

# Connecting Generosity to Faith

**Several of my family members have worked as restaurant servers. They give me a hard time about church people being terrible tippers. It seems that Sunday afternoon is the most ungenerous time in America. This is a big topic on the web among servers as well.**

What will it take to help church members practice what Robert Schnase calls “extravagant generosity”?

To get from here to there, we have to know what “there” looks like. Here’s one description from the book of Acts. It is the time after Pentecost. The earthly Jesus is gone but the Holy Spirit descends in force, and here is how those days are described: “All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:44-46).

If that’s what our churches were like, not only would we be tipping generously; we’d have a family of homeless people at our table and would ask the server to take our seat. I don’t know how to get there from here; it seems unattainable. But we can ask questions about how to take next steps to connect better faith and generosity.

## Are we worshipping God as the source of all blessings?

Be honest with yourself. When was that last time you said “Thank God” and meant it? I mean you *really* felt it? My guess is it was a time when you almost lost something precious. Thornton Wilder said, “We can only be said to be alive in those moments when our hearts are conscious of our treasures.” And I think it is only then that we truly appreciate them as gifts.

We may sing all the right things and say all the right words at the offering time. But when I think about why we don’t actually give that much away, I have to be honest and say it’s probably because we think it really all belongs to us. The German mystic Meister Eckhart said, “If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, ‘thank you,’ that would suffice.”

## Are we lifting up Christ as a model?

Think of the person in your life you most admire. Now, think of the person in your life who is most generous. My guess is, for most of you, they are the same person. The ones who give generously of their time, talent, and treasure are the ones we would want to be like.

God knows this. We follow. And so, as an exercise in practical theology, God became flesh and dwelt among us as the good shepherd. And in that shepherd’s teaching, from the widow in the temple who gave all she had to the father of the prodigal son, Jesus provides us with role models of generosity. How can we model that ourselves?

Most of the strong Korean churches I know have a rule from which others could learn. You can’t hold a position of leadership if you don’t tithe. As a consequence, more people tithe. It is not about pride or privilege, but a way humbly to follow Jesus.

## Are we proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God?

Jesus said that the Good News is the Kingdom of Heaven drawn near and taught us to pray saying, “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” And then he demonstrated what that meant by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and welcoming the stranger. Big things. Generous people give to things bigger than themselves. Churches dream too small.

It seems the Christian faith has come to be about mountains that we’ve turned into speed bumps; it is a march to Zion that we have treated like a trip to the mall. Maybe, if we want to foster a culture of generosity, we need bigger dreams about what our church is doing in the world. The relationship of faith to generosity is the relationship between gift and gratitude.

*Dr. David McAllister-Wilson is president of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC.*

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