

Lavish Giving, Loving Guests, Living Christ

by John Piper

Giving and hospitality are central to the Christian life, and we can break free from obstacles such as obliviousness, carelessness, greed, and fear by experiencing the pleasure of the presence of Christ and having certainty in the promises of Christ.

Duration: 47:01

Scripture: Romans 12:9

Topics: "Generous Living", "Christian Stewardship"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of giving and opening our homes as central aspects of the Christian life. He identifies fears, greed, carelessness, and obliviousness as the reasons why we often fail to be generous. The liberation from these bondages comes through the gospel of Jesus Christ, who sacrificed his own son for us. The preacher urges believers to believe in God's promise to supply all their needs and to practice hospitality and contribute to the needs of others.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.DesiringGod.org Romans 12, verse 9 through 13. Let love be genuine.

Abhor what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. Love one another with a brotherly affection.

Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit.

Serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope. Be patient in tribulation.

Be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Amen.

Father, I'm so thankful for grace and mercy. That we don't have to deserve salvation. And that you look down with great patience upon your erring children.

Where would we be without Christ and his blood and his resurrection and his reign and his intercession on our behalf? We would be undone. We would be lost. We would be perishing.

Father, I pray that out of the abundance of this grace we would be lavish givers. With open homes, loving guests in the power of a living Christ. And so come and apply verse 13 of Romans 12 to this church.

Make us lavishly generous people. And make our homes open, welcoming, Christ-exalting, hope-giving, peaceful, loving places for strangers to come. I pray for your help to this end.

In Jesus' name. Amen. How do you live when you know and feel that your life, moment by moment, is sustained by totally undeserved mercy? That's what Romans 12 is written to answer.

Remember verse 1. I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God. I appeal to you, therefore, on the basis of everything that I have said in Romans 1 to 11. I appeal to you on the basis of the wrath of God and the mercy of God.

I appeal to you on the basis of everything I've shown you about the deity of Christ. And about his death and resurrection and reign and intercession. I appeal to you on the basis of everything I've shown you about the Holy Spirit poured out into your heart.

Promising to raise your body from the dead. I appeal to you on the basis of everything I've said about justification by faith alone. And how, because of the obedience of one man, many will be counted righteous.

I appeal to you on the basis of everything I've taught you about the sovereignty of God. And how he works everything together for your good. I appeal to you, brothers, on the basis of all that.

Therefore, Romans 12, live this way. Live this way. Romans 12 is a description of how we live when we know and feel the truth that we deserve nothing but misery.

And instead have the promise that the sufferings of this life are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed to us. Romans 12 is the way you live when you have been broken because of your sin. And find yourself saying with Romans 7, Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? And discover as you look up to Christ that he has paid your debt in full.

And say thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. That's what Romans 12 is. It's the way you live when you're swimming in an ocean of mercy bought by the price of the blood of the Son of God.

When you know that and feel that, you live like this. There's a great issue facing us in every age, but especially in an age and a country that is an age and a country of wealth. And it's the issue of our possessions and how we handle them and think about them and feel about them.

For Jesus, this was simply huge, wasn't it? He talked about this more than he talked about almost anything except the kingdom of God. He gave warnings and promises and commandments about how we handle our money and our homes and our possessions. He rebuked people for building bigger and bigger barns in order to make their lives ease.

He told stories and parables. He said that by hoarding things, you will perish. And by giving things, you will lay up treasure for yourself in heaven.

How to handle our money and our possessions and our homes is the barometer in the life of Jesus of whether we trust God and treasure Christ. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. So it's not surprising that Paul comes back to this in verse 13.

So open your Bibles if you've closed them to Romans 12, verse 13. I mean, I say he's come back to it because in verse 8, in the middle of the verse, he had said, let the one who contributes do so in

generosity. At the end of the verse, the one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness.

Now he says it again with more specificity. Contribute to the needs of the saints. And then he gets really specific and says, open your homes, seek to show hospitality.

So it's not merely give money away, put money in the cup, but bring them into your home. You know, in our day, we think the term hospitality in a pretty domesticated way, like set a nice table and write a note and have somebody over. And hospitality, philoxenia, was a very dangerous practice in the early church.

If Christianity is outlawed or it is spontaneously being persecuted, and you say, come to my house, have the meeting at my house, or are you running away? Quick, come in here. That's dangerous. It was dangerous in World War II, according to Tim Boone, and it is dangerous in the world, many places today, to do hospitality for Christians.

So please, let's not over-domesticate the term hospitality, loving strangers, welcoming people into your home, not just giving stuff away, that's big and important, but also drawing the needy ones in. That's the two halves of verse 13. This is the way people who know and feel that moment by moment, you are living by sheer undeserved, lavish mercy live.

