

PERSPECTIVE

APRIL 2020



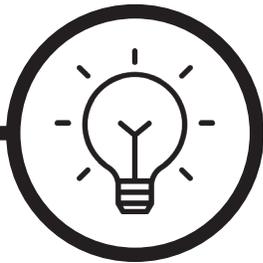
GENEROSITY &

THE CHURCH

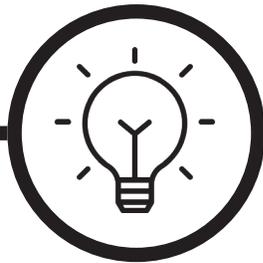
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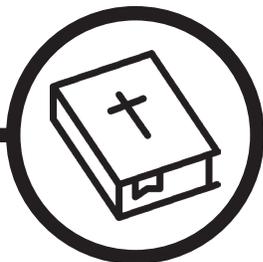
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BIBLE READING PLAN 6
Take Up And Read
April

Generosity & The Church

This pandemic is pressing and shaping our understanding of how to be generous with the church. By God's grace, we will grow in the grace of generosity through the adversity the Lord has purposed for us. May the Lord continue to conform us into the image of Christ, even as we cannot gather as we desire.

For some of us, the local church has always been a part of the rhythm of our lives. For others, life in the church began much later. Perhaps the Lord saved you as a teenager, college student, or adult, so establishing a pattern of engagement with the church has been a progressive journey toward a new normal. Attending the Sunday morning service naturally fell into place, but discerning biblical expectations for involvement in the other activities of the church felt like visiting Golden Corral for dinner. The buffet of classes, events, and small group studies felt overwhelming, and you didn't know where to begin.

Whatever your experience, thoughts of generosity and the church might conjure up a stereotype of preachers asking for money. As we consider the topic of generosity as a church family, we want to recalibrate our understanding of generosity to accord with Scripture. Is the New Testament mostly concerned with financial generosity, or is the call to be generous more than simply giving money?

Yes, much more! Here is how we are thinking about generosity in 2020: *Generosity is being joyfully open-handed with what we have for the sake of those we love—family, church, community, and world.* What would it look like if every member was joyfully open-handed with what we have for the sake of the church?

In this article, I want to present some very practical ways you can be more generous in and with the local church. There are so many things I could have pointed to, but I think our presence, our singing, and our service deserve special attention. As you read these words, I pray you are encouraged to see generosity and the church as being about so much more than money.

GENEROSITY AND PRESENCE

During my junior and senior years of college, I lived off-campus with a couple of my buddies. While I had experienced the close quarters of dorm life, living in an apartment with two other guys was a whole new experience! We now had the responsibility of cleaning and grocery shopping together. Thankfully, I was able to get to know those guys really well over two years, and they got to know me.

Our relationship developed because we lived together. Profound, right?! Yet, this simple observation is so easily overlooked in the life of the church. We cannot live with one another in the same sense, but our presence in the church must go beyond mere attendance. The quality of our presence when together matters. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 2:8, "So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also *our own selves*, because you had become very dear to us." Notice the sharing of their lives flowed out of their love for the church in Thessalonica.

Consider Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. He says, "It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart" (1:7a). Why? Paul continues, "for you are all partakers with me of grace," (1:7b). Then, in verse 5, he highlights their love. They loved one another with "the affection of Christ Jesus" (1:8). These statements are not mere sentimentality. Christians share a deep and abiding love in the church that is born out of the gospel. It is a love that flows from the love of God. It is a love Jesus shared with the Father and prayed his church would experience as well (John 17:20–23). One of the ways we experience the oneness in Christ that Jesus speaks of in John 17:21 is our regular presence with one another. We must be joyfully open-handed with our presence for the sake of those we love.

How can we grow in this in 2020? *First, be generous with your Sundays.* Plan ahead to show up early and leave late. If your family is like mine, staying later is easier than showing up early. Our greater challenge is getting everyone out the door early enough so that we don't merely slip into a Sunday School class with enough time to find a seat. This will take some planning for parents of small children. Adjusting our Sundays in this small way can go a long way toward improving the quality of our presence together.

