

live + love
GENEROUSLY

A DEVOTIONAL BY:
THE HOPE VENTURE

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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. 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 be a part of something amazing and awesome.

This devotional is meant to remind us that this is not news to God. This is how He intends it. Come explore with us and invite God to make your generosity more like His.

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

Generosity Starts In Your Heart

The Lord said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give."

Exodus 25:1-2

This is interesting: Here God is TELLING the Israelites to give, but then he says that those "whose HEART prompts him to give" should give. How can that be? Is it an offering if I'm told to give? Is it my choice if a collection plate is passed in front of me and I don't want to look stingy so I put something in? Is it my choice if the lady in the DriveIn says, "Would you like to round up?" How can I be generous if all around me people are asking me to give to this great cause and this other great cause and wait, there's another great cause I forgot to tell you about? I don't have enough anyway and I can't give to all those places and perhaps I'm left feeling like I let everyone down and just gave to the place that made

me feel the most guilty. Yuck.

And so we hide from the person who is asking for something. All of a sudden we need to slip into the restroom when that friend who started a non-profit is headed our way.

But friends, God never intended our giving to be something we just did because we felt compelled to. Offerings are meant to be from the HEART. That's the beginning of generosity: our hearts. Our hearts lead the way. They don't control us, we can still use our brains and make wise choices, but generosity is not something pulled out of us. Even IF we are asked, it's on us to let our hearts prompt us. No one has to control us in an "offering." It's not yanked, it's offered.

Do you ever let others yank you into giving? How come? When was the last time you let your heart prompt you?

to ponder

Day Two

Everything We Have Comes From God

"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from You, and we have given You only what comes from Your hand."

1 Chronicles 29:14

1 Chronicles 29 is an amazing chapter on generosity. David was speaking to the Israelites about the leaders giving for God's temple, and it is filled with words like "gave willingly" and "over and above" and "wholehearted devotion" and "the people rejoiced at the willing response."

And as they rejoice, David reminds them who enabled them to give like that. "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness... power... glory... majesty... splendor... Everything in heaven and earth is Yours... Wealth and honor come from You... It comes from Your hand and all of it belongs to You."

Why do we hold and protect our money as if we are the master of it? Yes, we are to be wise, but often we fool ourselves into thinking we know what tomorrow will bring and that our savings account will keep us safe.

The truth is, everything... everything... we have comes from God. He is our Caretaker and Provider, our Father and Master. We didn't pick where we were born. We didn't pick our skin color or parents. We didn't pick the hospital where we took our first breath. We didn't create ourselves. We didn't even give ourselves the will to make the good choices we have made. God created you, and me, and He is our Provider.

Read 1 Chronicles 29:1-20. Have you ever experienced that kind of JOY in giving? Is there anything frustrating or hard to imagine about God being in charge of it all instead of you? How could you line up with God on this thought more?

to ponder

Day Three

*All of Us Are Able To Be Generous
(trial or poverty doesn't exclude us)*

"Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity... they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability... they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this...."

2 Corinthians 8:2-4

Anyone can be generous. Young. Old. Rich. Poor. Blessed. Struggling. Anyone.

I love the Bible being our model! Because I am changed by it! I see others doing what I thought impossible. How could extreme poverty well up in rich generosity? How could people give out of their "severe trial"? And "beyond their ability"? It's so awesome!

THIS is my model! Not some calculation of a percentage. Some people in the Bible were "pleading" for the chance to give, to be a part of what God was doing! We are BLESSED to GET to give! I believe it! I've seen it in my own life!

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15. Is there anything that God might be giving you the grace to give to, but you haven't completed it because perhaps more trials have come, more fears have welled up within you? What do you think God is saying to you about that today and can you trust Him?

to ponder

Day Four

Generosity Involves Joy and a Willingness

"All whose hearts were willing brought burnt offerings.... [The priests] were too few to skin all the burnt offerings... There were burnt offerings in abundance.... And all the people rejoiced at what God had brought about for his people, because it was done so quickly."

