

THE SPIRIT OF GENEROSITY

Nov. 10, 2019

Rev. LORI FLEMING

Rev. Fleming: Hello to all of you who are watching us online who couldn't be here today. We're glad you're joining us.

So, there was this farmer, and he had a farm field.

[Congregation laughs]

Eight words and you laughed! Yes! I'm going on the comedy circuit!

[Congregation laughs]

So, this farmer had a farm field, and it was on fire. He called the county fire department, and they came over and were trying to put the fire out, and were having trouble. So, somebody suggested they call the volunteer fire department in the next town. Well, they didn't want to do that, because they didn't think they were very good. But they had to do it, because they needed help. So, they called the volunteer fire department, and they came thundering down the road in this dilapidated old fire engine and skidded right into the fire! Four firemen jumped out of the truck, grabbed their hoses, started watering down the fire. And pretty soon the fire was in two smaller fires, and everyone was able to put the fire out. The farmer was so grateful that he wrote the volunteer firefighters a check for \$1,000. There was a newspaper man there who was witnessing the old thing, and he said to the volunteer fire department, "What are you gonna do with that money? That's a lot of money." The firemen said, "Well, duh. We're gonna fix the brakes on the fire truck."

[Congregation laughs]

So, the title of my talk today is "The Spirit of Generosity": perfect for the upcoming holiday season, right? Thanksgiving and Christmas... I was in a couple of stores over the weekend, and the Christmas music has already started. Have you noticed that? I love Christmas music.... until about the middle of December! I love everything about Christmas! I love the decorations. I love the lights. I decorate my house. It takes two or three days to do it! I love this Thanksgiving/Christmas season, because it is about getting together with people we love. It is about connecting, and it is about sharing.

Look at nature. Nature is so generous! Every single oak tree every year produces thousands and thousands of acorns. If all those acorns grew into oak trees, we would be covered with oak trees everywhere, but of course they don't. There's more than enough to reproduce the trees and to also feed the squirrels and the deer and the other animals that eat those acorns. Mother Nature is lavish and lush and abundant.

Jesus said it this way: "It's God's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Seek first God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all things will be added unto you. Ask and it shall be given." Did you know Jesus was a master teacher of prosperity? Just listen to those words, because we live in an abundant universe.

There was a little boy, and he was with his parents on Black Friday. You know, that's the day after Thanksgiving when all you crazy people go and fight over TVs and things. You will not see me in a store on Black Friday! I don't care; I don't care how big the deal is! Well, he's out shopping in the mall with his

parents, and all of the sudden, he jerks his hand out of his mother's and he goes running for this man down the concourse. He runs to the man, and he has a long white beard, and he goes, "*Santa! Santa! Santa! All I want for Christmas is a shiny yellow dump truck.*" Santa pats him on the head, and he smiles and walks away. The parents catch up with the little boy and they say, "*What are you doing?*" He says, "*Oh, I was just telling Santa all I want is a shiny yellow dump truck for Christmas.*" The parents are like, "*Okay, whatever.*"

So, Christmas Eve comes, and there's a knock on the door. The parents go and open the door, and there's the man with the long white beard. In his hands, he has a shiny yellow dump truck. The little boy comes running out, and he sees Santa, sees the dump truck, and says, "*Oh, Santa! Thank you so much!*" He grabs his leg, hugs him, and says, "*Thank you, thank you, thank you.*" Santa presents him with the dump truck, and the little boy takes it into the family room and starts playing with it. Meanwhile, the parents are standing there with tears in their eyes, and they said, "*Thank you, Rabbi.*"

[Congregation laughs and applauds]

Rev. Fleming: That's a *Chicken Soup for the Soul* story. Jewish people don't celebrate Christmas, but this Rabbi went out of his way to find where the little boy lived and give him the gift that he wanted. You know, that's the spirit of generosity! What if we all could do that? Because every time we give out, that generosity is the beginning of our greater good. It's a catalyst for bringing our good to us.