Second, make attending one (or both if able) evening service a priority. Sunday evenings are a sweet time with the church family where we can pray boldly for one another and fellowship together. Intercessory prayer is like super glue bonding us together in the body of Christ. Paul constantly prayed for churches (Phil 1:3–4; Col 1:3; 2 Cor 11:28) and the church prayed for Paul (Phil 1:19). The fire of Christian love is ignited by knowing one another in Christ and sustained by the firewood of regular prayer for one another.

Wednesday night supper is a scheduled time for fellowship where the work of hospitality is taken up by the church. If you are able, take advantage of this opportunity. Sit with guests and new members as much as possible. Be intentional in your conversations around the dinner table. Redeem that time by being generous

with your presence. Imagine if every able member of Mount Vernon is joyfully open-handed with their presence for the sake of those they loved in the church.

GENEROSITY AND CORPORATE WORSHIP

Having grown up in the church with three older siblings, I was eager to be a part of the youth group. They would come home and share all the cool stuff they got to do in youth group, and I grew jealous. Looking back, I envied the wrong things! I was not eager to dive deeper into God's word nor to worship Christ with my friends at church. I wanted to have fun.

When I finally entered the youth ministry, I participated in everything. I have fond memories of youth weekend retreats focused on topical Bible studies. Faithful adults walked us through the Word and applied it to our lives. Inevitably, one leader would take his guitar and lead us in song. As retreats often do, those special times away formed me as a young believer, especially with regard to worship. However, not in the obvious ways.

At a weekend retreat, I felt the freedom to sing out my heart. As a slowly maturing believer, this challenged me to sing out to God. That was good. Yet, upon returning home, I found myself ashamed to sing out with the same enthusiasm. Why? Perhaps, in part, because I observed many of my friends not singing at all when we gathered with the church on the next Sunday. This pattern continued through high school.

The Lord began to work on my heart during college. He turned my attention away from peers to older saints who loved the Lord and were generous in their worship. The Psalter began to shape my theology of corporate worship. In Psalm 98:4, the psalmist exclaims: "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!" The excitement about worshipping God (loudly) in these exhortations leaps off the page!

When I would return home from college, I remember hearing my dad singing "To God Be the Glory" *loudly* next to me in the pew one Sunday. My heart soared. It's not that he never sang loudly before. I simply didn't notice. My dad's loud singing moved me; he was clearly so filled with love for Christ that he sang out. God faithfully taught me about being joyfully open-handed with my worship for the sake of the church.

Two passages speak to the importance of being generous with our worship for the sake of those we love. In Ephesians 5:19, Paul instructs the church to be "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,

singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart." And in Colossians 3:16, he makes a surprising point about the nature of musical worship: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." As I witnessed with my dad years ago, God works spiritually through the voices of his church gathered together singing—not only to him but to one another.

Pastor Garrett Kell observes that many Christians don't sing (or sing loudly) at church. He exhorts believers to sing loudly to bless one another: "Our Savior, not our likes or our skills, should determine how loud we raise our voices . . . one of the primary reasons we go to church is to encourage other Christians, and one of the primary ways we do this is through singing."¹ If you're able to sing out, do so *generously* for the sake of the saints around you Sunday morning. Imagine if every able member of Mount Vernon was joyfully open-handed with their worship for the sake of those they loved in the church.

GENEROSITY AND SERVING

In one of my courses at a Christian liberal arts university, I took a personality profile and spiritual gift inventory. The class divided into groups based on the results. It was a fun exercise, but I don't recall much of a distinction between the results of the personality test and the spiritual gift inventory. In both cases, we assessed ourselves and then enjoyed ribbing our friends for their personality quirks. On the whole, the results were based on introspection. They were our opinions of ourselves. They did not require input from those closest to us, from those who best knew us. They didn't require us to examine Scripture. In other words, the spiritual gift inventory was little more than a personality test. There didn't seem to be much biblical depth.

Perhaps you have taken a spiritual gift inventory. The intent behind them is pure and driven by a sincere desire to help Christians know their gifting and provide guidance on how to most effectively serve the church. Yet, too often, the burden is on the individual to discern and use their gift rightly. Paul takes a different approach.