2 Chronicles 29:31-36

Many of us avoid 2 Chronicles, and certainly all this "burnt offerings" stuff seems completely unrelatable. But it was their way of making an offering, just like we have our ways. And here we see them bringing it in abundance. Their hearts were willing and they were rejoicing. Their leader, Hezekiah, was 25 years old and he saw God show up for him. He brought the people together, repaired the temple, made sacrifices to God,

worshipped, bowed down, sang and led the people to bring so many offerings to God that they didn't have enough leaders to handle them! And they all praised God because of it!

When generosity wells up among us it's a beautiful thing! Generosity comes from the heart! It comes forward willingly and results in great joy!

What makes you afraid to be generous? What could help you remember the joy of it? Read 2 Chronicles 29.

to ponder

Day Five

Respect the Poor

"Do not go into his house to get what he is offering as a pledge. Stay outside and let the man to whom you are making the loan come to you. If the man is poor... Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy... he is poor... do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow..."

Deuteronomy 24:10-22

I find it interesting that all the provisions God makes for the poor. He goes out of His way to instruct us about how we treat the poor and the alien and the widow and the fatherless. God has a tender heart for their needs and He models that for us. He teaches us in His word how to treat the poor and the needy. He respects them. He Himself stoops down for their sake to lift them up.

One of the motivators for me to be generous to those around me is how generous God is to those around Him. He does not need to mention the poor and needy in His Bible. God is a King who is majestic. He does not need

to care for the lowly. Yet He is so thoughtful in His care for them. Over and over and over He mentions in His word special instructions for our treatment of the least of these. He doesn't even just talk about it, He does it. He left heaven to come to earth for us. He lets the children or a bleeding woman interrupt Him. He let people spit on Him just to lift us up and give us life.

We are to go out of our way, way out of our way perhaps, to care about others. We aren't to stay in our own little bubbles. God breaks the barriers and reaches. He is so lavish and generous. How 'bout you and me?

You are so incredible God. How I long to be like You! Who else Lord would you have me pay attention to? What bubble am I living in that is limiting how You want to use me? How could I be generous and respectful and tender and lavish towards the needs of others today, this week, this year?

to ponder

Day Six

God Doesn't Forget Any of Us

"[The Lord] is loving toward all He has made."

Psalm 145:12-17

How is it that God's kingdom is everlasting, that He is the Maker of heaven and earth, and yet still, He upholds ALL those who fall, He lifts up those who are bowed down? How could it be that His dominion endures through all generations, He is King over all, and yet He pays attention to the oppressed, He gives food to the hungry, and sight to the blind and sustains the fatherless? How could He not lose count and just let a few slip by Him? In all this time, has He really paid attention to all of us? Is He really loving toward ALL He has made?

God's love is meant to be poured out on all people. There are none undeserving. None that are beyond His care. He made each one of us, with dignity and value. And He loves all that He has made. Not just those that are loving back. Not just those that hold a title and seem important. The lowly. The oppressed. Those that are bowed down. The

alien. The immigrant. The forgotten. The orphan. The kid that's slow at school. The one with the ragged clothes sitting outside the alley. The mom. The widow. The hotel owner. The toothless third grader.

Our God is something special.

Are there limits to your love? God's model looks different than the judgments we make and assumptions we hold. God's love is generous, not to those that can return it, but to those that are needy. Indeed, there are those in this world today, in your world today, especially in need of love right now. Those who are bowed down. Those that feel like outsiders. Those that are lonely. Those who are hungry. Who are they? Can you see them? Can you help? Write down a prayer inviting God to show you this world with His eyes.

to ponder

Day Seven

It's Not for You

*"May God be gracious to us and bless us,
And make His face shine upon us,
That Your ways may be known on earth,
Your salvation among all nations."*

Psalm 67:1-2

God is amazing toward us. He gives us gifts we don't deserve. He bends and stoops in kindness toward those that are inferior... because of His deep love for us. He is good... "that His ways may be known on earth." It's not wrong that we have His goodness. but It's just not for us. He blesses with a purpose. He wants us to spread that goodness to others. To pay it forward. To turn around and give it away again.

