



Cheerful

Week 1: Finding Contentment

Brian Mattson - 10/04/2026

This week we are starting a new series called *Cheerful*. Every year about this time, we spend a few weeks talking about generosity because—and it's good to get this out in the open right now—this is the season the staff and church board are preparing our operating budget for next year. Some time long ago, long before I was here, somebody had a great idea that churches should talk about generosity when they want people to be generous. I know. Very smart. Shrewd. Prudent. But it's true—we have an operating budget, staff to support, and bills to pay. Plus, congregations can tense up a little bit when the pastor talks about money and giving, so it's best to use the word *generosity*.

During our last series, we talked about a few core characteristics of God that we want to attach our web of faith onto. One of those characteristics we didn't talk about was God's generous nature, and therefore, generosity should be one of our defining characteristics. That's not to say this congregation hasn't been generous—you have! You are! I know that you will continue to be. Still, it is good to be reminded from time to time how important a generous spirit is to becoming the people God calls us to be. You may not have realized it before, but I'm going to let you in on a little secret about sermons and Sunday worship. We are generally saying the same things in different ways over and over again—Love God, don't be a jerk, show

mercy, be thankful, forgive people. It's not that we forget what we're supposed to be doing. It's that life is hard and stuff happens. We get distracted. We get selfish. We get scared. So we come back together again to be surrounded by other people on this journey, and to be reminded that we are figuring this out together, just as people have done for generations.

Most of all, I don't want this to be a series designed simply to convince you to think about ways you can give to the church in the coming year. Yes, I like my job and enjoy getting paychecks to do it, and I know the rest of the staff does too, but maybe as we look at scripture and stories, we can see proof of God's generous spirit. And in doing so, perhaps that same spirit bubbles up in you. At the end of the day, our generosity should not be out of obligation, obedience, or to meet anyone's expectations. Let's face it, we will never be able to match the generosity of God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things. That's a sentiment shared over and over again in scripture, as in Psalm 65:

**You visit the earth and water it; you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain,
for so you have prepared it.**

If you think you are as generous as God, just zoom out a little. If everything in creation is of God and from God, our generosity is simply our best attempt to reflect God's nature.

Last month, Heather talked about tapping into God's joy—one of those core characteristics of God. God has continually called people to celebrate in remembrance and thanksgiving. She talked about how we see God's joy manifested in the person of Jesus, who invited us to join the party. As a reminder of how fun, joyous, and effervescent this kind of party, this kind of life, can be, she even gave you all sodas. One quick side note: we are not asking for you all to be generous because Heather spent all the money on soda and sparkling water. If anything, it's Brent who is spending all the money, but it's for good reasons, I promise. Anyway, back to the joy. Jesus

invites us to participate in it as a response to God's joyfulness. It causes us to smile, laugh, and be generous. It is not our dutiful response. It is our opportunity to reflect God's character into the world. Meredith Miller, who wrote the book we based our last series on, said this about connecting God's joy to our generosity.

God's people, connected to God's joy, do wild things that are possible only when you trust in the joyful abundance of God
- Meredith Miller

So that's what we're going to do. We're going to talk openly and honestly about the kind of generous response we can offer as we tap into God's joy. Not giving of ourselves and our resources begrudgingly, but because we are actually happy with the thought that other people will benefit from it. Happy to be participating in, and with, Creation.

The idea for this series comes from 2nd Corinthians. Paul is writing to the community in Corinth encouraging them to take up a collection in support of the poor in Jerusalem, and to do so generously.

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not regretfully or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written,

**"He scatters abroad; he gives to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever."**

- 2 Corinthians 9:6-9

A cheerful giver. The Message translates that line "God loves it when the giver delights in the giving." We might say there is joy in generosity. Still, Paul understands that we often have a firm grasp on our money, whereas it might

be easier for us to part with our time or material possessions. To address that tight grip, Paul spends some time prodding the Corinthians and creating a little friendly competition with other Christian communities in the region. In the chapter preceding this passage, he notes how the Macedonians (a poorer community) gave in incredible ways—beyond their means even—as an encouragement to the Corinthians to do the same.

Now, friends, I want to report on the surprising and generous ways in which God is working in the churches in Macedonia province. Fierce troubles came down on the people of those churches, pushing them to the very limit. The trial exposed their true colors: They were incredibly happy, though desperately poor. The pressure triggered something totally unexpected: an outpouring of pure and generous gifts. I was there and saw it for myself. They gave offerings of whatever they could—far more than they could afford!—pleading for the privilege of helping out in the relief of poor Christians.