Paul uses the human body as an analogy for the church. The body of Christ is a glorious reality comprised of diverse parts (read: people) united by the Spirit and arranged according to God's sovereign will (1 Cor 12:18). Each member has a role to play and is gifted by the Spirit to carry out that role (1 Cor 12:11). Paul's main concern is to reorient the church to the purpose of the gifts and the manner in which they are to be exercised.

According to verse 7, God gifts his church “for the common good.” Elsewhere, Paul defines this “common good.” It is for the church,

for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ... we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Eph 4:12–13, 15–16).

God gives spiritual gifts to the church so we can be built up in the knowledge of the truth. Then we will come to reflect the Savior more and more. In 1 Corinthians, Paul speaks of a more excellent way, the way of love (1 Cor 12:31). Here we find one of the most beautiful descriptions of love found in Scripture (1 Cor 13:4-8a). His point: no matter what gift God has given you, it is to be used out of love for the common good of the church.

What does this have to do with generosity and the church? Everything!

Serving the church is God’s plan for every member of the body. No exceptions. In God’s kindness to his people, he has provided the church with all it needs to grow up into Christ. Serving in the church is as simple as being *available* and *willing* to help in whatever way is needed.

You don’t need to know your spiritual gift in order to serve the church right now. Simply be willing to give of yourself generously for the sake of those you love in the church. Serving the church regularly is likely to bring clarity about how God has gifted you to serve the body most effectively. New Testament scholar Tom Schreiner writes, “we will discover our gift when we pour ourselves into the lives of other believers, when we get involved in the life of the body ... if you are involved in the church, if you are serving other believers, you are exercising your gifts even if you don’t know what they are, and that is the most important thing of all.”²

What does generosity and serving look like? It looks like energetic work. Paul puts it like this in Romans 12:11, “Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.” Why? Because through Christ, we have been redeemed to be zealous for the good works (Tit 2:14) that God has prepared beforehand for us walk in (Eph 2:10). Schreiner is right: “Spiritual gifts are exercised when we sacrifice ourselves for the sake of others, when we love others for Christ’s sake.”³

There are numerous ways to serve, from helping our children to ministering to the homebound. The work of the ministry is nearly endless. Imagine if every able member of Mount Vernon was joyfully open-handed with their service for the sake of those they loved in the church.

Our presence, worship, and service only scratch the surface of how believers can be joyfully open-handed with what they have for the sake of the church. But please place these exhortations within the proper context. The last thing we want to do is develop a “to-do” list for how to be generous. Generosity is first and foremost an *attitude* of the heart. In 1 Thessalonians 2:8, Paul makes an important comment: “we were ready to share.” They were ready. What made them ready? Their love for the church. Paul’s love created in him in a posture of readiness to be joyfully open-handed toward them; whatever shape that might take. It was his delight to “do” because of his Christ-centered delight in these brothers and sisters.

And where did this delight for his brothers and sisters originate? It started with the gospel. The message of a Savior who loved Paul enough to die for him captured his heart. Because he knew Christ now delighted in him, Paul could delight in the body of Christ, the church.

Our love for one another with the sacrificial affection of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:8) should drive our generosity toward, with, and in the church. In light of all this, while we exist as the church scattered, let’s make the most of our time apart. Let’s be generous from afar. We can’t gather together. We can’t sing together. It’s not easy to serve one another. But we can still be generous with our prayers. We can still serve one another in the name of Jesus through texts and phone calls, notes and emails.

Aaron recently and helpfully challenged us from Psalm 85 to consider how this present trial, a global pandemic, might serve as a jackhammer to loosen the soil of our hearts so God’s love and mercy might flood them again in a fresh way. Let this season serve as the crucible for our hearts, tested and purified by the Lord (Psa 17:3) so that when we gather again, we might be “ready to share” for the sake of those we love.