Where I work, we call this MOTAJ... creating Moments Of Turn-Around Joy. We've been

given joy and we can find moments to turn around and give it to others. We can create MOTAJ. We're not to hoard the good things we have. We're to bless others.

Where can you create MOTAJ today?

to ponder

Day Eight

Sparingly or Generously?

"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace... abound... all things... all times... having all that you need.... abound."

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

We can give sparingly. We can ration and calculate and make sure no duck is out of line. It's fine and we are allowed to do that. But it helps me to remember that if I do that, I'm also going to reap sparingly. I'm not going to see God's blessings the same way. But if I'm generous, maybe pour out more lavishly than was expected, ahh, it might just be awesome.

Now don't misunderstand this. If you give generously you aren't promised a wealthy life. God's blessings can't be calculated like that.

But we are blessed when we give. God loves a cheerful giver. We are to decide on our own, in our heart, what we freely want to do. And God blesses differently those that give sparingly and those that give generously.

The reminder also follows that we are able to give generously each time because God is our provider. At all times, He gives us what we need. He supplies. In fact, the word "abound" is used of His grace, which ironically is already a lavish type word. Gifts we already don't deserve abound to us. More than we need is provided. And why does He do that? So that we can abound in every good work. He abounds to us. He is generous toward us. We in turn can be generous toward others... at all times.

Do you want to sow sparingly or generously? Meditate on the word abound and imagine God's grace abounding to you. How could your generosity look differently if you remembered that God is able to make all grace abound to you?

to ponder

Day Nine

God's Model

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus... Made Himself nothing... Servant... Humbled Himself... Obedient."

Philippians 2:5-8

For us. God left His throne. His glorious majesty. His wealth. His comforts. His blessings. His home with the 4 car garage (OK maybe more cars). His luxuries. His clean bathroom... To come as a baby born in a cattle stall. What? He left what?

No joke. He laid it all down.

And you? What were you feeling so good about doing the other day? You gave to a homeless man a couple times? Congratulations. You bought coffee for the person behind you in line? You even went on a mission trip? Woah. Impressive.

He made Himself nothing... and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross.

We have nothing on Him. Our most lavish gesture, our grandest generosity, can not well up to the enormity that God's generosity exhibits for us. We have a model that keeps pulling us forward. Thousands of years later He is still way out ahead of us.

Yet somehow He is delighted in us and our efforts. Crazy. He's not sitting around judging us or comparing us to each other. He's just inviting us to be like Him. To love like Him. To be generous and lavish and to go out of our way, like He did, for the least of these. It's pretty awesome.

Read Philippians 2:1-18. How could you let God work in you to will and to act according to His good pleasure? How could you shine like a star in this universe?

to ponder

Day Ten

Generosity Is a Way of Loving

"You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host... You came down... You spoke... You gave... You heard... and in your compassion you delivered them time after time."

Nehemiah 9:5-31

Nehemiah 9 reminds us that God is above all things. He alone is the Lord, He is glorious, and even the highest heavens can't contain Him. Yet He cares for His people. He keeps His promises. He leads them, He tends to them. By day the pillar of cloud did not cease to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take. Indeed, for 40 years they lacked nothing, "their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet become swollen."

Nor did their feet become swollen. Wow. How could such a great and mighty God reach out to someone to care even for their feet? Not

only that, but He kept forgiving them. His generosity here was not about money, it was how abounding His love was. Over and over, time after time, He forgave them, He heard their cries, He had compassion on them and delivered them.

Generosity is a way of loving. "You are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love." Our forgiveness can be generous. Our compassion can be generous. Our love can be generous.

When you think of generosity, do you think mostly about money? Consider today how to broaden your generosity. Read Nehemiah 9:5-31. How could you care about someone else, like even God does, so that your love toward them, your forgiveness toward them, your compassion toward them, might be more generous?

to ponder

Day Eleven

What Are You Able For?

"... Some of the heads of the families gave freewill offerings... According to their ability they gave to the treasury for this work about 1,100 pounds of gold, about 3 tons of silver and 100 priestly garments."

