



Generosity

as a spiritual discipline

Presented By:

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“I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. ³⁵ This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other.”

(John 13:34-35 CEB)

“Generosity comes in many shapes, sizes, and colors. It’s not just mentioned in currency, or the numbers written on a check, or a financial statement. Generosity is broader and can be measured in how willing we are to share ourselves: our forgiveness, our mercy, our compassion, our love.”

(Generous Church Leadership Program session 1)

What is a spiritual discipline?

“A spiritual discipline is any habit or activity done with intention that helps us be more "in touch" with our spirituality and with God.

During Lent, many of us choose one discipline (like fasting, prayer, self-denial, service to the marginalized, etc.) as a focus in order to integrate it into our lives and become more spiritually connected. It doesn't really matter which of the disciplines you choose for your Lenten focus.

What matters is that you practice it on a consistent basis for the 40 days of Lent.” (UMC.org)

“Spiritual disciplines are a means by which we ‘get away’ with Jesus, ‘walk’ with Jesus, ‘learn’ from Jesus. Spiritual disciplines are a way of placing ourselves before God so that God can transform us, so that we are on a path where change can occur.” *(UNYUMC)*


“Spiritual disciplines are those practices found in the Scriptures that promote spiritual growth among those who believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that God's people have practiced since biblical times.”
(Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*)


Key spiritual disciplines within the Methodist tradition include:

- **Individual Practices:**

- **Study and Meditation:** Regular reading and study of Scripture, often called "searching the scriptures".
- **Prayer:** Personal prayer, including listening, meditation, and offering gratitude.
- **Fasting:** Abstaining from food or other comforts for spiritual focus.
- **Healthy Living/Self-Care:** Stewardship of the body and mind.
- **Solitude and Silence:** Withdrawing to be alone with God.
- **Confession:** Self-examination and repentance.
- **Simplicity:** Frugality and detachment from material distractions.

- **Communal/Corporate Practices:**

- **Worship:** Regular attendance in communal worship services.
- **Sacraments:** Receiving Holy Communion (The Lord's Supper) and Baptism.
- **Christian Conferencing:** Small group accountability, sharing, and spiritual direction.
- **Service/Works of Mercy:** Acts of compassion, visiting the sick, feeding the hungry, and social justice.
- **Hospitality:** Welcoming others. 

These practices are rooted in John Wesley's emphasis on the "means of grace," which are ways God works in believers to transform them into the likeness of Christ. 

The General Rule of Discipleship is a simple, easy to memorize, summary of the historic Methodist rule of life. It can be adopted by local congregations as their rule of life.

“A rule of life is a pattern of spiritual disciplines (habits) that provides structure and direction for growth in holiness. ... It fosters gifts of the Spirit in personal life and human community, helping to form us into the persons God intends us to be”
(Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast: An invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*).

The General Rule of Discipleship is a contemporary summary of the historic Methodist rule of life, The General Rules, found in ¶103 of The United Methodist Book of Discipline. The General Rule of Discipleship is found in ¶1117.2a.

From the 2020-2024 Book of Discipline

“Responsibilities and **Duties of Elders and Licensed Pastors** *[and all others empowered to be leaders in a congregation- DA]*

...to model and promote faithful financial stewardship and to encourage giving as a spiritual discipline by teaching the biblical principles of giving.”

(Paragraph 340)

What is Lent?

Lent is a season of 40 days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. The forty days **represents the time Jesus spent in the wilderness**, enduring the temptation of Satan and preparing to begin his ministry.

Lent is a time of:

repentance

fasting

reflection

self-examination

preparation for the coming of Easter

In the early church, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism by new converts and then became a time of penance by all Christians. **Today**, Christians focus on relationship with God, growing as disciples and extending ourselves, often choosing to give up something or to volunteer and give of ourselves for others.

Sundays in Lent are not counted in the forty days because each Sunday represents a "mini-Easter." This is why you will see the designation "Sunday **in** Lent" rather than "Sunday of Lent" in the naming of these Sundays. On each Lord's Day in Lent, while Lenten fasts continue, the reverent spirit of Lent is tempered with joyful anticipation of the Resurrection.

