

*season* **OF** *generosity*

PAST

PRESENT

FUTURE

**DEVOTIONS 2024**



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## DEVOTIONS 2024

Our annual Season of Generosity will be November 3-17, 2024. Every fall, the Season of Generosity reinforces why we give an offering to God. This year's theme is *Past, Present, Future*. The practical reason is to fund the operation, mission, and ministry of the church. But there is a more personal, spiritual, and joyful reason to give an offering to God. Generous giving grows our faith, joy, and trust in our Lord Jesus. Consider the ways worship, prayer, and Bible study grow your faith and sense of belonging in the Body of Christ. Giving to God is also a spiritual practice that grows our faith and sense of belonging in the Body of Christ.

We have prepared this daily devotional to help you reflect, pray, and grow in generosity. I am deeply grateful and impressed with the stories and spiritual insights into generosity shared in these devotions. May these simple, daily reflections unlock your joy when giving to God.

—Pastor Eric Bostrom

***In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive. • ACTS 20:35***

I love chocolate so when the pastor brought out a Hersey Bar for his children's sermon I was dialed in. As the children sat around him he opened it, broke off one of the ten sections and set it aside. One little girl asked what he was going to do with that piece. The pastor said that piece was for God. The children eyed the candy as he explained about tithing. Finally one brave boy asked if he could have a piece. The pastor sat there acting smug with his nine pieces of chocolate knowing he had worked hard and would enjoy the delicious treat. The youngsters sat expectedly and were crestfallen when the pastor didn't readily agree to share. As he looked around their sad faces he slowly began to break off more pieces and give to the kids. What a delight to see the children smile and the congregants enjoy the exchange. I may not have gotten a piece of chocolate that day but I was reminded of a valuable lesson. It is a blessing to share our time, talents, and resources with others. It warms the giver, the receiver, the witnesses, and God.

**Generous God, make me a hard worker in your kingdom.  
Continue to remind me it is more blessed to give than receive.  
Amen.**

***Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.***

• **2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-7**

I was blessed to be raised by parents who taught me to give first to the church. I remember asking my dad as a small girl, knowing my parents were not wealthy by any means, why he put his money in the offering basket each week. I asked him where the money went? He faithfully talked to me about giving to God first and he simplified his response of where the money goes, by saying that we help pay to turn the lights on in the church, we help pay for the water at the drinking fountain and we keep the church doors open.

Later, at the age of nineteen, on my own, and living from paycheck to paycheck I went to church on a Sunday morning. When I went to open my wallet for the offering, I realized I only had one five-dollar bill remaining and that had to get me through the week until payday on the following Friday. My parents teaching drew on my heart, and I faithfully and yes reluctantly placed my last money in the offering plate. I knew I had enough food to get me through and enough gas to get to work but I trusted the Lord would provide. The very next day I was in the lunchroom and was cleaning out my wallet. To my surprise and yes with relief, a \$20 dollar bill hid away in a side pocket. Not only had the Lord replaced the \$5 but he did it in fours. It reminded me to trust in the Lord.

I have been blessed in seeing the results of opening my heart to serving and giving and it has made me a “cheerful giver.” At times, I hesitate as we all do but when I have taken a leap in faith God has never let me down.

**Dear Lord, thank you for the reminder of Paul’s generosity and his teachings on being a cheerful giver. We pray for open hearts and a willingness to consider our generosity on behalf of your church in this season of generosity. I pray for all of us to take time and consider the spirit of being a cheerful giver on behalf of your kingdom. In Jesus name, Amen!**

***Jesus looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.” • LUKE 21:1-4***

In this scripture Luke tells the story of the Widow's Offering. Jesus observes a poor widow who puts two small copper coins into the Temple treasury, stating that she has given more than all the wealthy contributors because she gave all she had. Her sacrificial giving pleased the Lord and is held up to us as an example for our giving. The gifts given by others were *expendable income* given out of their surplus. It didn't affect them really in any way. Her gift was the *essential income* she had to live on.

Her sacrifice indicated her deep love for God. Sacrificial giving is a means of establishing and expressing our love for God.

**Heavenly Father, help us remember we are never too poor to give, our generous giving demonstrates our trust in you for the future and our trust that you are honored by our degree of sacrifice not the amount. Amen.**

***The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain. This also is vanity.***

• **ECCLESIASTES 5:10**

The book of Ecclesiastes is all about the search for meaning and purpose in life. This verse points out how money, if it becomes the focus, leads to things we do not want—dissatisfaction, pride, envy. As we search for meaning and our life purpose, money can easily muddle our vision.

Money is needed and is useful for many things, but is often one of our biggest stumbling blocks. The envy for the new truck or a set of golf clubs can easily catch my eye. Is it pride or indulgence? Either is destructive and unsatisfying, leaving me still wanting more.

I see money as meaningful for two good purposes:

1. Provision for the needs of life: food and home for my family.
2. Provision for growth: personal and spiritual.

To seek first the needs of my family, but foremost is to seek the Kingdom of God.

