

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR THRIVING LIFE

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FREELY GIVEN

Recall an occasion of transformative generosity you received from another. How did it affect you?

What does it mean to you that Jesus was generous to people who did not respond gratefully?

How would you think, speak, and act differently if you had no expectations of others when living generously?

Matthew 5:40-42 – ⁴⁰and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; ⁴¹and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. ⁴²Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

I) The Demanding...

Generosity is a gift freely given. We want our generosity to delight others. It doesn't feel compatible with situations of expectation. This is caused by our perspective. We look to others for validation, to their circumstances as justification. Validation is not forthcoming from those who demand of us. The need by others to demand suggests we did not freely give under the circumstance. The demanding take from us, causing us to feel victimized rather than empowered, deprived instead of generous. We are denied the emotional response we expect from our generosity, ruining the experience. Again, this is a matter of perspective. If we reorient ourselves toward Jesus, He is the One who validates us. He is the One in whose circumstances our action is justified. He is not demanding. He is proud of us for our joy in His presence and satisfaction in His gifts.

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◆**The indignity of being sued:** Our sense of integrity is wounded when we are accused of unlawfulness. It's the principle of the matter. Jesus urges us to be unconcerned with such things. He tells us, "If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well (Matthew 5:40)." He does not care about the indignity of being sued. He says to give what is demanded. In the eyes of Jesus, the demand is an opportunity to prove our generosity, not an indictment of our character. He wants to know whether we prioritize His approval or that of our community.

◆**Give more:** There are at least three biblical truths fulfilled by giving more than demanded. One, defending one's reputation and rights is not worth the cost of conflict. Every suit would be settled if the defendant conceded more than the demand. Two, the suing party is a child of God, royalty, whether they act the part or not. Citizens live for the pleasure of the King. If He tells us to give to one of His adopted children, we give abundantly in His honor. Three, Jesus promises that God will supply our material needs to the extent they fulfill His purposes for our lives. Obeying His instruction cannot be to our peril. Giving more testifies to our faith that He will fulfill His promise. Live in the joy of the Lord and "give your cloak as well (v40)."

II) The Obliging...

We perceive even less generosity when the demand is an obligation. Perhaps going before a court, we would successfully defend our character and avoid giving anything. When the court and the law demand our concession, it is unavoidable. Giving out of obligation has nothing to do with generosity. Jesus is unsatisfied with us merely living up to our human obligations. He instructs us to add a portion of generosity to them. This transforms what was an obligation into a demonstration of our conviction to live freely.

◆**The indignity of oppression:** The psychological consequence of oppression is more damaging than the material. The balance of power and value is actualized. Small acts of oppression reinforce this perceived reality in everyone involved—the powerful, the powerless, and observers. The world knows this. The Romans obligated their subjects to carry a soldier's armor one mile on demand. Jesus confronts this fact when He prepares to instruct us, "and if anyone forces you to go one mile... (v41)." We expect Him to illegitimize the obligation. He does us better. He does not invalidate the act of oppression—He obliterates the indignity of oppression by teaching us to live freely despite our oppressors.

◆**I will amaze you:** Generosity is a gift freely given. Under obligation there is not freedom. Generosity confronts obligation by giving more. It liberates what was given under obligation by operating within the space of freedom. It declares that we are generous and will not let that be stolen from us. It establishes us in power and denies it to the would-be oppressor. When we "go also the second mile (v41)," we give generously as a rebellion against the powers of darkness, revealing in our lives a portion of the strength Jesus exhibited carrying the heavy burden of the cross because He could. We declare to the world that, in Jesus, I will amaze you.

III) The Expecting...

Then there are those who deny us the emotional benefit of generosity in their expectation. They do not claim a demand, have no authority, but expect from us, nonetheless. Our temptation is to convince them of the illegitimacy of their expectation so that whatever we give is seen as evidence of our free will, and perhaps of Jesus' love. This desire to glorify Jesus is right, but the act is wrong. We glorify Jesus by obeying Him, trusting His Spirit to use our obedience to open others' eyes. Generosity is not defined by the heart of the recipient—it is defined by the heart of the giver.

◆**The indignity of begging:** Jesus wants us to abolish the indignity of hopelessness. Those who are dignified, respected, and valued by society do not beg. They are provided for in response to their participation in society. Beggars have given up on having a place in society. They suffer the indignity of knowing they have nothing to contribute to exchange for their needs. They are worthless. Jesus instructs us to "Give to everyone who begs from you (v42)," not as an act of charity but of dignity. He wants us to affirm the value of their life, just as He did when He suffered the cross for them.

◆**You will amaze me:** The line of these instructions is our progression of transformation. We discover our identity is in His image and pleasure in our faithfulness to it. We discover our freedom and exercise it in peaceful rebellion against the world. Now we discover our agency in His name to convey the healing of God's love. When we "Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you (v42)," we heal the wound of rejection. We act as if they too will fulfill their potential in Jesus. We share the grace Jesus offers us because they deserve it as much as we do—which is to say, not at all. Generosity to all is an act of gratitude that Jesus chose us despite our spiritual impoverishment.