

GENEROSITY GUIDE

Yearly Vision: “Times of Refreshing”

“I distrust a charity that costs nothing and does not hurt.” – Pope Francis

If we care about God’s justice, we will reprioritize our time and resources to show it. To become more generous is to become more like God. Stewardship of the gifts God has given us should be aspirational, not based on a complacent comfort. We can bless our limitations – jobs, family obligations, and so on – while still endeavoring to become more generous over time. True generosity will cost us something, but the reward is that we start to emulate the God revealed in Jesus, who sacrificially loves the whole world. In this way, generosity of our time and resources is an act of faith – we are intentionally pushing up against our desire for comfort to taste something we have not yet known, but we believe is still true.

What is proposed below is not a hard principle to follow, but a template that may help each of us grow in generosity. As you consider each type of giving, be aware of anything inside you that may be pushing back. Is it warranted, or is it merely discomfort? Ask God to help you push through to gain a vision of God’s heart for you and the stewardship of your gifts.

PRACTICE:

- Read 2 Corinthians 8:1–15, and 9:6–11. In these passages, Paul is using the witness of the much-poorer community in Macedonia to challenge the wealthier church in Corinth who have not yet followed through on their charitable giving.
- What words or phrases stick out to you, make you curious? Why might God be highlighting them to you?
- When you think about your own relationship to money, how does it shape your attitude towards radical generosity?
- What would it take for you to become a “cheerful giver”?

TITHE

God encourages us to give our “first fruits” as sacrificial worship.

The principle of tithe goes back to the story of Abraham, who gave a tenth of everything he owned in honor of Melchizedek, the mysterious Priest King who came to his side in a time of need (Genesis 14). The theme carries on into Torah as God determines a tenth of Israel’s resources go to the Levites for their service (Numbers 18). While there is no prescriptive in the New Testament for sticking to a 10% tithe, we do see Jesus critiquing the Pharisees for giving a tenth of their spices but neglecting justice (Matthew 23:23).

If there is one thing we can be confident in it is that, as New Testament people, we are not called to be *less* generous than the Israelites. Tithe is a principle of “first fruits”, meaning we give the *first* tenth of our income to God and God’s church as an act of worship before we consider where the

remaining 90% goes. In fact, giving in this way changes our attitude to the remainder, because we are acknowledging that all we have comes from God, and not merely our human effort.

PRACTICE:

- A quick-start budget sheet is a great way to get an overview of your finances. Organizations like The Compass Initiative offer one-sheet versions that put tithe at the top of the form, followed by savings, housing, bills, etc.
- Based on your financial situation now, how much are you giving to the local church as a sacrifice of praise?
- What would the next step be for you in approaching 10%?

RECURRING GENEROSITY

We go beyond giving to our local church to support causes we are passionate about in bringing justice to the earth.

Our finances are the most boring and most effective way we can contribute to justice initiatives. Average giving by adults at US Protestant churches is about \$17 a week (\$884/year). Research shows that about 3-5% of churchgoers tithe; regular attendees tend to be more generous than sporadic attendees to both the church and other charitable organizations. U.S. Christians collectively make \$5.2 trillion annually — nearly half the world's total Christian income. What could we accomplish if we prioritized recurring generosity?

While as Christians we should generally care about all injustice, we each have capacity to really invest in two or three causes. It is a relief to know there are good people out there tackling issues of justice with integrity and efficiency. We don't need to reinvent the wheel as a community when it comes to serving the poor, unhoused, enslaved, and so on. Giving above-and-beyond our tithe enables us to empower those who are addressing the crises that break our hearts. If the goal for tithe is 10%, perhaps 2-3% of our income could go to supporting charities that are doing the good work.

It is important to research any non-profits we are considering supporting, especially the ratio of administration costs to on-the-ground work. There are several websites dedicated to tracking an organization's financial transparency and efficacy in their work. You might want to consider supporting a local organization, the work of people you know personally, and one international organization.

PRACTICE

- What are 2-3 causes that break your heart because you know they break God's?
- Do some research. Who is doing the good work locally on that issue? Who is tackling it globally?
- Go to websites like Charity Navigator or Give.Org and see how those organizations are rated.
- Set up recurring giving, as it is almost always an option now.

SPONTANEOUS GENEROSITY

We should set aside a portion of our income for when the unexpected happens.

A natural disaster hits our state, causing billions in damage. A war breaks out half a world away. A friend loses their job and is struggling to find a new one. We can't plan for every contingency in life, but we can be ready to come to the aid of others when disaster strikes.

The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates this principle beautifully. We can assume he was not anticipating a half-dead Jewish man on the road to Jericho, but he was faced with a decision. Leave him, as the religious elites had, or stop and help. The Samaritan does what he can in the moment to address the immediate wounds, and then has the resources to get the injured man to an inn (the closest they had to a hospital in the day) and pay someone to bring him to full health.

We don't want to be caught off-guard when tragedy strikes. If we set aside a spontaneous fund, we can be the first to respond so people get the help they need in the moment. There are always opportunities to sew generously if we have our eyes open.

PRACTICE:

- Consider starting by setting aside a small amount every month for spontaneous giving in your budget. Perhaps there is a frivolous luxury in your life you could do without so you can be ready to help when needed. Perhaps start with \$25-50.
- Save up over time; if no needs arise after a couple months you could look to donate to a pressing issue.