

Making Room for Generosity Email Devotionals

Our 2026 stewardship season theme is Making Room for Generosity. I've written these daily email devotionals for this season, based on a book by one of my favorite living theological thinkers, Miroslav Volf of Yale Divinity. I hope these daily thoughts help us prayerfully consider how our lives in the year ahead are a response to God's overflowing grace. – Patrick

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Jan 7: God's Giving Precedes All Our Doing

Before you woke up this morning, grace was already at work. Before you poured your coffee or opened your email, God was already giving. Before you considered the first thing on your to-do list, you were wrapped in the gift of another day, given new breath and another chance.

Miroslav Volf writes, “God's giving precedes all our doing.” We don't do anything to kickstart grace. Every generous impulse, every open hand, every sacrificial gift is a response to a God who gave first and keeps giving.

Most of us instinctively believe we need to be good enough to earn God's attention. Like if I could just give the right amount, serve the right way, sacrifice enough, then God would approve and I would feel okay. It's a scorekeeper mentality that is exhausting, and the Gospel says it's backward.

We don't need to earn God's favor, and generosity doesn't prove our worthiness. Our giving is an echo of what we've already received, a grateful participation in the divine generosity that sustains all things.

When we understand that God's giving comes first, we see that we're not manufacturing grace through our efforts. We're simply making room in our lives to reflect the abundance that's already ours. How will we respond to the God who has already been, continues to be, and promises to continue being lavishly generous to us?

Some days we respond better than others. Some days we're open-handed. Other days we're squeezing nickels and making plans like they're life preservers. But God's grace was there before you woke up, it will be with you through this day, it will lay you to sleep tonight, and it will be there tomorrow too.

Prayer for Today: *Giving God, help me remember today that every good thing begins with you. Before I act, you have already acted. Before I give, you have already given. Shape my life*

and my generosity as a joyful response to your grace. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.

**These devotionals are inspired by ideas in Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace by Miroslav Volf.*

Jan 8: Grace Gives Without Calculating Return

The genetics of Darwinian selection make us calculators by nature. We weigh costs against benefit, risks against returns. We ask: What will I get back? What could go wrong? Is this worth it? Will my generosity be noticed, appreciated, reciprocated? These aren't necessarily bad questions in the marketplace, but they can poison the well of grace.

Miroslav Volf writes, "Grace gives without calculating return." It doesn't keep ledgers or keep score. It doesn't measure the worthiness of the recipient or predict the likelihood of payback. Grace gives because giving is its nature, the way light shines and water flows.

Most of us do a little mental calculation almost every time we consider giving something. Will they appreciate it? Will they use it well? Have they been generous to me? Have they called? Have they helped? It's automatic, like breathing. And I'm pretty sure I'm not alone in this.

When we give and calculate a return, it's not really grace. It's more like investing or trading. Real generosity mirrors God's grace. It gives with open hands and no strings attached. It gives to those who can't repay. It gives when no one's watching. It gives even when the gift might be wasted or rejected.

Does this kind of giving feel risky? You bet. It is. It makes us vulnerable. And there's also something freeing about it. When we release our need to control outcomes, to ensure fair return, to protect ourselves from being taken advantage of we can step into a different way

of living. God's economy operates on different mathematics entirely. Losing our lives means finding and saving our lives. Giving ourselves away increases our substance rather than depletes us. It's the mathematics of grace.

Prayer for Today: *God of abundant grace, free me from my calculating heart. Teach me to give as you give—without conditions, without keeping score, without demanding return. Help me trust your economy of grace. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.*

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Jan 12: Grace Does Not Abolish Effort; It Reshapes It

There is a lazy reading of grace that goes like this: If God loves me no matter what, why try? Why push myself? Why work hard at anything? If grace is free and unconditional, why not just coast?

I admit, the logic makes sense. Why get up early to volunteer when you could sleep in? Why write that check when you could keep the money? If grace covers everything, why bother?

Miroslav Volf writes, "Grace does not abolish effort; it reshapes it."

