham, and their two sons were killed in India by extremists. She and one daughter are the only surviving family members. This brave woman has offered public proclamations of forgiveness to the murderers of her husband and sons. She and her daughter continue their ministry in India to this day. “Gladys' generous spirit saw opportunity rather than defeat. This is a dramatic example of generosity's power to make peace.” (p.96)

Generosity does have tremendous power to change the world. The hungry are fed because of generosity. The oppressed find relief. Generosity is the heartbeat of justice and peacemaking.

And justice and peacemaking are deep in the heart of God.

### **Warming Up**

1. We may not be accustomed to thinking about generosity being linked to peacemaking, forgiveness and justice. How does the story of Gladys Staines and her family challenge you and your definition of generosity?
2. The book recounts the story of a young man who burned down a church. The congregation handled the situation in a unique way, offering forgiveness to the young man but

requiring he confess his crime and volunteer at the church (pp.85–88). What do you think of this creative solution?

### **Digging In**

Even as we see that God is generous and we are comforted, we discover that God is also about justice—and we are challenged. The words justice and righteousness are used more than 600 times in the Old Testament, and 200 in the New. Clearly, it is on God's mind.

“I believe there is a constant link between generosity and the pursuit of justice. Working together they offer a powerful response to situations of injustice and poverty in our world.”  
(*The Power of Generosity*, p.81)

1. Reading the words of the Old Testament prophet Amos helps us understand a little more how God feels about justice—and generosity. Consider Amos 8:4–6. What sins does Amos condemn in these verses?
2. What similarities do you see between Amos' time and our own? Explain.

Sometimes global trade rules and practices are unfairly biased towards the rich. Consider the coffee trade, a US\$55-billion industry worldwide in which a handful of middlemen and corporations reap enormous profits while more than 20 million coffee farming families struggle to live on less than a dollar a day. Would you be willing to pay a few cents more for a cup of coffee if you knew it would go to a poor farming family? How do global industries such as the coffee trade relate to these verses in Amos?

3. When Jesus began his public ministry he did it by claiming the words of the prophet Isaiah. Read Luke 4:16–21. According to these verses, what is Jesus’ mission?
4. As his followers, what is ours?

### Where the rubber hits the road

In 1970, the wealthiest countries in the world decided to give 0.7% of their yearly wealth as foreign aid. Only 5 countries have ever reached this target — Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. Canada is scheduled to reach the halfway point (0.35%) in 2010. Do you think wealthy countries like Canada have a responsibility to be generous outside our own borders? Why or why not?

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?” (Isaiah 58:6–7, NIV)

1. What does this passage tell you about God’s priorities?
2. What do you think would happen in the world if God’s people and the Church took this challenge seriously?

3. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (NIV) We know that it is God’s grace that saves us and not our good works. But clearly, we are asked to do some good in this world. Is there a tension between those two truths? How do you resolve that?

### Points of Prayer

- Thank God for his grace and free gift of love.
- Ask God to show you the good works he has prepared for you to do.
- Thank God for them.

*Dear God,*

*You do not call us higher to leave us hanging. You do not call us deeper into the spiritual life to leave us buried. Thank you that you empower us to do what you require of us. Help us to see good works as a privilege and not a burden, and to see service not as bondage but as freedom. Amen*

### The next stop on the generosity journey

What difference does generosity make? All the difference in the world. We are convinced generosity is a good thing. Now—how do we become more generous?

# Study 5

## *How do I become more generous?*

The good news is that you are already well on your way. Once you begin to think about generosity and taste its sweetness, it's hard not to get hooked. You see the joy and comfort it brings others and you are a firsthand witness to the transformation it brings about in your own life.

But we will falter on this journey. Chapter 10 of *The Power of Generosity* is a personal testimony of feeling like a failure when confronted with the heartbreak of Rwandan refugees in Zaire. Even those whose life's work is wrapped up in generosity will falter.

Generosity can be challenging. "Practising generosity and compassion is a calling. Not simply a set of rules or guidelines that makes our behaviour a little better." (p.144)

Callings are typically not easy things. And to get better at anything requires practice.

### **Warming Up**

1. Consult a dictionary for a definition of the word practice.
2. What happens to muscles that are not exercised? To the cello player who does not rehearse? To the craftsman who never builds? What happens to the Christian who never practices generosity?

### **Digging In**

1. Consider these "practice" verses of the Bible and discuss how they can help you learn to be more generous:
  - "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice." (Luke 8:21, NIV)
  - "Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." (Romans 12:13, NIV)
  - "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you." (Philippians 4:9, NIV)
2. Read and consider an ancient account from the Old Testament (perhaps the first recorded church building project fundraiser) in 1 Chronicles 29:6–18.
  - Who do the resources of the Earth belong to?
  - What enables the people to give so freely (verse 14)?
3. Jesus talked about money a great deal. He knew the strong hold it could have over his disciples then and his followers now. Read and consider Luke 16:13. Why can't you serve both God and money?
4. How can you serve God *with* your money?
5. In our culture, time is money. How can you serve God with your time?

### **Where the rubber hits the road**

Yes, but... We may think it is easy for someone who is wealthy to be generous with *their* money. We would be too if we had that much! That thinking is an easy trap to fall into. But Jesus pushes us further.

1. How does Luke 21:1–4 challenge the “it’s easy for them to give” mindset?
2. *The Power of Generosity* offers several practical tips and suggestions for excelling in the grace of giving. Which “best practices” from pages 124–129 resonate with you?
3. Which would you like to avoid like the plague? Why?
4. Are you ready to go? Choose one step from *How to be a more generous person* in Appendix A that you will personally attempt in the next few weeks. Share it with your group or a trusted friend. Agree to hold each other accountable to the steps you have chosen. Add another step when you are ready.

Before you know it, you will have moved five steps forward on the generosity journey. Every now and then you might slip two steps back. In those times be as generous with yourself as you want to be with everyone else. Remember that “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:6)

5. One last time as a group, turn to Isaiah 58:5–14 and read of the wonders that await the people of God on the generosity journey.

Take a deep breath. Then take the first step.

## Points of Prayer

- Thank God for his example of generosity.
- Thank God you were created in his image and carry with you the spiritual DNA to become generous.
- Ask God to help you step into that part of yourself humbly, confidently and expectantly.

*Dear God,*

*You have revealed yourself to be the ultimate gift-giver. We receive your gift of love and eternal life and we want to respond in gratitude to you. Help us to say thank you to you by being generous to others. Help us to trust you enough to know that as we care for others you will care for us. Open our eyes to the hurts of the world and then open our hands and our hearts to heal them. Amen*

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1 World Drive, Mississauga, ON L5T 2Y4  
[www.worldvision.ca](http://www.worldvision.ca)