So, I appeal to you, go back to verse 1, I appeal to you by the mercies of God, by the lavish contribution that God has made to your life in the blood of Christ, and by the lavish open home that the Lord has shown to you, not just to welcome you in as a guest, but by official, blood-signed documents of adoption into His family. There's kind of a limited hospitality, and then there's mega-hospitality. Mega-hospitality is called adoption.

And God did that so that we would do both. So let's think about verse 13 for a few minutes. I have four questions to ask of this text.

Number one, is it really crucial in the Bible, is it really near the center of living the Christian life to be a contributor to needs that people have so that you relieve them, and to welcome people into your home? Is that near the center of the Christian life, or marginal and kind of icing on the cake and you can take it or leave it? Question number two, what stands in the way of our doing that more liberally, joyfully? Three, how do you break free from the bondages that keep us from being givers and welcomers? And fourth, what would the rewards be if it happened to us, that liberation? Number one, is it really crucial, is it central to the Christian life? Let's take texts on giving and then texts on hospitality to show you how this is central. Yes, the answer is yes. Matthew 6, 19, do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal.

Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust don't destroy, thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Sell your possessions and give alms and thus provide for yourselves purses in heaven that do not grow old.

It's real clear how you lay up treasures in heaven. You give. There is an investment strategy in the Christian life.

Give money away and you will have treasure in heaven. That's the investment strategy that was very, very, very central to the teachings of Jesus. Then the early church picked it up like this, Acts 4, 34.

There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet and it was distributed to each as any had need. That's the way Romans 12, 13 looked in Jerusalem in the early church. Then the apostle Paul takes it and takes it to all of his churches, to Titus, the churches that he was responsible for.

He says, let our people learn to devote themselves to good work so that they may help cases of urgent need and not be unfruitful. To the Corinthians, he says, each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, because God loves a cheerful giver. And then to the Ephesians, this amazing word.

Oh, how relevant this is to us. Chapter 4, verse 28. Let the thief no longer steal, but let him labor, working with his hands, that he may have something to give to those in need.

The reason I say that's so relevant is because it gives three layers of life. And some are stuck at one, most are stuck at two, few make it to three. First, don't steal.

That's level one. You could steal that. You want to have? Steal.

Level two, don't steal. Work with your hands that you may have. That's level two.

Most people live there. Most Christians live there. They totally think about their work is have, have, have, have, have, have, have, have, have, have.

I want to earn that I may have. And then there's level three. Let the thief no longer steal.

Let him labor with his hands that he may have something to give. Life is about giving. Christian living is not level one for sure and not level two in spite of most people being there.

It's level three. We earn in order to have to give. Life is about giving.

You're two-thirds of the way towards life if you don't steal and you work hard and you have what you ought to have. That's two-thirds of life. And you haven't reached life.

When you start spilling over, you know life is happening in your heart. Randy Alcorn, we said it last year, is exactly right. Nails it as he does so many times.

He says, quote, God prospers me not to raise my standard of living but to raise my standard of giving. That is so absolutely biblically right. Wesley, make as much as you can.

Save as much as you can. Give as much as you can. There's a tension between two and three there, isn't there? I'd love to go into that, but we'll leave it.

Paul then turned it to a discipline. Listen to this. This is the biblical roots of why we take an offering as a part of worship.

First Corinthians 16. Now concerning the collection for the saints, he's going around collecting money for the poor in Jerusalem. On the first day of the week, not Saturday, everything's shifting over to the Lord's day.

On the first day of the week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up as he may prosper. Now that may have meant just store it up in your house so that when I come, there doesn't have to be this big

pressure on everybody to collect, but just have it ready. Now today you might say, well, let's not have to scramble at the end of every month or end of every six months in order to do the ministry of the church, so we will lay aside every Lord's day and turn it into a glorious act of worship whereby we declare we depend on you, not money.

That's enough on the giving half of verse 13. What about the hospitality half? In answering the question, is it central? Is it important? Is it right near the middle of the Christian life? When Jesus sent out the twelve, listen to what he said. Acquire no gold, nor silver, nor copper for your belts, no bag for your money, nor two tunics, or sandals, nor staff, for the laborer deserves his food.

Whatever town or village you enter, find out who's worthy in it, and stay there until you depart. Jesus built hospitality into the matrix of his mission. Depend on hospitality, missionary.

When you go, find a house. Stay there. And then, as if there needed to be some motivation, he said one of the most biblically breathtaking things about hospitality that could be said.