Grace doesn't make us lazy. It makes us free. Free from the frantic striving that comes from trying to earn God's approval, yes. But free for something else—free to work and give and serve for entirely different reasons.

When we're trying to earn God's love, or someone else's love, through our effort, eventually we resent it. Every act of service is a transaction, a payment on a debt we can never quite pay off. We give because we have to, because we're afraid of what will happen if we don't. That kind of effort is exhausting, joyless, a treadmill that never stops.

But what happens when we know God's love is already ours? When we know we can't lose it no matter how we perform? The effort changes shape entirely. We serve because we want to, because we've experienced something so good we can't help but share it. We give generously because we've been given *to* generously. The work is still work, it still costs time and money and energy, but it springs from a different source. Not obligation, but gratitude. Not fear, but freedom.

This is the reshaping that grace does. Same actions, different heart. Same effort, different fuel.

Prayer for Today: *Gracious God, reshape my efforts today. Let them flow from gratitude rather than obligation, from freedom rather than fear. Help me work and give and serve because I am loved, not to be loved. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.*

(These devotionals are inspired by ideas in Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace by Miroslav Volf.)

Jan 13: Good Works Are Responses to Grace, Not Payments for It

Think about how kids respond when someone gives them a gift. Often their first instinct is to give something back, a drawing, a hug, an extra-long thank you. They're not trying to pay for the gift. They're responding to it, and there's a difference.

Miroslav Volf writes, "Good works are responses to grace, not payments for it."

We get this backward constantly. We treat our generosity like installment payments on a divine loan. We serve on committees to work off the debt. We give to others to stay current on our account.

But grace isn't a loan. It's a gift. And gifts don't require payment, they invite response. There's a huge difference. When you're making payments, you're trapped in a transactional relationship. You calculate what you owe, maybe the minimum required, and pay because you have to. The payment reduces the debt but you're still on the hook.

But what happens when you're responding to a gift? Everything changes. You're not obligated, you're moved. You're not paying off, you're paying forward. You're not settling accounts, you're participating in a relationship of mutual generosity.

Gift-givers don't want repayment. They want relationship. They want us to know we're loved, that we belong, and their generosity toward us isn't contingent on our ability to pay them back.

A child's thank-you drawing isn't worth the price of the gift. But it means something because it comes from a different place, love not obligation. That's what our good works are meant to be. Responses, not payments. Love letters, not invoices.

Prayer for Today: *God of grace, help me stop trying to pay you back for what you've freely given. Let my generosity today be a response to your love, not a payment on my debt. Teach me to give like someone who's been given to. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.*

(These devotionals are inspired by ideas in Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace by Miroslav Volf.)

Jan 14: Freedom, Not Fear, Is the Soil of Christian Obedience

Some of us learned to obey God the way we learned to follow rules in school, out of fear of what would happen if we didn't. Don't break the rules or there will be consequences. So we follow rules, mostly, but often with one eye on what we can get away with and the other on who's watching.

That's not obedience. That's compliance. And compliance is exhausting.

Miroslav Volf writes, "Freedom, not fear, is the soil of Christian obedience."

Real obedience - the kind that actually changes us, that actually reflects the gospel - doesn't grow in the dirt of anxiety and fear. It doesn't sprout from "what if God punishes me?" or "what will people think?" Those kinds of questions might produce outward conformity, but they poison the inner life.

Fear-based obedience is always calculating the angles. What's the minimum? How much can I hold back without getting in trouble? What's the least I can do and still be considered faithful? It's a cramped, defensive way to live, always looking over your shoulder, always worried about getting caught short.

But what happens when obedience grows out of freedom? When we give and serve and show up not because we're afraid of the consequences but because we've tasted something good and want more of it? That's different soil entirely. That's the soil where generosity actually flourishes.

Think about healthy relationships. People don't keep their commitments (for long) because they're afraid of what will happen if they don't. They honor them because the relationship matters, because they love the other person, because they want the relationship to thrive. The same actions, like faithfulness, showing up, and keeping promises, but completely different motivations.

