

# PERSPECTIVE

NOVEMBER 2020

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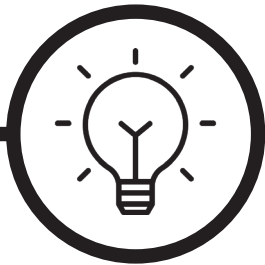
# GENEROUS GOD



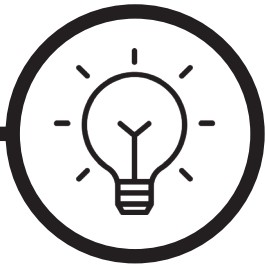
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## Our Generous God

*I will sing to the Lord, because he has  
dealt bountifully with me.  
—Psalm 13:6*

At midnight on March 27th, 2015, I sat at a small desk in a hotel room in Homewood, Alabama with two blank cards in front of me. One was addressed to my dad. The other was addressed to my mom. It was the night before my wedding day, and I had procrastinated until this moment to write these notes for a reason—I didn't know what to say.

How do you thank your parents for . . . everything? For providing for your every need? For patiently loving you at all times? For teaching you everything you know—most importantly, about the good news of Jesus? For throwing you this huge party to celebrate the fact that you're getting married (which meant *leaving* them to cleave to your future husband)? It felt so overwhelming.

That night I realized that no expression of gratitude will ever measure up to what my parents have given me. And frankly, they're not looking to be paid back or given the perfect "thank you" note. They're my parents. They love me because I'm their daughter. And everything they give me—from material gifts to their time—is out of a love for me.

As I get older, gratefulness for my parents grows. With each new year, I face new challenges that sharpen my understanding of the sacrifices my parents have made and the ways they've been uniquely generous to me. And I know this gratefulness will only grow deeper as I enter more of the seasons they've walked before me. I won't ever be able to repay them, but I can love them, enjoy them, and seek to learn from them about what it means to be a cheerful giver.

The same is true of our gratefulness to God. The more deeply we know our heavenly Father and understand what he has given us in his Son, Jesus Christ, the more grateful we are to him for saving us and making us his own. We cannot repay him, but we can love him, enjoy him, and seek to give generously out of the bounty we've received in Christ.

As a church, we've spent this year thinking about what it means for us to be generous with the gifts God has given us. In January's *Perspective* article, Pastor Aaron defined generosity as "being joyfully open-handed with what we have for the sake of those we love—family, church, community, and world."<sup>1</sup>

This month, we're looking at our generous God, focusing on the ways he has been generous to his people throughout the storyline of Scripture. If generosity is being joyfully open-handed with what we have for the sake of those we love, **God's greatest act of generosity is giving us himself through the person and work of his Son, Jesus Christ.** "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

My prayer for our congregation is that meditating on the generosity of God will draw our hearts to worship him and encourage us to give out of the abundance that is ours in Christ Jesus.

### OUR GENEROUS CREATOR

In the beginning, God created everything—from the tiniest microorganism to the largest galaxy in the universe—and saw that all of it was very good (Gen. 2:30). Because God is the creator of all good things, he is the giver of all good things. Creation itself is an outpouring of God's generous character.

In eternity past, the three persons of our Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—were perfectly satisfied in loving, joy-filled communion with one another. God was not lonely or bored. God is not like us; he doesn't need anything apart from himself (Acts 17:25). So then, why did he create us?

The short answer is for his glory. The Westminster Shorter Catechism's first answer is: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.<sup>2</sup> If you have been a Christian for a while, you've probably heard this statement many times—maybe so much so that it doesn't make you marvel like it should. So, let's unpack it together and pray it stirs afresh our wonder and awe for our great God.

God—eternal, all-powerful, righteous, loving, satisfied in himself—*gave* us life, but he didn't simply make us creatures. He made us in his own image *like his Son*, Jesus Christ (Col. 1:15). In his book *Delighting in the Trinity*, Michael Reeves says that at creation, "The fountain of love brimmed over. The Father so delighted in his Son that his love for him overflowed, so that the Son might be the firstborn among many brothers."<sup>3</sup> God was generous to us at creation because he made us to enjoy him like his eternal Son, Jesus Christ.

God gave Adam and Eve life as his image bearers, and they enjoyed personal communion with him. He also gave them good work to do and everything they needed to live and thrive on the earth (Gen. 1:28–29). But Adam and

Eve believed the lie that their perfectly generous God was withholding something from them. Instead of enjoying the gift God had given them in perfect communion with him, they wanted to be their own gods (Gen. 3:5).

Their sin cursed all of mankind and this world that we live in. God would have been just to immediately sentence them (and all of us) to eternal judgment. But even before God laid out the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin, he cursed the serpent and promised to crush Satan once and for all through a Savior who would be bruised for us: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen 3:15).