He said, Matthew 10, 40, Whoever receives you, receives me. And whoever receives me, receives him who sent me. Hospitality, in the name of Christ, is a receiving of God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, into your home.

You will have the reward of a righteous man when you receive a righteous man, in the name of Christ. You will have the reward of a prophet when you receive a prophet into your house. When you open your house, now let's let the book of Hebrews say it, not quite as amazingly, just almost.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. You can have God and you can have angels if you open your house, in the name of Jesus. And then Jesus, as if he wanted to push the stakes even further and further on this issue, he took hospitality and he added it to the list of the things for which we will be held accountable at the judgment day, when he said, the king will say to those on his right hand, Come, you who are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was hungry, you gave me food, I was thirsty, you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you took me in.

That's the kind of questions he's going to ask at the last day. How did you handle your house? Did you bar the door and not take any risks? Or did you open and welcome in people who you didn't know but they might be angels? And they certainly would be God if you received them in the name of Jesus. Listen to Peter.

He puts hospitality in such a critical context. This is 1 Peter 4, 7. The end of all things is at hand. Therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. What a context.

The end of the world is coming down. Open your door and don't murmur about it. The Lord loves a cheerful hostess.

I love it when the Bible says don't murmur. Because I'm a Christian hedonist and I know what the opposite of murmuring is. Be happy.

The Bible doesn't want us to murmur. Oh, we have to have people over for dinner again. Clean up the house.

Well, you don't have to clean up the house. I'll get to that later. That comes later in the sermon.

Answer to question number one, yes. It is very central, very crucial, right at the heart, in essence of what it means to be a Christian who lives and swims in the mercy of God. Question number two.

What stands in the way of us being like this? Lavish in giving, opening our homes. I have in mind all kinds of giving. I have in mind giving to the church because that's one of the ways we funnel money into ministries which meet needs.

But I have in mind giving to all kinds of agencies. I wrote a check just this week to Voice of the Martyrs. It came every time I opened Voice of the Martyrs.

I say, okay, should I give this time? Yeah, I'll give this time because, oh, I love the ministry to persecuted Christians around the world. And envelope after envelope comes in my life, right? It's not easy to know where to give. But I'm not saying Bethlehem's the only place you should give.

And then thirdly, besides Bethlehem and all these wonderful places to give, there's people on your doorstep or on the street and just face-to-face giving. So that's the kind of giving I have in mind as I launch now into obstacles. Number one obstacle.

And these are in the order from gentle to severe. One, obliviousness. For whatever reason in the church, and this is totally understandable, there are many young people especially, some older ones, who grew up in homes where it was absolutely the last thing on anybody's agenda to give money regularly to a church, let alone 10%.

You've got to be kidding. I mean, that's the kind of homes hundreds of you grew up in. It was not on the radar.

And therefore, children, unlike my little Talitha, who has a little envelope that says long-term savings, short-term savings, and church. And as I give her her allowance, she divvies it up in the envelopes. Now, she's growing up, when she's 18, giving to the church is a given.

You don't learn that. It's done. Most of you, I don't know, lots of you didn't grow up in that kind of home.

And therefore, you're just oblivious that there might be a call on your life right near the center that says your money is not your own. It belongs to God. What portion of it will go to the needy in the church? And so this is an oblivion-destroying message.

Number two, carelessness. There are some of you who are not oblivious, but careless. That is, you know this is what you're supposed to do.

This is part of the joy of being a Christian, to give and give and give. And you never get around to planning how much, when, talk it over with the spouse. It just slides.

And so you are impulsive and just, oh, I guess, yeah, I should write a check this morning quick. And it's just life is one impulse after the other, and there's no planning. There's no discipline, unlike 1 Corinthians 16.

That's reason number two. Reason number three is greed. That is, the desire to keep more than we need.

The spirit of greed groans when it gives. And the biblical alternative to greed is not disciplined groaning. It's not like, well, we don't like to give, and it's a sure groaning thing to give, and I would rather buy this and this and this and this, but he said do it, so I groan as I discipline regularly give.

That's not the biblical alternative to greed. The biblical alternative is 2 Corinthians 9, 7. Let each do as he has made up his mind, not under compulsion, but freely, for the Lord loves a cheerful giver. Just keep it if you don't do it cheerfully.

At least the Lord will not be pleased with a gutting out of your disciplined giving of this money you love so much. What he wants is for you to say by your giving, I love you, I trust you, this can be multiplied for your glory, amen, I'm happy. That's the way we break free from greed.

And the fourth obstacle is fear. Greed wants more than it needs, and fear is afraid God can't meet my real needs. And so it protects itself unduly.

