

live + love
GENEROUSLY

A DEVOTIONAL BY:
THE HOPE VENTURE

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Thank you so much for taking some time to dive into what it means to live and love generously. We hope this devotional can help equip you to live a life of abundant joy and love. We have seen the truths in this booklet to be true in our lives and have experienced amazing peace and joy through them. We hope you can do the same.

Love,

The Hope Venture Team

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The Hope Venture exists to bring hope and dignity to the most disadvantaged people in the world.

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day one >>

LIVE AND LOVE GENEROUSLY

At The Hope Venture we have this crazy passion to Live & Love Generously... to believe there is something that enables us to live beyond our limitations and pour out a deep and real love to real people, with overflowing wonder. Seriously, it's a wonder.

It's beyond the norm. It's believing we can have the capacity to give when we don't feel it's within us. It's this notion that something grander can compel us. Something mighty and awesome can flow from within us. We can love the hurting. We can give lots of money (it's a thing – people do that). We can be a part of something amazing and awesome.

Around here, there's no obligation. We don't love reluctantly or begrudgingly. We don't give sparingly or for a pat on the back. We give out of great joy in doing so. We love out of deep conviction that every person is worthy of love. We produce excellent work not because we are so skilled but because our God is so wise.

Yes, it completely relates to our view of God. If He lavishes, He abounds, He gives grace, He dances over, He stoops down to lift up, He leaves the 99 to run after the one, He fills, He enables, He renews, He supplies and increases... well then that pretty much changes everything. When I am weak, He is strong. When I am unable, He is able. When I am unloving – because let's face it, our hearts are not always so noble – He still loves and teaches us how to love also.

How is your view of God these days? We hope we can represent Him to you. Maybe you've seen very little love flow from the Church and that's been your view of God. Maybe you've gone to

church all your life but how you relate to people outside those walls isn't really affected by that. Maybe you give 10% and you volunteer but you see no connection to God in that. Maybe God's been in a box of limitations and niceties (or perhaps the opposite) that have been constructed from years of consideration.

But what if God really is wonderful? What if love really is available?

If we could so dare, we want to challenge your view of God. Not really by our words, but by both the way we practice real love (1 John 3:16-18) and by how we believe God fills us to enable us to live that way (2 Co 9:6-15). And we want to invite you to live and love that way with us. Go read those verses. Be changed.

Pause for a minute. Could God make a difference in your ability to live and love generously this month? If He loves everyone, could you love everyone? A family member that's troubling you? Someone of a different culture? Your boss? If He cares for the brokenhearted and shows compassion, could you? If He's not in a box and 10% doesn't always equal love, maybe give more – maybe way more - to someone you know or to an organization you trust. Or do something radical like put away the distractions and be attentive to the needs around you. Even though you're tired. Even though you need that money. Even though you don't have time. Even though they really do annoy you or are weird or just different than you. Even though you don't have the strength today. Could there be a God who is stronger? A God who is able. A God who loves the unloveable. A God who holds all the riches. A God who is great and awesome and wild and wonderful.

We invite you... Live and Love Generously. Today is your moment.

the action //

Take some time to journal about your view of God. Do you feel his love overflowing out of your life? Maybe take time today to reconnect and refill with God. This is step one.

LOOK AROUND // THE \$10 MATCH

OK suppose you want to jump in with us and do something different during our 14 day Live & Love Generously challenge. How do you do it? How do we do it together?

Well we told you we didn't want to just talk about real love; we wanted to show you how we practice it here. We want to model it and help you go for it. Now there's a lot of ways we can start, and honestly in a few days we'll back up and take a look at some of our motivations and what fills us up to even have a real love to give away. But for now, we really wanted to put our money where our mouth was and get to it.

So, even though non-profits usually COLLECT money, today we are GIVING AWAY money! That's right. Please, take us up on it. We want to do this together. Here's the idea:

We are giving away \$10 Venmo transfers to the FIRST 15 people who can give it away to someone in need today. All you have to do is show us how you've helped or encouraged someone - message us the receipt or a picture of you giving it away - and we'll Venmo you \$10. It's that easy.

Sometimes we just don't look around and see the need. So we're inviting you today to look around, find a need, step in and we will pay. We want to get you looking. We want to get you talking to us and each other about what you see. Tell us some needs you see around you. Tell us some ideas you have to help. And where you need money to step in and make a difference, for today, let us step in and do that with you.

We invite you... Live and Love Generously. Today is your moment.

the action //

Look around and see the needs. If you step in and help, message @thehopeventure or Cynci at 402-802-8296 and we will pay \$10 to the first 15 requests!