It's been said that we have a lot and that's why we give... but that is not an accurate statement. The true statement is that because we give, we have a lot... because giving comes first. There's always a giver and always a receiver, but if you want more good in your life, you have to give.

So, what are you giving? Are you giving out a poverty consciousness or are you giving out a prosperity consciousness? Think about that for a minute. What are you giving? We always have something we can give. With the spirit of generosity, we can give a smile. Everybody can give a smile, right? Everybody can give somebody a pat on the back. I love working with Rev. Richard Maraj. He never, ever fails to compliment me on what I am doing. He does that with all of the staff. He always tells us what a great and wonderful job we are doing, and how much he appreciates us. Because of that, we are doing it with each other... because what you give out gets multiplied and magnified. It makes it a beautiful place to work. You know, my friend, Sue, here does all these slides. She puts all the slides together. Doesn't she do a great job?

[Congregation applauds]

She does, doesn't she? And all of the volunteers and all the people in the A/V booth. It takes a village to put this together, but they give out all of their time and their energy to help make this a beautiful Sunday morning. So, we can care about people. We can give them advice. Well, maybe we should ask before we give them advice... They probably don't want it. I never give my kids advice unless I ask first.

So, what do you have to give? What can you give out as your spirit of generosity? Maybe you take someone to a doctor's appointment. Maybe you cook a meal for them. Maybe you just take time to listen and be fully present when they have a problem they want to talk about. Maybe you have a skill that you can teach them, like sewing on a button or playing the piano or cooking your favorite meal. Just taking time to be with people, because every single act of kindness counts and is rewarded lavishly.

There was a young man, and he had written his doctoral thesis. He was going from New York to California to defend his thesis. The plane from New York was late because of weather getting into Minneapolis, so he wasn't sure he was going to make his connection. You all know how that is! So, he's practically running through the airport in one of those moving stairways. It made him look like he was running really, really fast. He came upon a woman who is dragging a suitcase, and she is trying to hurry, too. Something made him say, *"Are you going to the plane for California? It looks like you're late."* She says, *"Yes; I hope I make it."* He goes, *"Okay. Here's what I am going to do. Take your suitcase. I'll go to the plane. I'll make them wait for you so you can come to the plane when you get there."* She's like, *"Oh, thank you, thank you."*

Now, today I don't know if I would give my suitcase to a stranger, but that's the way the story was told to me. So, I'm going to tell it that way! So, he gets to the airplane. He tells the flight attendant, *"There's a lady coming; I've got her suitcase. She's coming, so hold the plane for her."* And, of course, they did. She gets on the plane. As she walks by him, she gives him a big smile and says, *"Thank you."* So, the man gets to California. He gets to his hotel. He doesn't sleep a wink all night, because he has to defend his doctoral thesis. You can imagine how nervous you would be if you were doing that! He gets to the appointed place the next morning, and he's waiting and waiting. An hour he waits for them to finally call him, which made his anxiety level go up even higher. He walked into the room, and there was the panel of five PhD's in their robes: you know, each one different for their colleges. They're sitting there kind of stone-faced, looking at him. He walks in, and they point to the chair. He sits down, and he looks up. There in the middle is the woman that he helped with the suitcase! She smiles at him, gives him some encouragement, and his anxiety level goes down a little bit. So he starts defending his thesis and, every time he got a little shaky, she would smile at him and help him along... because no good deed ever goes unrewarded. The smallest thing that you do for someone may be the biggest thing for them. She didn't miss her plane, right? So, she helped him.

Jesus said, *"Give and it shall be given unto you: in good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over it will be given to you."* Not you're going to get back what you give out. You're going to get back more than what you gave out: heaped up, shaken together!

Over Labor Day weekend, my husband and I decided to go up to Cottonwood and do the kayaking tour. Kayaks are these inflatable boats. They call them ducks. We went on the Verde River, which has about this much water in it [**indicates about eight inches**], so we kept getting hung up on the rocks. But, they picked us up at the hotel in this van that might have been 200 years old. It rattled. [**Pantomimes riding in a rattly old truck.**] That was on the paved road! Imagine when we got off the paved road. I thought I was going to lose my teeth! The air conditioning didn't work, and neither did some of the windows...