Ezra 2:68-69

Interesting that it says "some" of the heads of the families gave. Not all of them. People who wanted to. It was a "freewill" offering... but for real. I mean, it wasn't "freewill" as in "People-are-watching-and-you-should-feel-bad-if-you-don't-give-the-same-as-other-people-are-giving" kind of offering. It even says they gave "according to their ability."

God's word tells us to give what we can give. He honors those that give according to their ability. It's also interesting that "according to our ability" doesn't mean "not much." We actually have lots of ability. These heads of families gave 3 tons of silver! 1,100 pounds

of gold! And those priestly garments must've been pretty cool. They gave a lot... as they were able. And with praise and thanksgiving they sang.

Giving is a privilege and a joy that we are invited into, according to our ability.

Have you ever felt like you needed to give what others were giving? God doesn't compare like that. He simply wants us to give as we are able. Consider what is in your mindset that takes that freedom away from you in your offering.

to ponder

Day Twelve

Who Is Thanking God?

"Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."

2 Corinthians 9:10-11

This is the Christian life to me. God is our Supplier. He fills us. He provides the seed and bread. He is where it all begins. I can't be generous without Him. In the long run, my resources will run out. But His never will. He has seed for the sower, always. Not only does He provide for me, but He increases my provision so that the harvest of my righteousness can be even greater. He makes me rich in every way. He fills me so that I can

pour out generously on every occasion. It's His provision that allows me to be generous. This is the key. I lean into His provision and multiply it to others.

The best part is that in the end: others will thank God for my obedience. The service I perform will lead others to praise God (see verses 12-15). They don't praise me; they praise God. Through others, my generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. Amazing.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15. Who is praising God because of your generosity?

to ponder

Day Thirteen

Give Who You Are

"Then Moses summoned Bezalel and Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the Lord had given ability and who was willing to come and do the work... the people are bringing more than enough... And so the people were restrained from bringing more because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work."

Exodus 35-36

There is so much in these chapters! First, I want to remind you that your generosity is not just about your money. It's about giving yourself to the needs around you. All that you are to God and His work. And that doesn't mean we all become pastors or singers. I love Bezalel and Oholiab in the Bible because they were honored for being master craftsmen. They worked with wood and stones. They were skilled in embroidery and were artistic designers.

God makes us uniquely and celebrates us. The Lord had "chosen Bezalel" and had "filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts." That's so awesome. Give who you are! Pour out offerings from your heart and ability, whatever it is.

Read Exodus 35:4-36:7. Can you picture them bringing freewill offerings morning after morning? And then being stopped because it was so much they didn't know what to do with it all? That's what giving and generosity can be like. What a joy that must've been.

to ponder

Day Fourteen

Heaps

"As soon as the order went out, the Israelites generously gave the first fruits of their grain, new wine, oil and honey... and they piled them in heaps... When Hezekiah and his officials came and saw the heaps, they praised the Lord and blessed his people Israel."

2 Chron 31:5-10

Right away, when they heard the need, they gave what first came in. Their firstfruits. It's a good practice. The discipline of trusting God to not just give Him something if there are leftovers, but to start by giving to Him and trusting that He will supply for the rest of your needs. Have you been doing that lately? Giving Him your firstfruits and trusting Him for the rest? How's your trust?

They did this for four straight months. By the end, they had so much that they had to pile it in heaps. Heaps. I think that's so awesome. Their offerings were piled into heaps because

there was so much! Hezekiah wasn't pulling it out of them. They were offering so much that it got piled into heaps and when Hezekiah saw it, He praised God. He was excited! It was awesome!

Aaahhhh! How can I say this enough? God's ways are best. His generosity flows from Him, is modeled to us, and we GET to take part in it. We can be like God and show His goodness to this world! We can make an offering and others will praise God because of it. Awesome.

It's been 14 days. Look back. Make something stick. Write it down. Become different in your generosity and in your offering to God and to others. May others praise God as they see the heaps pile up from what you give.

to ponder



**thank
you**

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