As I searched for the meaning of life and my purpose I settled on these words:

*“...to establish relationships that allow me to encourage, mold vision, provide tools and build memories that God would be glorified and the lives of others are enriched.”*

As long as I keep my “eye on the ball” the temptation of wealth will fade. I want more, but more of God, more and deeper relationships—that my pride is in the amazement of God’s love for me and my joy is in the success of others.

**God I love you, but only because you first loved me. Help me keep my focus on You and Your Kingdom. Enable me to meet, love and serve others that Your Kingdom will grow and the lives of others are enriched. Lord in Your mercy and grace, hear my prayer. Amen.**

***Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. • GALATIANS 6:2***

To love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength; and to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. This Bible verse says that we fulfill this law when we choose to come alongside and help carry the burdens of the people around us. We help ease those burdens when we choose kindness, mercy, generosity, and grace. And when we learn to carry each other's burdens, we show sympathy and compassion to those who are suffering or struggling, no matter how big or small. We are living to learn to love one another—to do to others as you would have them do to you.

This is a great part of being a deacon at MVLC. This scripture helps define how we feel after a visit or call, when our hearts get warm in doing this good service; it gives us energy and persistence to give and serve more and share with others.

**Heavenly Father, may I grow to enable my spirit of wisdom with grace, and humility with gentleness, so that I can be sustained to help my brothers and sisters in Christ and to bear their burdens. Amen.**



Friday, November 8, 2024

Troy Kehm-Goins

***It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice. • PSALM 112:5***

Our righteous God calls us—  
as God's righteous people—  
to live generously and in Jubilee

*Will you squeeze  
the marrow from an egg?*

to love the stranger and the refugee  
to house the widow and the orphan  
to heal the unclean to wholeness.

*Will you hold the brave  
and beautiful in tender hands?*

Where do we walk?  
Where do we speak aloud?  
Where do we live out justice?

*Will you press olives into oil*

When is our conduct blessed?  
When is our behavior a treasure?  
When does abundance slip

*that will anoint  
the brow of a monarch,  
or shine the blade  
of the killing sword?*

into overripeness and waste?  
What things will you grip tightly  
that were gifts to begin with?

*Justice is an unclenched fist.*

**Lord God, allow our lives to be filled with your poetry—words and deeds of life and love and liberty. Grant us the ability to share the very things that you have gifted to us with those in need, those lesser members who you have lifted to places of prominence in your upside-down kingdom. We pray this through the inspiration of your Holy Spirit and in the name of your Son, Jesus the Christ. Amen.**

***Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. • PHILIPPIANS 4:11-13***

Most of us are familiar with Philippians 4:13, “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” But are we familiar with the context in which Paul is writing this verse? Paul shares that he has learned the secret of being content in all circumstances. What is his secret? He doesn’t tell us. I wonder if he experienced contentment knowing he was doing God’s will? He could trust God would provide for him, in life or death, because his life was spreading the good news of Jesus.

Let us follow Paul’s example, learning contentment in any situation God has placed us in. Then, we can be genuinely generous with what He has given us, trusting in Christ’s strength.

**Gracious Heavenly Father, thank you for the love & mercy you have lavished upon us. Help us trust that you will provide. May we learn Paul’s secret of being content whatever the circumstances, so we don’t miss an opportunity to be generous. Amen.**

***Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today. • DEUTERONOMY 8:17-18***

The word that pops out to me in this passage is "wealth." But we have an uneasy feeling about the word "wealth." I'm not wealthy. Do you feel wealthy?

Deuteronomy 8 is warning God's people to not forget about God after they enter the wealth of the Promised Land. In other words, don't pat yourself on your own back for any wealth enjoyed. Remember and give credit to God for the power, the opportunities, and the assistance from others that have filled our lives with a wealth of blessings.

Wealth by itself is neither good nor bad. It's the covenant we make with wealth that impacts our faith. "Remember the Lord your God...that you may confirm God's covenant." I'm asking you to now confirm your covenant with God. Pray about your covenant between God and wealth. Use your wealth to express your gratitude, love, and worship of God. When we give generously to God, the shame of excess is turned into the joy of sharing.

**Generous God, you gift us more than we know. Help us believe the abundance of your blessings. Move us with joy to share. Amen.**

***From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded. • LUKE 12:48***

In a busy family restaurant sat five women deep in a conversation. In an adjacent booth was Millie, an acquaintance of the group, who had come in late. Millie overhearing their conversation, offered a comment she thought might add to the discussion. One of the gals looked puzzled by Millie's comment. Millie soon realized that in her absence, she had missed an important context of the conversation.

Likewise, for years, I've focused only on verse 12:48 devoid of the context in which Jesus was teaching a parable about being responsive to the will of God.

*“The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. For everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.*

The warning by Jesus towards careless servants feels sobering, but don't miss out on the empowerment. As we receive more gifts and generosity from God, our capacity to share our talents, financial security, knowledge, and skills with our neighbor grows. We experience as much joy and life when we receive from God as when we 'pay it forward' to our neighbor. The greater our understanding of his will, the more we are expected to live out God's will in our actions.