TODAY

Proverbs 3:27-28 says, “Do not withhold good from those who deserve it when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Come back later; I’ll give it to you tomorrow’ -- when you now have it with you.” These verses are foundational to us here at The Hope Venture. We might not do everything perfectly, but we also don’t want to sit back and watch hurting people all around us and do nothing about it.

We believe to Live & Love Generously means we need to step into it... sometimes BEFORE we have it all figured out, sometimes WHILE we are figuring it out, and sometimes in those ideal moments, AFTER we’ve figured it out.

We almost never have ALL the knowledge we need to make perfect decisions. We pray. We do our best. We trust God to lead us.

If you want to live and love to check off all your boxes or to live and love after the need is already met and proven to be noble, then it may be too late. Ahhh... this can be so misunderstood because we also don’t mean to turn off your brain because that can be damaging as well. We want to get you wrestling with this with us. Helping others isn’t easy. Living and loving generously isn’t a calculation. It can be wise - that’s what tomorrow is about - but it also does have a heart. Engage your heart. Look around. See if your heart can start to notice some needs around you that you’ve been oblivious to lately. Is there anything you should do today to respond to those needs?

We invite you... Live and Love Generously. Today is your moment.

the action //

Take time to let your heart feel and respond to the needs around you today, while it is still today, while the opportunity is before you. What does that look like for you?

BE WISE

Often when I've been in India I've seen beggars on the streets. Sometimes I've helped them with a little cash, more often with a little food or by purchasing something they were selling, but often I've chosen to help only by giving to organizations that are planning wisely how to distribute funds to the hurting of that country. It's actually one of the reasons I started The Hope Venture: I saw so many people wanting to give but then not being wise about HOW they gave. Even my husband and I were scammed when we started trying to help the country of India... and then again in Uganda. Helping is not always easy. Organizations work hard to figure out the best way to get real help into real hands.

We've been sharing the last couple days how we need to respond with our hearts and act now while we have a moment of opportunity. It's a beautiful thing when you can combine that heart with a wise mind to accomplish the best plan.

Have you considered that when you want to give to an organization, you can do some research and make sure they are trustworthy and acting with the highest of ethics? Charity Navigator, Guidestar (now called Candid) and the ECFA are just a few of the many organizations that rate nonprofits for integrity and other data.

Have you considered that when you see a homeless man or woman, perhaps instead of giving them money you could give money to the local City Mission that is wisely meeting their needs? Or you could buy them a meal instead of giving them cash. Or you could sit and talk with them and bring them dignity with your attention instead of any money at all.

This month, we are asking you to combine your heart and mind to love people. Don't check your heart at the door and try to figure it all out before you do anything. But don't check your mind at the door either. There's nothing praiseworthy about throwing your money out to just be wasted. Use your money, your time, all your resources to the glory of God. Use your mind and your heart together and wrestle through what that looks like for you.

What could you do this week to be more wise about the way you love others?

We invite you... Live and Love Generously. Today is your moment.

the action //

Get on one of these websites and find an organization you can trust.

ALLEN

Several years ago, my son's friend had his dad die in an accident. It was a horrible tragedy. No boy wants to lose his dad.

If you knew that boy, how would you try to extend love and kindness to him? We've been challenging ourselves to Live & Love Generously and we've said it's not going to be so much about our words as it is about our actions. So if you knew him, how would you love in this real life situation? We all have them - yep, real life situations. What are yours right now? Real life has pain, but love can reach into that pain and restore hope. We can't fix all the wounds, but we can bring hope.

Allen is a man who Lives and Loves Generously.

Allen was a family friend who decided to step into that pain. He attended this boy's baseball games. He helped financially. He prayed. He began to mentor and give advice and kindness. For years now, Allen has been a continued part of this family's story.

He's also become a part of The Hope Venture story. One time I was in Starbucks and he came over to me and told me he liked what we were doing and to keep it up. I thanked him as he walked away and then looked down, only then realizing he had dropped a \$100 bill on my table to help our organization. Since then he has become a regular supporter and sponsors a student in Kenya through us.

I want to live like that. I bet you do too.

What can we do today? Taking after Allen, we challenge you today to pause for a minute and think of someone you know who is experiencing a loss of some sort. Offer them a kindness, today. Just take one step. Bring them a meal or some brownies or a coffee or some flowers. Write them a note and get it in the mail today. Do something today for one person who has had a loss. Perhaps you'll be more the person you want to be in the process.

We invite you... Live and Love Generously. Today is your moment.

the action //

Do something today for one person who has had a loss. Perhaps you'll be more the person you want to be in the process.

ARLIN

Yesterday we talked about loving someone in their loss. Today we want to encourage you to love someone in their victory.