This means that despite their rebellion, God immediately promised, out of the overflow of his love and generosity, to save his people and to provide a way for them to be reconciled to him forever.

### GENEROUS GOD TO A PEOPLE IN BONDAGE

In the Old Testament, God showed his generosity and steadfast love to his chosen people. Like you and me, the people of Israel didn't do anything to earn God's favor, but God in his mercy, chose them to be his treasured possession.

But because of the curse of sin and the rebellion in all men's hearts, God could no longer dwell with his people the way he did in the Garden of Eden. Yet, God remained who he is. He is by nature generous, and he lovingly gave them the law to help them understand their own sinfulness in light of his holiness (Rom. 7:7) and to point them toward a future Redeemer. The law was good and loving in that it revealed God's character and taught the Israelites how to live lives that glorify him, but God knew that his people could never keep it on their own. He wanted them to understand their need for him. He wanted them to see that the problem was in their hearts. The people of Israel had a heart problem, and only God can change hearts.

The people of Israel also had a debt problem. They could not pay the penalty for their sin. God established a sacrificial system for his people, but in it, they were bound to repeatedly give animal sacrifices. John Piper explained that "The very repetition of the sacrifices showed that they did not perfect the sinners."<sup>4</sup> Piper was simply unpacking what the author of Hebrews clearly taught, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). This system was meant to help God's people see their need for the ultimate sacrifice that would satisfy God's righteous punishment for their sin. Without a worthy sacrifice, God's people could not do what he created them to do—glorify him by enjoying him forever.

So God, overflowing with mercy and generosity, promised a new covenant that would free his people from their bondage to sin:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:33–34).

Witness the generosity and love of our God who promised to change the hearts of his people and to forgive them forever and who gave us his Son, Jesus Christ, the guarantor of this new and better covenant (Heb. 7:7)!

### THE GREATEST ACT OF GENEROSITY

It is fitting that the climax of Scripture is God's greatest act of generosity: God gave us himself through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

If generosity is being joyfully open-handed with what we have (and cherish) for the sake of those we love, the gospel is the perfect expression of God's generous character. "For God so loved the world, that **he gave his only Son**, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16, emphasis added). In perfect love, God the Father gave his only Son for us, and God the Son freely gave himself up for us (Mark 10:45).

Jesus Christ, Maker of heaven and earth, Ruler of all things, came to earth as a man and humbled himself in every way for us. Paul describes it this way to the church in Philippi:

... though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:6–8).

Jesus Christ died on the cross to atone for the sins of his people. The Lamb of God took on the sin of the world and opened the way back up to God for all who would repent and believe on him for eternal life.

Christ rose from the grave, conquering sin and death once and for all. And now he sits at the right hand of God, ruling, reigning, advocating, and interceding for his people as they await the day when they will enjoy him face to face forever—just as he planned.



Our God's ultimate act of generosity was the giving of his own Son to solve our greatest problem and to make a way for us to enjoy him forever.

### GOD'S GENEROUS GIFTS TO HIS CHILDREN

Our God is generous to give us a beautiful inheritance in Christ. Through Christ's perfect life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection, we've been forgiven our sins and made right with God (Eph. 1:7). This is glorious news for us all! We were once enemies of God, but now we're his sons and daughters and fellow heirs with Christ (Col. 1:21; Rom. 8:17). Our inheritance is God himself. Now, we can glorify him by enjoying him in this life and also by looking forward to the day when we will enjoy him in his presence.

In this life, God has generously given us the gift of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:11). The Holy Spirit works in and through the saints to sanctify us, teach us, comfort us, intercede for us, convict us, and enable us to live lives that bring glory to God (John 15:26; Rom 8:26, Gal. 5:22–23; 1 Cor. 2:13). Christian, God is in you! And you can enjoy a deep personal relationship with him in this life through prayer, Bible reading, and corporate worship with your fellow saints. Though we look eagerly to our future hope, let us not forget the good gifts that we can freely enjoy now.

Yet, to be a Christian means we also look forward to the day when we will be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:17). In the life to come, God generously gives us an eternity of unspeakable and ever-increasing joy in his presence. For us, "to live is Christ and to die is gain" because when we take our final breath, we will be with Jesus (Phil. 1:21). We cling confidently to the fact that this life is not the end, and we look forward to the promised second coming of Christ.

One day, Christ will return to usher in a new kingdom—a new heaven and a new earth—where he will rule and reign with his people forever:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:3–4).

We will enjoy God as redeemed children in his new creation forever. Praise him for the infinite gifts he's given us in Christ Jesus!