It focuses on the consequences of not having what it really needs, and I'm calling you not to be afraid. The answer to greed is the pleasure of the presence of Christ, and the answer to fear is certainty in the promises of Christ. Let me say that again.

The liberation from greed is the present experience of the joyful fellowship of Jesus, and the liberation from fear is the present confidence that tomorrow there will be abundant mercies for that need that is making me anxious. What about hospitality? What keeps us from being more hospitable, opening our homes the way we should? And here there's a whole cluster of fears, as well as obliviousness and carelessness. There's fear that people will just take too much of our time.

You have these people over for lunch, they may never go home. I've got to take a nap, right? And they just may talk and talk and talk. Or if you have them over because they've been put out of their apartment, goodnight, they may stay there for months.

And so I can't do this good deed because I might get trapped. The fear of time. The fear of they'll see you don't keep your house very well.

They might open a closet door or go into the teenager's bedroom. And I just think we ought to declare at Bethlehem, maybe for a month or two, something like this. We all resolve to have people over every week and never dust for two months.

Never dust. And you just put it on your invitation. You're invited to come for lunch on Sunday and we don't dust before guests come.

Something like that. And we just kind of corporately get our act not together. And just free each other.

At Bethlehem you go and you expect to find mess everywhere. There's just laundry and screens leaning up against the back of the sofa. I'm describing my living room right now.

And a shovel, the snow shovel is in the living room right now. And we just kind of assume that's the way we are. We don't try to keep up a front and disobey the Bible.

We just relax and say, oh, cool. They're not head up about this so why should I be either? Another fear would be that you do have your act together and these folks are going to wreck it. Because you just put in new carpet.

And you're spending all your time as to whether or not you should buy slippers for everybody. I know some of you do that and that's okay. But really, can we just say this is stuff.

People are people in the image of God. I have a home as a representative of heaven. Oh, the bondages in which we live.

Let me mention one more fear that I think keeps us away is I don't make conversation real well. And especially if they don't speak English too good. So how are you going to do a whole afternoon? This is hard.

We're in bondage. Fear after fear after fear keeps us from obeying verse 13. And I want to say be free.

So we go to question number three. How do you break free from this bondage into the liberty of the joy of lavish generosity and open homes? The fundamental biblical answer of liberty, freedom from greed and fear. The biblical answer is that Jesus Christ died and rose again.

To make you absolutely certain that everybody who trusts in him would have the all-owning and all-powerful God on your side. Committing himself every day of your life to be lavishly generous to you and to be openly hospitable to you. The way you get free from fear and greed in not being hospitable and not giving is that you are confident the blood of Jesus is so precious, so valuable, so all-covering and all-sufficient that almighty God is no longer against me but for me.

And when I undertake to do a hard thing, he's going to work for me. Don't shut your door and belittle the blood. It's a gospel issue.

Do you trust the sufficiency of the death of the Son of God to incline the heart of God to sinners like you to supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus? That's the essence of the answer. It's expressed in Romans 8.32. He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, will he not with him freely give us all things that we need? Answer, yes, because Christ is worth it. You're not worth it.

Just don't argue with God that way. I'm worth it, help me. Don't argue that way.

Say, for Christ's sake, help me. I look away to Jesus. I'm a sinner.

He's perfect. His blood and righteousness is all my hope. And stay for his sake.

Would you meet my need this afternoon and help me to make conversation? Please. He will. Hear the promises to hold on to.

My God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. That's Philippians 4.19. Plastered inside your brain. Or 2 Corinthians 9.8. God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound for every good work.

There is not one good work that God expects you to perform for which there will not be adequate supply. I'll say that again on the basis of 2 Corinthians 9.8. There is not one good deed that God expects you to perform for which there will not be a bountiful supply of everything you need to perform it. That's amazing.

What a promise. 2 Corinthians 9.8. Bethlehem, let us be thankful as a church. I have, with some of you, walked to the end of 25 budget years now.

And I have learned so much with you about God's ways with money. They're not our ways. He does not do it our way.

But he does it his way. My God, Bethlehem, will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. On my little prayer bench at home, there's a little square white piece of paper.

I might have thrown it away now since it was all last year. And I saw February 2004. Please, 21% increase in giving, oh God.

Because we thought that was untouchable last year when we bumped the budget up 21%. And the giving in January, as it always does, wasn't 21% ahead of December giving. No, December is impossible to get ahead of.

And then we come to the end of the year. And moving into the last Sunday. Hundreds of thousands of dollars behind for all these need-meeting ministries that we have.