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-is-lent-and-why-does-it-last-forty-days>

Outlines

Five Aspects of Generosity

1. *God's Generosity*
2. *Receiving God's Generosity*
3. *Generosity To Oneself*
4. *Generosity To Community*
5. *Generosity For The World*

(Becky J. Eberhart: 40 days of Generosity. vi)

What gifts has God entrusted to me?

1. *What is a gift from God?*
2. *How do I learn to name the gifts God has entrusted to me?*
3. *How do I use my gifts to grow closer to Jesus?*
4. *How might I use them to serve others?*
5. *How might I help others to see their gifts?*

Sermon Series

First Sunday in Lent

Matthew 4:1-11 (CEB version)

4 Then the Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness so that the devil might tempt him. **2** After Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights, he was starving. **3** The tempter came to him and said, “Since you are God’s Son, command these stones to become bread.”

4 Jesus replied, “It’s written, *People won’t live only by bread, but by every word spoken by God.*”

5 After that the devil brought him into the holy city and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, **6** “Since you are God’s Son, throw yourself down; for it is written, *I will command my angels concerning you, and they will take you up in their hands so that you won’t hit your foot on a stone.*”

7 Jesus replied, “Again it’s written, *Don’t test the Lord your God.*”

8 Then the devil brought him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. **9** He said, “I’ll give you all these if you bow down and worship me.”

10 Jesus responded, “Go away, Satan, because it’s written, *You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*” **11** The devil left him, and angels came and took care of him.

How might you talk about **God's Generosity** through this text?

How might you talk about **Gifts from God** through this text?

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Lent 2026

First Sunday in Lent - February 22, 2026 - Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7 - Psalm 32 - Romans 5:12-19 - **Matthew 4:1-11** (Jesus Tested in the wilderness)

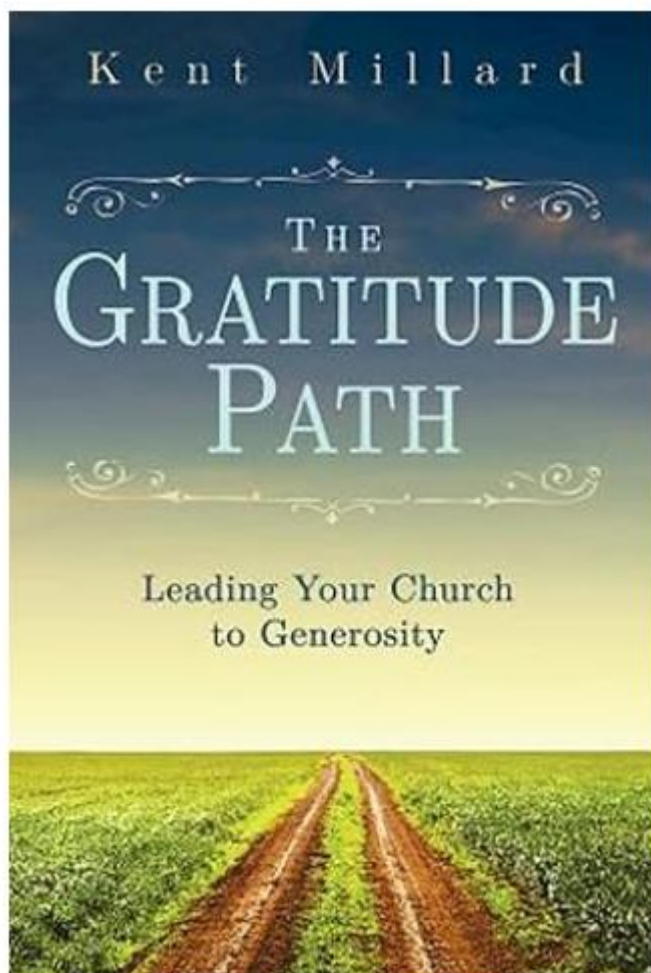
Second Sunday in Lent - March 1, 2026 - Genesis 12:1-4a - Psalm 121 - Romans 4:1-5, 13-17 - **John 3:1-17** (Nicodemus and John 3:16) or **Matthew 17:1-9** (Transfiguration)

Third Sunday in Lent - March 8, 2026 - Exodus 17:1-7 - Psalm 95 - Romans 5:1-11 - **John 4:5-42** (Samaritan woman)

Fourth Sunday in Lent - March 15, 2026 - 1 Samuel 16:1-13 - Psalm 23 - Ephesians 5:8-14 - **John 9:1-41** (Healing the blind man and the investigation of the healing)

Fifth Sunday in Lent - March 22, 2026 - Ezekiel 37:1-14 - Psalm 130 - Romans 8:6-11 - **John 11:1-45** (Death of Lazarus)

Liturgy of the Palms - March 29, 2026 - Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 - **Matthew 21:1-11** (Jesus arriving in Jerusalem)



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Individual or Communal Devotions

A Money Autobiography

A money autobiography is a reflection process on the role and influence of money and material possessions in our lives. It challenges us to explore the past to see how our attitudes, assumptions, and values concerning money and wealth were formed.

(Dan Dick)

Money Autobiography Questions

WEEK 1: FORMATIVE QUESTIONS

Day 1: What is your earliest memory of money?

Day 2: What is your happiest memory in connection with money?

Day 3: What is your unhappiest money memory?

Day 4: What attitudes did your parents and other family members have about money?

WEEK 4: LIFESTYLE QUESTIONS

Day 1: Does the fact that two-thirds of the earth's population lives below the U.S. poverty line affect your attitude toward money? If so, how? If not, why not?

Day 2: How do you feel when people approach you for money on the street? How do you feel when you receive phone solicitations for charitable contributions?

Day 3: Which of the following words best describe you and why?

affluent comfortable average

poor struggling wealthy

balanced working class impoverished

Day 4: What kind of legacy would you like to leave when you die? Of your worldly possessions, what would you leave to whom and why?

PHILANTHROPIC AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

The Philanthropic Autobiography Individual Edition

"Where your treasure is there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:21)

How does my past impact my talking about generosity in my life, ministry and faith community?

This tool helps you reflect on who you are and to think consciously about your involvement and thoughts around giving. It is an intentional time to consider how your past impacts your feelings around giving. It will also help to develop this part of your faith story as to your thoughts, feelings, and actions around talking about, and living out, giving in all aspects of your life and ministry. Write down notes below the questions (or on the back as needed) for personal and communal reflection.

1. What is your earliest memory of giving or receiving?
2. Did your family talk about money in your home? What did you learn from your family about giving?
3. What are some practices of faith and giving that you remember from your childhood?
4. Who has deeply touched your life, or influenced you as a giver? What makes this mentor memorable?
5. What issues do you have around talking about giving in your life and ministry? What tools could help you to address these issues?

We encourage you to use this information to create your "generosity/stewardship" story when people ask, "Why do you give?"

PHILANTHROPIC AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Faith Community Edition

The Philanthropic Autobiography Faith Community Edition

"Where your treasure is there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:21)

How does the history of our faith community impact the current and future actions and conversations around generosity and stewardship?

Answer these questions to the best of your ability in respect to what you've experienced as a member of your faith community. It is an intentional time to consider how your faith community's history and present actions impact conversations, perspectives, and feelings around giving for individuals and the faith community itself. Write down notes below the questions for personal and communal reflection.

1. What is your earliest memory of experiencing giving or receiving in your Faith Community?
2. When does your faith community talk about money? What do they say?
3. What have you learned from your faith community about the practices of faith and giving?
4. Within your faith community, who has deeply touched your life, or influenced you as a giver? What makes this person memorable?
5. What issues does your faith community have around talking about giving in their ministry? What tools could help them to address these issues?

How does this information help to shape further conversations around the stewardship practices of your congregation?

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- [GIVING[[JESUS]]GENEROSITY] information where the ideas from today are expanded & deepened
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“We give thanks that God gave us Jesus Christ to teach us what God is like, to demonstrate complete trust in God, to live a life of unconditional love, and to give his life on a cross and rise again for our salvation. When we realize the depth of God’s everlasting love for us, our hearts are filled with thanksgiving and gratitude.” Amen.

Kent Millard “Gratitude Path