Meet Arlin. Arlin is someone who Lives & Loves Generously not only at a time of need, but as she celebrates you. If you get a promotion, or do a good job at work, or have a child that got picked for the team, she's right there to throw a party or send you a card in the mail or just shoot you a text that says, "Wow congratulations!" She's that person that responds to your group email. She's that person who's cheering you on.

Among friends, she's known especially for how she celebrates your birthday.

She's the one that secretly texts your friends and gathers everybody. She's the one that picks the grand place to eat. She's the one that gets there early and sets up her own table decorations, even if it's just a coffee shop or casual place. She's got a full tub of stuff from candles to flowers to birthday hats. She's never embarrassed to lavish you with love. Seriously, it's beautiful and amazing.

So here we go; we have another challenge for you. Hopefully you got that card in the mail yesterday or the meal given away because life keeps going and days slip into the next and there is no day like today to give away love again. Everyday, be the person you want to be. So here it is... who in your world could you celebrate today? Seriously, find one. If they have a birthday coming up, challenge yourself to go all out. Risk being known for loving over the top.

Don't have any birthdays you want to get too crazy about? Maybe just celebrate something your friend or family member did recently. Maybe they put a lot of time into something and would love if someone noticed. Choose today to just offer one word of encouragement in a world of trials and struggle. Make plans to celebrate someone today.

We invite you... Live and Love Generously. Today is your moment.

the action //

Make plans to celebrate someone today, either by loving over the top, or by a simple word of encouragement.

OUR SOURCE OF LOVE

We've been challenging ourselves to Live & Love Generously. We've talked about responding to the needs around us (first noticing the needs), today, while we have the opportunity, with our hearts, but also with our minds. We've been challenged by Allen and Arlin to love people in their loss and to celebrate people in their moment of victory. Still though, what if we're tired? How do we really have the strength to do this?

And God is able to make all grace abound to you so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Who is this God? And does the Bible really say this, or is it that God might make a little ability available for us, in some things, or at some times, having almost what we need but not quite, so that some of our works can be good?

We said in our original blog a week ago that...

If He lavishes, He abounds, He gives grace, He dances over, He stoops down to lift up, He leaves the 99 to run after the one, He fills, He enables, He renews, He supplies and increases... well then that pretty much changes everything.

This is the God that enables us to Live & Love Generously. He is like no other. He is King and Shepherd and Master and Friend and our Rock and Refuge and Lion and Peace and Father and Strength. He is Love - unfailing. He is with us - always. He is for us - to the point of coming as a baby and dying on a cross.

This is the God that enables us to reach out to a friend who has experienced loss. This is the God that gives us wisdom to know

how to love and a heart to respond with compassion. This is the God that celebrates and dances over us as an example so we have any idea how to celebrate others.

So the challenge today is not even to find someone to extend love to, so much as it is to consider diving deeper into the Love of the One who can enable you day after day after day. If we have no source of Love to draw upon, then surely we will come up short in our efforts. When life is hard we will be unable. When too many needs come at us, our capacity will be spent.

But His resources never run dry. You have not used them up. He is here again today with all you need... in all things, at all times.

Have you spent much time with the King of kings lately? Have you thanked Him? Have you run to Him, relying on His strength to pour into you and then out to the world through you? How are you doing at drawing upon His love as you pour out to others? Take some time with Him today.

We invite you... Live and Love Generously. Today is your moment.

the action //

Run to the King of kings and draw upon His love today. Spend some extra moments with Him.

DORCAS

In Ezekiel 16:49 it says, "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy."

Wow. We Christians think of Sodom and Gomorrah as a sexually sinful place, but this verse points to something more. They were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.

It was no small deal that they were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned.

Wow.

We are called to care about the poor. A woman named Dorcas in Acts 9 did it well: she "was always doing good and helping the poor." She made clothing for them. She was loved by many people for how she extended love and kindness to the poor.

I didn't grow up thinking I wanted to be like Dorcas. Even her name doesn't feel very flattering. And what she did... I don't know... I kind of wanted to do some great noble thing with my life, not linger in the background being helpful to the poor. That sounds horrible but even today, having walked with Jesus now for 30 years, I still am challenged by God's call to help the poor. People may think I'm like Dorcas - I run an organization that spends every day trying to help the poor and I do feel called to do so. But we partner with people overseas who do the hard work; I'm still in my comfy little world quite honestly. I too need to keep asking myself am I doing all I can to honor God's call on

my life to care about the poor.

What about you? Are you doing all you can to help the poor? Would people describe you as someone "who was always doing good and helping the poor"? Is there something God would call you to so that you could show kindness to the poor? Is there an organization you can get involved with? Do you even perhaps need to repent because honestly, you might be described as 'arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy'?"