And the laborer is worthy of his food. And at the end of the last Sunday, we don't have it. \$200,000 short.

And it's over. The giving Sundays are past. And God did it.

And we went \$20,000 over not only giving but budget. And I asked, was that a sugar daddy? And I was told there wasn't but one check over \$10,000 in the mail. And all the rest was spread out over dozens and probably hundreds of late gifts.

So here's what I've learned. I mean, I've learned lots of things. Number one, just when you think you're on top of it, an unexpected bill comes.

And just when you think you're going to go under, an unexpected check comes. And do you think God's going to ever do it differently than that? I don't think God's going to ever do it differently from that. Because if we got on top of this thing, we know how to do money at Bethlehem.

We don't have to be on our faces crying out to God for the impossible. That would be a bad place to be. We got businessmen here, right? We got savvy.

We know how to do budgets. We know how to motivate people. We know how to get people giving.

Yes, sir. If that's the reliance, God will take a vacation from us. And it isn't.

So I just linger over Bethlehem on this third question to say thank you publicly, Lord. Thank you for last year. And now we've just voted last Wednesday night to increase this year's budget 27%.

And we will be on our faces all year long in reliance upon Him. Last question. What are the rewards if God does this liberation? Number one, the suffering saints will be relieved.

You see that there in verse 13? Contribute to the needs of the saints. Relieve a need, lift a burden, give hope. When that happens, we love it.

It's a reward. It's more blessed to see that happen in another than to receive more money. Number two, the glory of God will be displayed.

Matthew 5, 16. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. When you lavishly don't depend on money but depend on God and let your money go and open your home and depend on God, people start thinking He's valuable to you.

And if to you, maybe perhaps to them. But as long as we live like the world, with the world's treasures, then that's what will look valuable. And God won't get any glory from that.

Third, more thanksgivings to God will be unleashed. 2 Corinthians 9, 12. This ministry of the service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, it is overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

Have you thought of your life this way, specifically your money and your house, your apartment? Have you said, God has been so good to me to give me sufficient income, I give Him thanks, I give Him thanks. God has been good to give me a place to stay, a flat, an apartment, a roommate and a house. Thank you, thank you, thank you, period.

That's not the way you're supposed to live. Rather, other people are supposed to give thanks for what God has given you. Other people are supposed to give thanks for the house God has given you.

Yes, it's proper for us to say, thank you for the job you just gave me. Thank you for this new house. Oh yes, thank you.

But that's not the point of life. The point of life is, alright, now I have, I have, I have. What will I do? How will I spread thanksgivings? Answer, I will give and give and give.

And then what God gives to me multiplies my thanksgiving and the thanksgiving of many. That was 2 Corinthians 9, 12. Fourth answer.

Confirming, confirming God's love in your life. 1 John 3, 17. If anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? It doesn't.

That's scary. You talk about it being center, close. If we receive and receive and then lock it up.

I'm thankful, I'm thankful. You know the Pharisee said that? I thank thee God that I am not like this publican. What's wrong with that? I'm thankful I'm not a drunk.

Well what's wrong with that is he bottled it all up. He just shoved this guy away. His whole heart was wrong and his words were good.

I thank thee God. Thank thee. Thank thee.

No you don't. You're not living by grace. You're not living by mercy.

Pharisee, come on. That was not true. It was a use of religious language.

And his heart was wrong towards the publican. So let's not claim to love God if we just, I've got love for God. My door is shut and my checkbook is shut.

And I'm giving thanks. Last benefit that comes besides these other four is treasure in heaven. Sell your possessions and give alms and lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.

Multiply your joys in heaven. Closing summary statement. Lavish giving and open homes are near the center of what it means to be a Christian.

The reasons we don't open our checkbook and open our homes the way we should is a cluster of fears and greed and carelessness and obliviousness. The liberation out of that bondage is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Reckoning that he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all will most certainly fulfill Philippians 4.19. My God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus bought by the blood of his son.

Do we believe that? And if we do and are liberated then we will have the benefits, the rewards that I have listed. Treasures in heaven. So I beseech you, I beseech you, I appeal to you by the mercies of God, the ocean of mercy in which you swim.

I appeal to you by the mercies of God. Contribute to the needs of the saints and practice hospitality. Let's pray.

Lord that's my and I believe your exhortation to the flock of God at Bethlehem this morning. And I ask that you would do it. Oh Lord we long for life to be as free from fear and greed as birds with wings to fly are free and lilies have no need.

Our spirits surge to break the chains of love to earthly things to strip our souls of worldly reins and ride on eagles wings. Oh father make us free to give and teach by heaven's beam that in a spring no life can live until it makes a stream. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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