- 2 Corinthians 8:1-4

Now if that doesn't sound straight out of a fundraising seminar, I don't know what does. Paul is telling the Corinthians that he was amazed by this miraculous gift from the Macedonians, and that maybe the Corinthians could be just as generous. No pressure, of course.

I'm not trying to order you around against your will. But by bringing in the Macedonians' enthusiasm as a stimulus to your love, I am hoping to bring the best out of you.

- 2 Corinthians 8:8

And with a few final pressure tactics—boy, we like holding onto our wealth, don't we?—Paul attempts to seal the deal. He sends a group of three men ahead to encourage the Corinthians in their collection. Then he reminds the

church that he's been boasting about their giving spirit to the Macedonians up the road, so he hopes they won't let him down.

All of this seems a little heavy handed to us today, but that's mostly our distance from the place and culture. Paul is not trying to divorce the Corinthians from all of their money, or guilt them into acquiescence. Instead, he was appealing to the idea of equality, which was an ideal in ancient friendships. One commentary I read said, "Whoever had more than enough should share with whoever had less, emulating the same principle exemplified in the manna: God provided just enough, so no one had too much or too little." Here, though, Paul was taking this individual concept and making it universal. Not only person to person, but church to church, community to community, should share resources to those in need. Generosity connects us, one to another, in a web of reciprocity, for one day it could be us, or our church, who needs assistance.

Our willingness, cheerfulness, even, to be generous connects us to one more important person—Jesus—who became poor for our sakes.

Rich as he was, he gave it all away for us—in one stroke he became poor and we became rich.

- 2 Corinthians 8:9

As followers of Jesus, we are tasked with modeling his example of generosity. I don't believe God expects us to literally sell our possessions and give away everything, but there is something that happens as we move towards contentment. A willingness to give more of ourselves and our resources with the understanding that we will still have enough, because God already provided that which we gave away. Our *contentment* is the reward of generosity, not more wealth or status. William Barclay writes this:

The rewards that the New Testament envisions are never material. It promises not the wealth of things, but the wealth of the heart and of the spirit.

Barclay goes on to note that some of those intangible benefits are quite valuable. First, we become rich in love, as cheerful givers are like magnets to other people. Generosity connects us to each other in ways that build friendships and connection. Second, it is a testament to our faith. As others notice our generosity—though we don't give to be recognized—our transformed lives are more than just words, but actions. And lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it encourages praise and thanksgiving to God. Ultimately, what and how we give are hollow if they don't come from a place of gratitude.

From praise and thankfulness flow generosity and joy. From generosity and joy comes contentment. And from contentment—a state of sufficiency—we move away from amassing possessions and towards eliminating needs. It's a long road. Maybe it's one we never reach the end of. The first step is to offer our praise and thanksgiving for everything we have.

I want to stop here and mention that our generosity is not simply counted through financial contributions. We are so blessed here at The Downtown Church, and over the next few weeks we are going to highlight a few people whose lives are a reflection of their generous spirit. Up first is a dear friend of mine, your former board chair, and our favorite lawn guy, Wade Shelton.

One of the oldest traditions in Christianity is the Eucharist. We call it Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper, but the Greek word—eucharistia—means thanksgiving. This meal was the central component of worship in the early church. Justo Gonzalez writes about the nature of these services.

The most remarkable characteristic of those early communion services was that they were celebrations. The tone was one of joy and gratitude, rather than sorrow and repentance.

It is easy for us to forget to be thankful. I know I've got a lot going on in my life and in my head. Do you? But the God who loves you, who is abundantly

generous, wants to fill your cup until it overflows. So we have a choice to make. We can recognize that we have been the recipients of God's generosity and cheerfully pass it on. Or we can not. You do have a choice. God doesn't order you around against your will. God invites you to participate in this joyous celebration of what has freely been given to us already.

You may be at a place in your life where contentment is a real possibility. I pray that this meal is a chance for you to draw closer to it, and in turn, discover new ways to help others move there as well. Some of you may be at a place in your life where contentment—or joy, or peace—is far away. I pray this meal is a chance for you to just be quiet. A chance to say thanks, for even just five minutes of stillness to reflect on the people in your life, the breath in your lungs, the fact that you made it another day. You are not alone. Fill our cups, Lord. Run it over.