So, the tour starts at the winery, and we're waiting for the other nine people who were supposed to come and go on the duck tour with us. They said, *"Oh, we're really sorry, but they're going to be about 20 minutes late. Is that okay?"* We said, *"Yeah, sure. We don't have anywhere else to go."* We were just walking around looking at the grapes, and it was a beautiful, beautiful, cool, sunny day. So, finally – 45 minutes later – this group shows up. They're all under 30. The girls have these cute little shorts on and these leather sandals... Like, this is not what you wear when you go out on a boat in the water! They had their cell phones with them; one of the people actually lost a cell phone in the water! But they were from the Arizona Tourism Department, and they had photographers with them. They had these cameras that had these – they were like periscopes – so they could get up and shoot down. They had those

drones, so while we were on the river, they were taking pictures and the drones are buzzing all over us. And it was really nice, because there was all shade and there was water and it was quiet (except for the drones. They make a buzzing noise, “Zzzzzz.” Here they go. Is that mosquitos or are those drones?) Okay. So, when we finally got back to the winery, part of the tour was to have a wine tasting. We really haven’t tasted Arizona wines, which is one of the reasons we wanted to do it, and they were pretty good.

So, they came up to us and they said, “*Look, we are so grateful that you waited for us, so what we want to do is we want to pay for your tour.*” That’s \$160! We said, “*Wow, that’s really great!*” But, the problem was, we paid for the tour through the hotel. So, they were trying to figure out how to reimburse us, and the only thing they could figure out to do was to give us \$160 worth of wine!

[Congregation laughs]

Who’s gonna say no to that? You can always give it away if you don’t drink it, right? So, I was telling the story to my hairdresser a couple of days later, and she stopped for a minute and said, “*So, it really, really does pay to be kind and generous, doesn’t it?*” Yeah, it really, really does! Because what you put out comes back to you. We live in this lavish abundant universe where there is more than enough for everyone!

So, Jesus taught this way. He said, “*To those who have, more will be given, and they will have abundance; but for those who do not have, even what they have will be taken away.*” So, people who have will get more, and people who don’t have will lose what they have. That doesn’t sound right, does it? Well, you know Jesus taught in parables. It was a story that always had a twist at the end that you had to try and figure out what it really meant. He explained to the disciples ahead of time what it meant so they could kind of share with the people. There is something missing in this verse, so I added it back. This is the Bible according to Laurie.

[Congregation laughs]

I may rewrite the whole thing, you know?

[Congregation laughs]

“*To those who have **a consciousness of abundance**, more will be given and they will have abundance; but to those who do not have **a consciousness of abundance**, even what they have will be taken away.*” The secret is what’s in your consciousness. And you create your consciousness by what you’re thinking about all day long. That’s what comes back to you!

In Matthew it says, “*The key to spirit is the spirit of generosity, because what you give, you receive.*” In a different part of the Bible, he says it this way: “*Give and it will be given to you: a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, and it will be put in your lap.*” You don’t even have to go and get it it’s going to come to you! “*For the measure you give will be the measure you get back.*”

So, what are you giving out into the Universe? Are you driving on the 101 and cutting off drivers and honking at them? Or are you saying, “*Oh, they have their turn signal on; let me let you in. Have a great day!*”

[Congregation laughs]

When we give with a spirit of generosity, we develop this consciousness of receiving. Many years ago I had a friend, and she went to a prosperity class. She was telling me that, the first day, the teacher said that the homework was everybody had to go home, and for five minutes a day, they had to imagine that they were a millionaire. What that would be like, you know? What would you do with the money? Where would you put it? What would you buy? What would you share? Well, she was having trouble with this. She was not getting any more prosperity. It wasn't working for her at all!