**Dear God, as I more fully understand your gracious will, help me be ready to generously share your gracious will with my neighbor. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.**

***How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?***

• **1 JOHN 3:17**

We have been given an **example** of what **love** looks like in the person of **Jesus**. Christ's purpose was a life of love and **sacrifice**—a **model** for **us** to use as a **daily** reminder in our own lives. How, then, is it so easy to make the simple become complicated? Why do we continue to fool ourselves that we might be taken advantage of? Why do we falsely claim we don't have time? Why do we tell ourselves that "they" will misuse our help or that someone else will certainly show generosity. While need, inequity, or injustice are not simple, our response to them can be. Simply show up. Simply give. Simply love.

**God of simple love, open up our closed hearts so that we might radically live into your calling of generosity, compassion and love. Amen.**

***Let my prayer rise up as incense before you.***

***The lifting up of my hands as an offering to you.***

• **Marty Haugen, *Holden Evening Prayer*, based on PSALM 141**

Talk is, they say, cheap. Actions are what counts. Day by day we pray for a litany of things: for the person we love to be healed, for the hungry to have food, for the homeless to have shelter. That is the talk part of our faith. And it is VITAL to our faith. But so are actions.

At Mountain View, we don't simply pray for the hungry—we provide them food through the food bank we built. We don't simply pray for the homeless—we help provide them shelter through our benevolence gifts. We don't simply pray for healing, we comfort the sick, we welcome the stranger. We are a congregation of doers, who put our faith into action.

This is the work that Christ tasked us with: to BE part of the answer to the prayers we lift to God. Our offerings are not simply a gift to God, they are also God's gift to us. God showed us that we have the capacity to do great good in the world. We are called to lift our hands, our hearts, our voices, and work toward creating the world God wants for all of His Creation.

**O God, I call to you: Come to me now; hear my voice when I cry for the hungry, the homeless, the poor, those affected by war and violence. Help each of us to remember, we are your healing hands doing your work in this world. Amen.**

***One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.***

• **PROVERBS 11:24-25 (NIV)**

Our faith in God does not guarantee material wealth; in fact, when Jesus speaks of money in the Gospels, it is typically to warn against its influence, as in Matthew 6:24, where he describes wealth as a master competing against God for control.

Yet the Bible does insist that believers must shower material blessings on others. Generosity to those in need is in fact one of the most frequently repeated commands in the Bible. In Proverbs, the writer assures us that God will reward such generosity with even greater generosity of his own, and warns that those who withhold generosity will "come to poverty." God is generous, and he expects his children to follow his example.

As we do, the blessings we receive may include material blessings, but that is not the point; what God promises us are blessings of all kinds, suited to meet our deepest needs, poured out in abundance by the one who knows us better than we know ourselves.

**Father, help us to give generously today, knowing that through Christ you have given us so much, and will continue to give us more than we could ask or imagine. Amen.**

***For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.***

• **MATTHEW 6:21**

When Lutherans gather outside of the sanctuary, there seems to be an unwritten rule that food must be involved in that meeting. Imagine that we had Jesus as our guest, and He asked us what we value in life. What would our answers be?

We would probably say that we value Him the most. But what do our actions communicate about us? In Matthew 6:21 it says, “The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.” (*The Message*) Is Mountain View a place that you treasure? How then can we build each other up to be able to head out into the world and show God’s love? I would say through our money, time, and talents we offer at Mountain View.

May we give generously through whatever means we can to show God our thanks for all He has done.

**Father God, we thank you for all you have done for us. Help us to sacrificially give our time, talents, and money at Mountain View to show that our treasure is in You and not in the culture around us. Shake us out of our routines into newness, O God, to the new creation in us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**



***But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty. • MATTHEW 13:23***

This verse comes from the Parable of the Sower. Jesus explains to us the different kinds of soils: the hard path, rocky, thorny, and good soil.

The Bible tells us that good soil represents true disciples who accept God's Word and produces a rich harvest.

So what does this have to do with the season of giving? The key may be the receptivity and fertility of the various soils. Jesus says this good soil refers to a person's willingness to listen to his word, and understand what he says.

We know that Jesus says to be generous. So often the worries of the day can stifle our faith and our spiritual vitality can be lost. Let's remember the One who is faithful. Let's focus and pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us to give 100, 60, 30.

*A prayer of Saint Ignatius of Loyola:*

**Teach me to serve You as You deserve, to give, and not count the cost, to fight and not feel the wounds, to labor, and not seek to rest, to give of ourselves and not ask for a reward—except the reward of knowing that we are doing your will. Amen.**

***Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.***

• **LUKE 12:33**

In this passage from Luke, Jesus encourages us to treasure those things that matter most. He instructs us to make purses that do not wear out. Our purses or wallets are meant to safeguard things we value, but money and the valuables of this world are fickle – they can be taken, be destroyed, and ultimately disappoint. The question Jesus poses is, what can we fill our purses with that will be an unfailing treasure in heaven? What is God calling us to value that is greater and more lasting than what the world tells us? The answer to these questions has profound impact for our lives—as Jesus continues in verse 34 to say: *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

**Lord, give us the strength and courage to walk the discipleship path you call us to. Protect us from the temptations of the world and help us to value more fully the gifts you give us. Amen.**