### REMEMBER YOUR GOD IS GENEROUS

It is no mistake that God led the elders of Mount Vernon to make 2020 our year of generosity. If you're like me, it's been easier to think about all of the things God has taken away from us this year than what he's given us. Most days, it's been easier to set my hope on the prospect of a vaccine and a return to normalcy than to fix my eyes on generous gifts I've received in Christ. Like you, I pray that God will take COVID-19 away, that he will heal sick people and make a way for us all to meet together again in one room. But I am grateful for the ways God has used this virus and this year to pry my fingers from the emptiness this world has to offer.

This world is not our home, and he's given us one another to be a family in this foreign land. He's given us one another to remind each other that God is by his very nature generous and has given us everything—most importantly, himself. It's only when we believe this, that we can give cheerfully out of the abundance we've received in Christ (2. Cor. 8:9; 9:7–8). It's only when our hearts respond in gratefulness to our generous God that we can give generously to those we love—family, church, community, and world.

– Marjorie Roberson

### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Aaron Menikoff, "A Culture of Generosity," *Perspective*, (January 2020), 1.
- <sup>2</sup> The Westminster Assembly, *The Shorter Catechism with Scripture Proofs*, (Titus Books, 2014).
- <sup>3</sup> Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, (InterVarsity Press, 2012), 43.
- <sup>4</sup> John Piper, "Perfect for All Time by a Single Offering," A Sermon Delivered February 16, 1997, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/perfected-for-all-time-by-a-single-offering>.

## Confronting Christianity

Written by Rebecca McLaughlin

When I first became a Christian it was mostly without challenge. Growing up in a primarily Christian environment not too many hard questions arose about faith. It wasn't until I began a discipling relationship with a younger believer that questions came up: "Why would a good God send people to hell?" and "How could God allow so much suffering?" These questions challenged me in my faith and I went looking for answers. In *Confronting Christianity*, Rebecca McLaughlin provides compelling answers to 12 common questions in Christianity. I found her approach to answering these questions helpful in two unique ways.

From the beginning, McLaughlin draws out each subject, looking at the "how and why" of each question instead of quickly jumping to the solution. For example, the first chapter addresses "Aren't We Better Off Without Religion?" She spends the first few pages tracing the rise of this question in recent years from the new atheist narratives popular in 2004 onward to the increasing generation of "Nones" in 2016. From there she unpacks what modern psychology studies are saying, and then shows how the Bible places weight in each of these areas. I found this approach helpful because at the end of each chapter you feel like you have a good grasp on where each question comes from, what the most common objections are, and how the Bible weighs in.

Unfortunately, in many books like this, the author will seek to give a purely logical answer to each question. Not so in *Confronting Christianity*. McLaughlin has woven the gospel into every chapter. While she also provides a logical answer in every chapter, she always points back towards the gospel. In "Does Christianity Promote Violence?" she ends this way, "Staked at the heart of Christianity is a symbol of extreme violence the brutal, tortuous, state-sponsored execution of an innocent man. Christians believe that this execution was orchestrated by God himself. Some argue from this that Christianity glorifies violence but the meaning of the cross is precisely the opposite. Violence is the use of power by the strong to hurt the weak. At the cross, the most powerful man who ever lived submitted to the most brutal death ever died, to save the powerless. Christianity does not glorify violence. It humiliates it." (p. 93)

When I first became a Christian I may not have had adequate answers to these questions, but books like this have been instrumental in sharpening my faith and preparing me to always "give a reason for the hope within me." If you are looking to do the same I would highly recommend this book.

– RECOMMENDED BY MATT WILLIAMS



### Excerpts From the Book

## 1

"Gratitude is buried at the heart of Christianity. Christians believe not only that God created us and every good thing we have, but also that he offers us salvation as a free gift, won for us by Jesus's death in our place. For the Christian therefore, thankfulness is not just a positivity technique: it is a deep disposition towards a life-giving and life-saving God."  
– Aren't We Better Off Without Religion?, p.27

## 2

"We are so used to science that we forget to marvel at the very fact that laws of the universe are comprehensible to us."  
– Hasn't Science Disproved Christianity?, p.129

## 3

"Heaven, in biblical terms, is not primarily a place. It is shorthand for the full blessings of a relationship with God. It is the prodigal son come home. It is the bride being embraced by her husband with tears of joy. It is the new heavens and the new earth, where God's people with upgraded, resurrection bodies will enjoy eternity with him at a level of intimacy into which the best of human marriage gives us no more than a glimpse. Heaven is home: an embodied experience of deep relationships with God and his people on a recreated earth."  
– How Could A Loving God Send People to Hell?, p.218

## The Things Of Earth

Written by Joe Rigney

“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him” goes the anthem of the Christian Hedonist. In *The Things of Earth*, Joe Rigney invites us to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to glorify God through a proper enjoyment of his creation. Aware of our sinful penchant towards idolatry and ingratitude, he navigates through rich Biblical truths to arrive at a nuanced understanding of enjoying God’s creation while obeying the command to “set [our] minds on things above,” Col 3:1.