So, about the third week, she went to class. She was getting kind of down about it, and somebody handed her a book they promised to lend her. She went home, opened the book, and there in the book was one of those black and white paper copies of a million dollar bill. So because she couldn't believe that she had a million dollars, she manifested a fake million dollars! Think about that! If you're praying for \$1,000, but you only have the consciousness to receive \$100, you're only going to receive \$100! It's just as easy to imagine a thousand or a million as it is a hundred. You simply add zeros!

So, start with a spirit of generosity; become a giver, and then you will become a receiver. As you give, so you receive... because giving and receiving are two sides of the same coin.

Jesus said, *"Whatever you ask for in prayer, believing, you will receive."* She didn't believe she could manifest that million dollars in her heart of hearts, so she did not receive a real million dollars. People ask me all the time, *"Lori, why aren't my prayers answered? I've been praying and praying and praying and nothing ever seems to happen. What's wrong?"* Your prayers will never be answered until you can sit in the silence and you can feel them, you can see them, you can taste them, you can smell them, you can believe for yourself that they are yours now. When you imagine yourself healed at depth, you will be healed at depth. When you imagine yourself anything, that's when that good will happen to you. You have to have the consciousness of what you're praying for.

There was a little 8-year-old boy. It was two weeks before Christmas, and he was running all over the place. He went next door and he said, *"Ms. Lucy, Ms. Lucy, I'm getting a red shiny bicycle for Christmas."* Ms. Lucy said, *"Well, that's wonderful, Billy."* He told the fireman down at the fire station, *"I'm getting a red shiny bicycle for Christmas. It's going to be right in front of my Christmas tree on Christmas morning."* He told his mom. He told his teacher. He told anybody who would listen! To all his friends, *"I'm getting a red shiny bicycle for Christmas."* He could see it. He could taste it. He could smell it. He could imagine himself peddling that bike, holding the handlebars, the wind blowing through his hair. (No, wait; he has to wear a helmet.)

[Congregation laughs]

I'm sorry, not wind blowing through his hair. He's gotta be safe here. He didn't say, *"Santa's bringing my bicycle."* He didn't say, *"Grandma's bringing my bicycle."* He didn't say, *"Mom and dad are bringing my bicycle."* Because frankly, he didn't care who brought the bicycle. He just knew he was getting a bicycle on Christmas morning! Of course, he woke up on Christmas morning, and there was his red shiny bicycle. He knew with every fiber of his being that that bicycle belonged to him. He had a red shiny bicycle consciousness, and there it was!

When you have a prosperity consciousness, prosperity will flood into your life! And don't do what some people do and say, *"Oh, no. You can't pay for my lunch. No, no, no. That wouldn't be right."* You're stopping the flow of prosperity when you do that. When you begin to believe that the Universe has

unlimited prosperity and abundance for you... When you believe that you have a loving God who wants you to share in all of this vast good... When you stop feeling guilty about expecting the best in life and begin to expect it unconditionally, that's when you will have the spirit of generosity. Your prosperity will come flooding to you. You won't be able to stop it. You will have to give it away because you'll have too much.

[Congregation cheers and applauds]

Yeah, okay! So, I ran across this story in a little book while I was preparing this talk. I never heard this story before, and I've been at Unity 45 years. It's a story about a minister who went to Unity Village – which is outside Kansas City back in the 30s – when they were just getting started. The minister stood up on the podium and he said, *“In my ministry, we never pass the offering plate.”* He said, *“We leave one in the back of the room. And anyone who wishes to give something, the plate is available, but I don't stress giving.”* Charles Fillmore, cofounder of Unity, it says he walked up to the lectern – but, if it had been me, I would have run up to the lectern. Mr. Fillmore says, *“You may think and teach whatever you want in your own organization, but in this one, we believe in passing the plate, because we know the laws of giving and receiving. Not only do we pass the plate in our meetings, but each plate is always filled to overflowing.”*

Students of practical Christianity know to give so that they can prosper. Because when you give, you receive. That's the spirit of generosity! We have this divine birthright that we can demand our spiritual inheritance from our good and loving God, befitting the sons and daughters of the king that we truly are. Because God is the Source of everything: our body, mind, spirit; our employment; everything! All of our good comes from God! When we go to God with this list of everything we want, but we're not practicing the spirit of generosity, that's why our prayers are not answered. That's why our good doesn't come to us.