– Chad Ireland

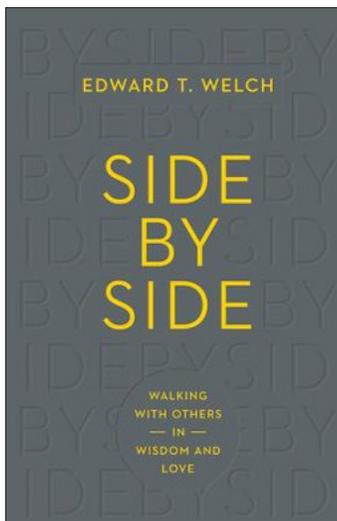
¹ Garrett Kell, *Church – Do I Have to Go?* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2019), location 1220.

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are & Why They Matter*, (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2018), 83.

³ *Ibid.*, 51.

Side By Side

Written by Ed T. Welch



As a redeemed people, we have direct access to the Lord and rich fellowship with one another. We go boldly to the throne of grace in communion with Christ and demonstrate his love to those around us. In *Side by Side*, we see that God is pleased to use ordinary Christians to fulfill extraordinary kingdom work. We are called to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2), acknowledging that we are both *needy* and *needed*.

We are needy: Life is hard. Neediness is our “basic condition”, and our circumstances present challenges which can be magnified by busy hearts. When suffering arises, we cry out to God; Welch describes Jesus’ recitation of Ps. 22 from the cross as the supreme example. Additionally, we take our sins to the Lord in confession. In suffering and sin, it is crucial that we turn to Jesus. Moreover, we should share these burdens with each other. We ask for prayer, both for circumstances and heart matters. Then we update those who have prayed for us, letting them know what God has done. Together, we ascribe glory to the Lord as we rejoice in his faithfulness.

We are needed: In Christ, ordinary people become Spirit-filled ambassadors, empowered to love others as we have been loved. We don’t need an advanced degree or professional counseling experience to impact people’s lives. We are qualified because we have the Holy Spirit, and he enables us to speak life-giving words of encouragement. As the Father pursues us, we pursue others by greeting them, asking thoughtful questions, interceding in prayer, and following up on progress. Welch notes that it is important to see the good in others as we minister to them, which can involve affirming their God-given gifts or their spiritual growth. This process of “building up” provides a framework of trust and allows us to delve into difficult conversations about suffering and sin knowing that we desire mutual edification.

Side by Side is a helpful guide for walking together in love and I recommend it to all believers seeking to mature in this area. When we embrace the fact that we are needy and needed, we grow in our worship of God and our affection for the body of Christ.

– RECOMMENDED BY JOHN CAMP

Excerpts From the Book

1

“Mingled with the knowledge of the true God are lies we bring and lies we are told. The result is that no one has a completely unhindered and accurate knowledge of the Lord. No one. Our resident myths are revealed in our fears, pasts, troubled emotions, and sins.”

– Our Hearts Are Busy, p. 30

2

“The Spirit gives us the wisdom of God. This wisdom overlaps with wisdom that we can gather from books and careful observations, but it goes deeper. It is wisdom rooted in the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. It is crammed with guidance from the Father through Christ – wisdom that we could never discover on our own (1 Cor. 1:20-25).”

– Remember: We Have the Spirit, p. 68

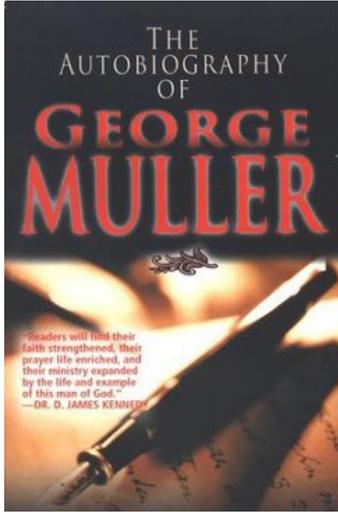
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“When we pray for faith, our hope is that someone will see through the immediate circumstances and into spiritual realities: God has rescued us, incorporated us into the line of the suffering servant, has forgiven our sins, is so near that he dwells within us, and will give us power to believe, hope, and even love in the midst of the trouble.”

– Pray During Trouble, p. 118

The Autobiography of George Müller

Written by George Müller



The Autobiography of George Müller is a classic story of one man's faith journey, and how God guided him and provided for his every need during a lifetime of Christian service. This book is a powerful example of how keeping a journal allows a Christian to see God's work in their life. Müller shares key parts from his 30 year journal: his prayers, God's provision, and his pleading with God to increase his faith.