From the beginning, Rigney warns his readers that some of his writings will be “high theology, the kind that can make the head hurt and the eyes glaze over.” While I certainly recommend reading this book with a fresh and alert mind, a ready pen, and a hot cup of coffee, the work you put into it will be worth it. It will leave you with a richer and deeper appreciation of our triune God, his creation, and the amazing role he is inviting us to partake in.

Drawing from spiritual giants such as C.S. Lewis and Jonathan Edwards, Rigney spends the first half of his book setting up the theological foundations for Christian hedonism. He explores the glory of the Trinity, God’s role as author and creator, the ways in which God reveals himself to us through his creation, and what it means for us to be his creatures – “bodily, finite, temporal, and, according to Genesis, very good,” (p. 32). He addresses biblical passages that seem to contradict the idea of Christian hedonism and discusses how sinners corrupt God’s desired enjoyment of his earthly gifts.

In the second half of his book, Rigney shows us practical steps that we can take to properly enjoy God’s gifts while guarding against idolatry and ingratitude. He starts by exhorting us to a life of “godwardness” as described in 1 Corinthians 10:31: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God,” and shows us habits that can help us achieve this. Rigney goes on to explore topics such as how we can engage with the culture, how to handle wealth in light of the biblical call to self-denial, the matter of suffering, and the loss of good gifts.

I picked this book up a little hesitantly. If anything, I thought I needed a book to teach me to enjoy the things of earth a little less, and the things above a whole lot more. Rigney shows us, however, that when done properly, these two need not be antagonistic. When we first love God supremely and fully, we can enjoy his gifts to their fullest extent, and through their enjoyment, deepen our love, understanding, and appreciation of the giver of all good things.

– RECOMMENDED BY TRACY BURKE



### Excerpts From the Book

## 1

“The burden of this chapter is to impress upon our minds the reality that finitude and limitations are not defects; they are designed. Meeting needs and giving joy through creation was God’s idea, and despite the ways that we’ve misused and abused his good gifts, he hasn’t rescinded the offer or the gifts. Harping on this point is no minor thing. False guilt kills true joy and ruins us for fruitful ministry[.]”  
– Created to Be a Creature?, p.90

## 2

“When we love God supremely and fully, we are able to integrate our joy in God and our joy in his gifts, receiving the gifts as shafts of his glory[.]”  
– The Gospel Solution to Idolatry, p.99

## 3

“Given that disparity in the world, what should my first response be to all that I have received? Gratitude. Unbridled gratitude. Abounding and overflowing thanksgiving. Not guilt. Not shame... We don’t boast about the gifts (“What do you have that you have not received?”), but neither do we grovel and mope. We reach down deep and we marvel at his kindness to us and move forward in obedience to his Word[.]”  
– When Wartime Goes Wrong, p.201

# NOVEMBER

*These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!*

<b>November 1</b>	<b>Ecclesiastes 8:1–9:6</b>	November 16	Ecclesiastes 11:1–4
November 2	Ecclesiastes 9:7–10	November 17	Ecclesiastes 11:5–10
November 3	Ecclesiastes 9:11–18	November 18	Ecclesiastes 12:1–8
November 4	Ecclesiastes 10:1–7	November 19	Ecclesiastes 12:9–13
November 5	Ecclesiastes 10:8–20	November 20	1 John 1
November 6	Romans 4:13–25	November 21	1 John 2
November 7	Romans 5:8–6:4	<b>November 22</b>	<b>Ecclesiastes 11:1–12:13</b>
<b>November 8</b>	<b>Ecclesiastes 9:7–10:20</b>	November 23	Jeremiah 31:23–30
November 9	Mark 7:14–23	November 24	Jeremiah 31:31–34
November 10	Mark 7:24–30	November 25	Jeremiah 31:35–40
November 11	Mark 7:31–37	November 26	Hebrews 8:1–13
November 12	Mark 8:1–10	November 27	Hebrews 10:1–18
November 13	Psalms 1	November 28	Hebrews 10:19–39
November 14	Psalms 2	<b>November 29</b>	<b>Jeremiah 31:23–34</b>
<b>November 15</b>	<b>Mark 7:24–37</b>	November 30	Isaiah 30:18–33

\*Sermons in bold

# TAKE UP & READ





*Mount Vernon*  
BAPTIST CHURCH