Honestly I have never seen poverty anywhere like the slums I've visited in India and Kenya. So we have made it our mission to work to alleviate the poverty in those slums. But the reality is that there is poverty all around us. Where have you seen it? Perhaps you've seen what I have. Perhaps you see it down the street. Perhaps you see it in your backyard. Wherever you see the poor, the call is to step in and help. Do you have the means to clothe someone who is cold and can't afford a jacket? Do you have the means to help someone pay hospital bills? Do you have the ability to help someone get their car back up and running? Do you know where the food bank is? Do you know where the homeless shelter is?

Helping the poor is not for the select few, it's for us all. The call to love is one that intrinsically necessitates love of the poor. So join us. Let's turn our eyes to those who are in real need, and let's help.

We invite you... Live and Love Generously. Today is your moment.

the action //

Do something today to help the poor. Whether that is donating to a nonprofit organization or sitting down and having a conversation with someone who is homeless, do something.

LOVE THOSE OTHER PEOPLE

I've heard it said that we judge people within 12 seconds. You're in line to checkout somewhere and your eyes trace the line and you already know who you could be friends with, who looks kind of like you, who has that look you wish you had, and who you really don't want to be like at all.

To Live & Love Generously doesn't mean just being nice to people who are like us. It means to love those other guys. To extend love beyond what's comfortable, to lavish love on someone who is even perhaps undeserving. After all, isn't that what Jesus did for all of us? I don't deserve the love that is lavished all over me by the One who didn't need to even notice me.

So today the challenge is to find someone outside of your normal box. Literally, go out of your way. (Again, Jesus.) Look for someone who doesn't normally get your kindness extended to them. Maybe it's because you haven't noticed. Maybe it's because you've withheld it. Today, uhh, break the barrier, cross into the unknown, and be kind to someone other than your normal crowd. Literally go. Do it. They dress differently. Their skin color is different. They hang out not where you hang out. They excel at something you have no idea about. They're weird. They're uncomfortable. Give yourself a timeframe and go into that world today for just a bit. The goal we have for you: See if you can find something in common. Write it down in your journal or message us - what do you have in common? After all, they're people, and I think you're a people if you're reading this. So do it.

We invite you... Live and Love Generously. Today is your moment.

the action //

Break the barrier, cross into the unknown, and be kind to someone other than your normal crowd.

RIGHT THE WRONGS

We live in a world that is hurting and where injustice takes place. We see it on the news. We don't like it. Yet if it doesn't directly affect us, sometimes we don't know what to do about it. Maybe it's even just overwhelming.

As we try to Live & Love Generously, we've been trying to just really do it... to take some step and make some effort. That is the starting point.

So for me as I write this, I'm thinking about Jayme Closs, a girl who perhaps we've all heard about over the last few months. It's not fair what has happened to her. I can't change it, so what am I supposed to do?

I'm supposed to love. I'm supposed to care. I'm supposed to not turn off my heart just because there are too many stories like that one, too many other stories completely different but completely wrong and horrible. So first maybe I just decide I'm not going to grow cold just because it's overwhelming. I'm going to have a heart and care.

Then, if you're the praying type - which I am - you pray. Today if you think about someone who is being treated unfairly, pray for them. It matters. God hears our prayers.

It's a big deal to pray, to ask the God of the heavens to act. It's no small thing.

I believe God can lead you next. He can take care of it from there, or He can burden you to stay a part of it, to do something more about it, to maybe get involved with ongoing change for some injustice. He'll lead you. Just let Him know you care and that it bothers you too and that you're willing to line up with Him. He'll figure it out with you.

We invite you... Live and Love Generously. Today is your moment.

the action //

Pray for people who are being treated unfairly today. Let God know that you care and that it bothers you too. Ask God to take care of it and tell him you're willing to line up with Him.

NAVEEN

A few years ago my son Caleb met a young boy named Naveen. Naveen lives in India. His family struggles to have enough food to eat so Naveen comes regularly to The Hope Venture's Feeding Center. Naveen also speaks some English and was eager to handle all the talking when Caleb came to his village. As the other little boys excitedly tried to show Caleb their Cricket abilities or their homes or anything and everything, Naveen calmly acted almost like an interpreter, though his English was just maybe a step above theirs. Caleb took a liking to Naveen and when he left he wrote a little note on a piece of paper and handed it to Naveen. This is what it said:

Dear Naveen,

I have missed you while in America. I am praying for you. You are my friend. Don't do evil things, do good things. Know that Jesus loves you more than anyone. You are going to do great things in life. You will change the world.