Born in Kroppenstaedt, Prussia, in 1805, George was the son of a tax collector. Before he became a Christian, he lived a life of comfort and sin. After he was saved, the Lord led him to Bristol, England to establish The Scriptural Knowledge Institution for Home and Abroad. This organization sought to assist day schools and adult schools based on scriptural principles, to provide scholarships for poor children, to circulate the Holy scriptures, to support missionaries and missionary schools, and to establish an orphanage.

Müller launched his ministry by praying to God for both resources and guidance. He put his trust exclusively in God. He refused to go into debt, to ask anyone to supply his needs, and refused to take donations from non-believers.

Through the 30 thrilling years of adventure we see God's perfect timing over and over again. Frequently, Müller and his colleagues had only an English shilling, with hundreds of mouths to feed, but God never let them go hungry. I was encouraged to read how George undertook numerous expansions of his orphanage, faithfully growing it to over 1,000 children! Ultimately, Müller's ministry cared for over 10,000 orphans during his life, by meeting their daily needs and most importantly, feeding them spiritually.

This uplifting book is an appropriate example of the Christian life for both the mature and new believer. Müller addresses common topics: applying prayer in your daily schedule; explaining what is meant by a prayer of faith; how to act on the promises of God; how to pray effectively; how God provides everything one needs; how to study the Bible; and how to view your role in a secular world. After finishing this book, believers will find their daily lives and their prayer life strengthened and renewed with the example set by God's humble servant George Müller.

– RECOMMENDED BY JOHN HH TURNER III

Excerpts From the Book

1

"My wife and I had the grace to take the Lord's commandment in Luke 12:33, literally, "Sell that ye have, and give alms." We never regretted taking that step. God blessed us abundantly as He taught us to trust in Him alone. When we were down to our last few shillings, we told Him about our needs and depended on Him to provide. He never failed us."

– Learning to Live by Faith, p.37

2

"How great is the blessing the soul obtains by trusting in God and by waiting patiently."

– Answering God's Call to Service, p.182

3

"The Lord has given me precious proof that He is delighted when we expect great things from Him."

– A New Victory of Faith, p. 206

4

"The longer I go on in this service, the more I find that prayer and faith can overcome every difficulty."

– The Spirit's Work Among Us, p. 226

APRIL

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

April 1	Acts 28:17–31 Psalm 98	April 17	Joel 2:18–27 Psalm 114
April 2	Ephesians 3:1–13 Psalm 99	April 18	1 Thess. 5:1–28 Psalm 115
April 3	1 Thess. 2:1–16 Psalm 100	April 19	1 Thess. 5:16 Psalm 116
April 4	2 Cor. 3:1–18 Psalm 101	April 20	Romans 4:1–11 Psalm 117
April 5	2 Cor. 3:12 Psalm 102	April 21	Matthew 6:25–34 Psalm 118
April 6	1 Peter 1:1–12 Psalm 103	April 22	Gen. 15:1–21 Ps. 119:161–168
April 7	John 16:1–33 Psalm 104	April 23	Isaiah 35:1–10 Psalm 120
April 8	John 17:1–26 Psalm 105	April 24	1 John 4:7–21 Psalm 121
April 9	John 18:1–40 Psalm 106	April 25	Phil. 4:1–23 Psalm 122
April 10	John 19:1–30 Psalm 107	April 26	Philippians 4:6 Psalm 123
April 11	John 19:31–42 Psalm 108	April 27	Luke 12:22–34 Psalm 124
April 12	John 20:1–8 Psalm 109	April 28	1 Peter 5:1–11 Psalm 125
April 13	John 20:9–31 Psalm 110	April 29	Prov. 3:21–35 Psalm 126
April 14	Phil. 4:1–13 Psalm 111	April 30	2 Chr. 12:1–12 Psalm 127
April 15	1 Chr. 16:8–36 Psalm 112		
April 16	Isaiah 25:1–12 Psalm 113		

***Sermon text in bold**

TAKE UP & READ



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH