

“Growing in Generosity”
October 11, 2026

Proverbs 11:24-26
II Corinthians 8:1-9

I want to thank Jane for talking this morning—and Darcie who spoke last week. Not only did both of them offer heart-felt words that call all of us to support the mission and ministry of this congregation, they also let me off the hook. I don’t have to preach about giving. They’ve done my work for me!

Not that there’s anything wrong with talking about money during a worship service—although not everyone feels that way. Prince Rivers, who teaches down at Duke Divinity School, recently wrote that “For some pastors, talking about money is uncomfortable. We don’t want people to think we are begging from the pulpit. We don’t want visitors and new members to think the church is ‘all about money.’”

Of course, if you’ve been around here for any length of time, you know that I’m generally quite comfortable in my preaching about giving. I actually *like* stewardship season. I enjoy preaching stewardship sermons. I am glad to announce the good news of the abundant love that God rains down upon us and the fruits that grow from our giving. I agree with the person who said, “There is only one thing better than raising money for the Realm of God and that is *spending money* for the Realm of God.”

So, this a great time of year. It reminds us of the astonishing reality that is ongoing giving to congregations—and to this congregation in particular. One person has pointed out that “People give more money to their places of worship than to *any other organization*. Dedicated churchgoers give to their congregations for decades on end, through good times and bad. They see ministers come and go, adjust to variations in worship, and as the years go by, accept all manner of changes, many of which they may not like. Yet large numbers of parishioners give generously their entire lives, until they draw their final breaths—and indeed after, as they often include church in their wills and estate plans.”¹

Astonishing.

But you know that because that is what you do. You know about giving. And I am confident that you will continue to give in ways that support the growing ministry and mission of our congregation that is important not only for us but for so many in our wider community. Fill out those pledge cards and we will continue to move forward.

This morning, instead of encouraging you to give, I want to encourage you to develop a gift that you already have within you—the gift of generosity. I want to encourage you to grow in that generosity.

As we grow in generosity, we discover something, perhaps unexpected, perhaps something of a paradox: God gives generously to each of us but does not compel our response. God gives freely so that we can be—if we desire—like God at least in this sense: free, generous, and cheerful givers ourselves.

Recall then, those words of Paul that we heard this morning.

For a variety of reasons, the early Christian congregation in Jerusalem needed financial support. The leaders of that church—James, Peter, and John—along with, no doubt, several prominent but unnamed women—asked for a collection among the Gentile churches that were developing in the west.

And the church in Corinth responded. When Paul wrote to them, they had been collecting money for the church in Jerusalem for over a year. But knowing these faithful yet difficult people, Paul thought that they could be more generous.

A lot of people think of Paul as being harsh and judgmental, but he was actually pretty good at calling forth the best in a congregation—even a congregation as troubled as those Corinthians. So, he wrote to the Corinthians, and encouraged their generosity by reminding them that, since they excel in so much, they should also excel in generosity.

And in a stroke of genius, he also mentioned the Christians in Macedonia.

Now, the Christians in Macedonia were poor. The whole region was suffering greatly under the Romans. Added to their poverty was their persecution. Yet when they heard about the need of the poor in Jerusalem, their response was a generosity that, as Paul saw it, grew out of nothing less than the grace of God.

So, Paul told the Corinthians what those Macedonians had done: “Their abundant joy *and* their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.” Paul gently hints: certainly the Corinthians wouldn’t want to be outdone by the Macedonians. It would be like me suggesting that the people over at Faith UCC are more generous than the folk here at the corner of Jefferson and Clinton.

How would you respond to that? My guess is with your own growing generosity.

Being a generous person is one of life’s great privileges.

So where do we begin?

Let me suggest three ways in which we can grow in generosity:

Living with joy in the presence of God.

Sharing abundance.

Developing our resources.

Generosity grows as we live with joy in the presence of a loving God.

You are valued as a child of God. You are valued as a human being created in the image of God. Not that this is always easy to see.

It’s been said that “In the United States—and, let’s face, here in Iowa City—if people have money, our culture grants them prestige, power, and security. Our culture values people with money.”²

Our faith, however, teaches us that we are more than what American culture teaches. We are more than our money. Each one of us has a value far beyond that given to us by our culture.

Each of us and all of us have value in the sight of God for who we are and *whose* we are. No prosperity, no adversity can change your worth.

You see, generosity does not grow out of a sense of wealth. Survey after survey indicates that poorer people give away a greater percentage of their income than wealthy people. Generosity does not develop as we look around and see how much we've got. Usually that leaves us thinking we'd like a little more.

Generosity grows as we live with joy in the presence of a loving God.

God loves you.

You know, I preach a lot about what might be called the social and political implications of our faith. You expect that. But from time to time, it is good to recall the foundation of our faith—the love of God—and its meaning for our lives.

So let me say it again: God loves you. Let that reality sink into your heart this week and see the difference it makes. Generosity grows as we live with joy in the presence of the God of love.

We grow in generosity by sharing God's abundance.

If you take anything from this sermon this morning, please let it be this: Generosity is not primarily about money—it is about a spirit that is ready to share many gifts in many ways. That readiness to share grows out of gratitude.

We give thanks for the beautiful, safe homes we live in. And we find ourselves wanting to share that goodness, seeking to make sure everyone has the shelter, the home they need. Generosity grows.

We give thanks for the food we have, the meals we enjoy with family and friends. And we find ourselves wanting to share that goodness with others. We support the food pantry at the CommUnity Crisis Center with our time, our money. We serve at Hope Lodge and the Free Lunch Program—and there will be opportunities to do that again in November. We support the Agapé Café down the street at Old Brick, providing free breakfast to all. Generosity grows.

We are thankful for the love we have received—so we are generous in giving love.

We are thankful for the forgiveness we have received—so we are generous in forgiving others.

We are thankful for the grace we have received—so we are generous in extending grace to others.

Generosity is about much more than money. We grow in generosity as we share God's abundance.

And yes, generosity does include how we relate to our money. It grows as we develop our own financial resources.

We are not asked to grab and hoard, conserve and hold our financial resources. We are asked to develop and grow those resources.

One part of developing our financial resources is being generous with them. Remember John Templeton, who said that in all his years of working with people, he never encountered anyone who was generous who didn't grow in both wealth and happiness. Wealth and happiness aren't always found together—but generosity seems to unite them.

We grow in generosity as we develop our financial resources.

We grow in generosity as we live in the presence of a loving God who gives to us in abundance and invites us to similar generosity. We begin to relax a little. We develop our financial resources—the gifts and offerings that come to us—not out of a spirit of fear for tomorrow but out of a spirit of hope in the future that is in God's hands.

As a congregation, we need people who are growing the possibility of generosity. We need people who are generous in teaching others about the love of God. We need people who are generous in compassion and caring. We need people who are generous in their work toward justice. We need people who are generous in hospitality and welcome. We need people to share with newer, younger members their own history of generosity before God.

This is to say, we need people like you.

So, again, I don't want to encourage you to give—you'll do that anyway. I do want to encourage you to grow in generosity.

Like those Corinthian Christians, as you excel in everything, so excel in generosity.

¹ Michael Durall, *Creating Congregations...*, pg. ix.

² Callahan, *12 Keys*, pg. 150.