From,
Caleb

Several months later when I went to India Caleb told me to find the boy named Naveen and say hi. I found him and told him he had met my son. His eyes lit up and then he reached his little fingers into his pants' pocket and dug out a crumpled up note. He had carried it everyday for months because it meant so much to him.

Wow. One little note and it was boosting this boy's heart for months.

A note. It can be short. Just anything to use our words for good. To boost up another human.

So how bout it? A sticky note on the bathroom mirror. A letter in the mail. Even a text if paper just isn't going to happen today. Just do something to use your words to boost someone today.

We invite you... Live and Love Generously. Today is your moment.

the action //

Write a short note to someone to encourage them. Send it in the mail or put it where they will see it... today.

BE GENEROUS

The dictionary defines generous this way:

“Showing a readiness to give more of something, as money or time, than is strictly necessary or expected.

Showing kindness toward others.

Larger or more plentiful than is usual or necessary.”

If we want to Live & Love Generously, it might take more than the bare minimum, more than just what is expected or calculated or necessary. Sometimes it feels foolish. Sometimes it feels like, “Shoot did I even need to do that? Did they really need it?” We’re not saying it always feels like that, because it should be addressing a real need. But sometimes, it just isn’t so perfect.

Not everyone lives a generous life. So when you start to Live & Love Generously, you might feel weird. It’s “not expected.” It’s “more than is usual.” You become a bit unusual. Don’t let that scare you away. This world needs this kind of love. Jesus is our model and think about it - who expected Him to come as a baby? Who expected Him to lower Himself so much on our behalf? Who pours out grace to the sinner like Jesus does or “stoops down to lift us up” like Jesus does? He is our model - not this world. Go be like Jesus. Pour out love, don’t dribble a lit bit of it. Lavish it. Give it away.

What can you do today that is more than necessary or not expected?

We invite you... Live and Love Generously. Today is your moment.

the action //

Follow Jesus’ example in being generous today. Pour it out! Lavish it on someone today!

VICTORIA

The night before my son Josh proposed to Victoria she got into a car wreck and totaled her car. Within a week Josh also totaled his car. Woops, not a great start. It was December and money was already tight. Then our family gathered for a Christmas tradition where we give our kids some money and put some catalogs and support letters and opportunities before them and invite them to choose some ways to give. This was Victoria's first time to join us for this.

I remember watching them try to figure out what they wanted to do together. Victoria recounts how glad she was that we were giving them money because that took the pressure off and gave her joy to look at the opportunities. But then Josh leaned over and privately suggested they use their own money to also sponsor a student overseas together.

Gulp. Umm, what money? She was in shock. This was the time to be wise. She discussed very valid points with Josh. Yet still he said, maybe now, in our time of need, is our moment to put our trust in God and give even more than we thought?

This was not the perspective she was expecting. It was scary... but inspiring too. She hesitantly agreed, little knowing that God would honor that decision and change the trajectory of their lives together through it. That step of faith and more choices like it, to be generous, to trust in God and in His radical ways, and to follow Him into the unknown has brought beauty and love and joy they would never have known... for themselves and for countless others here and abroad.

Are you scared? Jonah 2:8 says, "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs." Maybe now is the moment that God wants to show Himself to you.

We invite you... Live and Love Generously. Today is your moment.

the action //

Consider what might be holding you back in pouring out love to this world. Are you scared of anything that might be involved with that? Take that to God, turn from it if you are ready (and keep wrestling if not), and then recommit yourself to following God wherever He leads.

NOW WHAT?

For the last 14 days we've challenged ourselves to Live & Love Generously. Like Dorcas who was always doing good and helping the poor. Or by righting a wrong or loving the other guys. We challenged ourselves to look around and see the need and then act today... but ahhh be wise too! Let Jesus be your source of living and loving generously and you can pour out to this world. You can use kind words and write a note, you can give lots of money to a great cause. You can act generously even though others may not.

Today we want to ask you to read back over these 14 days and pick one day that challenged you not only at that moment, but is something you want to incorporate more as a part of your lifestyle. Is there something you've done these last couple weeks that you want to do more often? Is there a new habit, a new normal, you could create so that you are more the person you want to be when life is all said and done?

Pray that God would help you add one of these things into your normal. Just one. And let us know what it is if you want - we'd love to hear!

Thanks for being on the journey with us!

We invite you... Live and Love Generously. Today is your moment.

the action //

Read back over these 14 days and pick one day that challenged you not only at that moment, but is something you want to incorporate more as a part of your lifestyle. Ask God to help you and share your desire with a friend (us!).

**thank
you**

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