

HILARIOUS GENEROSITY

A Needed Return to Joyful Generosity *Selected Scriptures*



LET'S BEGIN HERE

For too long, Christians have regarded serving Christ as a heavy *burden*. Because that attitude is so widespread, Christians often put on grim, gloomy, whipped, and weather-beaten faces when a pastor mentions the word *serve*. Many consider service to be nine parts sacrificial duty and only one part joyful privilege, especially when asked to serve by giving money. Just the mention of *giving* makes some recoil. Rather than responding with joy, Christians often respond with defensiveness, reluctance, even feelings of being pressured to give. Strangely, it is as if people think their money is *theirs* rather than the Lord's . . . as if being urged to give is offensive, rather than a plea for mere obedience. We need to give with joyful generosity—as did those cheerful givers in the Bible.



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1. A Statement Worth Considering (2 Corinthians 9:1–7)

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Ever wonder where that phrase originated? Jesus said it, of course (Acts 20:35)! That alone makes that statement worthy of our consideration. We don't have to read too far back into the history of the early church to see wonderful examples of Christians relishing the joy of hilarious generosity.

A Quick Glance at Two Churches

God's attitude about giving is concisely expressed in Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church. That gracious attitude became operational in a relationship between the church at Corinth and the church in Jerusalem.

2. Biblical Examples of Cheerful Givers (Exodus 35:20–24)

Both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible include examples of hilarious generosity in action that literally come alive before our eyes!

From the Old Testament

Having freed His people, the Israelites, from bondage to Egypt, God desired a place to dwell with them and offer His presence. Through Moses, God



Quotable

*You can't think of
the word hilarious
without smiling.
That's the idea
behind hilarious
generosity. The
Lord loves it!*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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commanded His people to give generously to the building fund for the tabernacle and to draw resources from the possessions they had taken from the Egyptians.

Also, in Nehemiah 2 we witness another opportunity for God's people to give of both their time and their talents to help rebuild the broken-down walls of Jerusalem. Did Nehemiah use guilt or coercion to motivate people to give? Absolutely not! He didn't have to, because the people gave willingly and generously to see the walls of Jerusalem rise again!

From the New Testament (Matthew 2:1–2, 10–12)

The giving of the valuable gifts of the wise men from the East represents the principle of hilarious generosity in the lives of men who, at enormous personal cost, traveled from a foreign country to bring their gifts to the Christ child. They were not in any way forced to do what they did, but rather, willingly and with eagerness they presented their gifts to the Lord.

And their giving became an act of worship as they “saw the child . . . and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests” (Matthew 2:10–11).

Another example of hilarious generosity in the New Testament is Onesiphorus—a close companion and fellow servant of the apostle Paul, who gave sacrificially of himself in order to participate in the spread of the gospel. In the case of Onesiphorus, however, the generosity that marked him was a generosity of spirit as he poured *himself* out on behalf of Christ and the church (2 Timothy 1:16–18).



LET'S LIVE IT

It's fairly simple for us to write a check, even a sizeable one, especially if we've been entrusted with significant resources. It's a much weightier prospect, though, to *spend ourselves* and to do so joyfully, willingly, and without hesitation. That all comes down to the heart.



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Four principles emerge from the biblical passages we've looked at in this message that will help us keep our hearts soft and responsive to the Lord with hilarious generosity.

1. *Reflect on God's numerous gifts to you.* Our attitude toward giving cannot help becoming more gracious and joyful as we consider where we would be apart from God's generous gift of grace in Christ!
2. *Remind yourself of His promise to reward generosity.* Like everything else in the Christian life, giving to the Lord becomes an issue of faith—believing that God will do as says He will do for anyone who trusts Him and obeys His Word. The Lord loves those who give cheerfully and promises to bless all who freely give with hearts of gladness and joy.
3. *Ask some probing questions.* Evaluation proves to be a healthy exercise for ensuring we are staying on top of our giving and maintaining the proper attitude toward the Lord. For example, we might ask ourselves such questions as . . .

Am I becoming more or less generous as I grow older?

Does my giving match God's blessing in my life?

Have I prayed about the level of my giving, or is my giving all impulsive?

4. *Change whatever keeps you from being a generous follower of Jesus.*

The ideal model of hilarious generosity is Jesus! In fact, the generosity of Jesus is what brings people to repentance and into a right relationship with God (Romans 2:4)! Because of His generosity in giving Himself, we can experience the joy of giving everything to Him in worship and in faith.

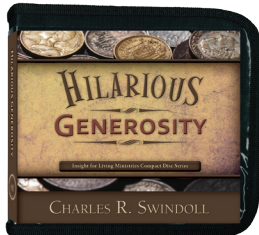


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