Some of us say, *“Well, you know, when I finally get something, then I'll be able to give.”* But, it doesn't work that way! Every single person in this room has something right now that they can give: your smile, your talent, a pat on the back... Any of that is giving! If we work with the spiritual principle, we begin to seek more of everything. We will get more money, more time, more ability, and we'll be able to share all of that with the rest of humanity... all because we follow the spiritual principle of generosity.

This is somewhere from the Old Testament: *“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse and prove me now,” said the Lord of hosts. ‘See If I will not open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall be not enough room to receive it.’* Not enough room to receive it! That's how abundant God is!

The human mind thinks that, if we give things away, we'll become broke or won't have enough. You know, I think some of that comes from those of us who lived through the Depression and are children of people who lived through the Depression. You have to save everything. But when we begin to tithe of our time and our talent and our treasure, it becomes a commitment to having a working relationship and agreement with God, the Prosperous, and that leads to spiritual growth. We don't tithe just to get more money; we tithe so that we become a free and open channel for God to work through us to bring greater good into the world, for ourselves and for each other. We tithe to the Source from which we are spiritually fed. The commitment to tithe leads to financial security, health, happiness and success, because we become partners with God.

Many years ago, I heard my minister say – back in the 80s in Cincinnati – the minister was talking about when he first learned to tithe. He and his wife had just found Unity. He wasn't a minister yet, and his minister talked about tithing. She said, *"I'm gonna start tithing,"* and he said, *"I'm not gonna start tithing. I don't believe that at all."* So, a month goes by. She is tithing 10% off the top. She gets a promotion and a really nice raise, so she gets to up her tithe. He's not tithing. He hits something in the road and destroys two tires. He has to buy tires, and the tires are almost exactly the same amount as his tithe would have been. True story, okay?

So, I heard that story. I talked to my husband. We had three little children. He had a pretty new dental practice he was trying to grow, so money didn't grow on trees. We decided to tithe 10% off the top. We started doing it. In the first month, all of a sudden he has new patients coming in. All of a sudden things are happening. Somebody called to invite us to dinner at this really nice place, and they paid for our dinner. I won \$1,000 in the lottery and, when I wrote my tithe check, I wrote it for \$101. On the memo line, I wrote GIMS (God Is My Source). We've continued to tithe today.

A couple of years after we started tithing, my husband's sister and her baby moved in with us, and I decided, *"Okay, we're tithing. Everything's great, but I need a little extra money for Christmas."* So I thought: who could I write a check to? Oh, a food bank! It's almost Thanksgiving; let's do that. So, I wrote \$100 check to the food bank – GIMS on the memo line – put it in an envelope, walked down the driveway (hoping the mailman hadn't come yet), got to the mailbox, opened it. The mail was already there. I said, *"Oh, darn."* I took out the mail, put the envelope in, closed the mailbox, put the flag up. You know, those kind of mailboxes? I started walking back up the driveway... you know how you leaf through the mail? There was a letter there in a white envelope addressed to me with no return address. I was curious. I opened it and, inside – this is a true story – there was a check for \$1,000. My \$100 check hadn't even gotten out of my mailbox yet! That's how quick God works! This was not money that was owed to me. It was a gift: an absolute gift from someone. I'm like, *"Yup. This stuff really works."*

So, I invite you – during this holiday season – to practice the spirit of generosity. To move out of your comfort zone. To give a smile, a helping hand, cook a meal, take somebody out to a movie. Find a way to give as much of your resources that you can, and then give a little more. Because you can't out-give God.

Namaste.

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Thank you to volunteer Kimberly Nelson for transcribing this message