God doesn't want our terrified compliance. God wants our free response. And grace is what makes that freedom possible.

Prayer for Today: *Liberating God, free me from fear-based obedience today. Help me give and serve and show up not because I'm afraid of consequences but because I've experienced your goodness. Let freedom be the soil of my generosity. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.*

(These devotionals are inspired by ideas in Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace by Miroslav Volf.)

Jan 15: Generosity Resists the Logic of Scarcity

We live in a world that runs on scarcity. There's not enough time, not enough money, not enough energy to go around. Better hold tight to what you have, because once it's gone, it's gone. The strategy for how to live in scarcity is to protect what you have, calculate the future, and look out for yourself.

This makes a certain kind of sense. Budgets are real. Bills come due. Retirement accounts need funding. It would be foolish to pretend we have unlimited resources. We don't.

But Miroslav Volf writes, "Generosity resists the logic of scarcity."

Notice he doesn't say generosity denies scarcity or pretends it doesn't exist. He says it resists the logic of scarcity, the way that scarcity thinking shapes how we see the world, how we make decisions, how we relate to others and to God. Scarcity logic says: Hold on tight. There may not be enough. Count carefully.

Now, it's not wrong to be careful, but when scarcity becomes the organizing principle of our lives, the fear is real and the deepest gifts of generosity become impossible. We're always one emergency away from closing our hands.

Generosity operates on a different logic entirely. It says: There's enough. Not because we're naive, but because we trust that God's abundance is more real than our scarcity. Generosity doesn't ignore the math, it just refuses to let the math have the final word. God's persistent goodness always has the last word.

I'll be honest, some days scarcity wins. I look at the credit card bill, calculate what's coming up, and think, "I can't afford it right now." And maybe that's true. But other days I remember

that I've never actually run out. Not always had plenty, but enough. And even in lean times, I've never regretted what I've given away.

That's what generosity does. It pushes back against the grip of scarcity and makes a little room for trust.

Prayer for Today: *God of abundance, help me resist the logic of scarcity today. When fear tells me to hold tight, remind me that you provide. Give me courage to open my hands, trusting that there will be enough. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.*

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Jan 16: To Give Is to Trust That God's Abundance Is Real

Every act of generosity is an act of faith. When we make a contribution larger than we're used to, when we give time we don't feel like we have, when we share resources we think we might need later, we're making a bet. We're betting that God's abundance is more reliable than our predictions.

Miroslav Volf writes, "To give is to trust that God's abundance is real."

This isn't about pretending we have infinite resources or ignoring our actual limitations. It's about what we believe is fundamentally true about the world. Is scarcity the bottom line? Or is there something deeper, more foundational than our lack?

The biblical witness keeps insisting that abundance is the deeper reality. There is a rainbow after the flood. There is manna in the wilderness. The widow's oil doesn't run out. Five loaves feed five thousand with leftovers to spare. Seeds die and multiply. It's not magic, it's the logic of grace: giving doesn't deplete but somehow participates in God's own generosity.

But let's be real: this is hard to believe. Especially when the bank account is low, when life is getting more expensive, when we're worried about making ends meet. Trusting God's abundance can feel like foolishness when the spreadsheets say otherwise.

And yet. How many of us can look back and see times when we gave more than we thought we could afford, and somehow we were okay? When we made room for someone else's needs, and our own needs were still met? Not always in the way we expected, not always on our timeline, but met nonetheless.

To give is to practice trust. It's to say, with our wallets and our calendars and our hands, "I believe there's enough. I believe God provides. I believe abundance is real, even when I can't see it yet."

Some days that trust comes easily. Other days it's a struggle. But the practice of giving—the actual opening of our hands—is what trains us to trust.

Prayer for Today: *Providing God, help me trust your abundance is real. When my calculations say there's not enough, give me faith to believe you provide. Let my giving today be an act of trust, not foolishness. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.*

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Jan 19: Christian Giving Flows from Gratitude, Not Guilt

We've all sat through the stewardship sermon that makes us squirm. (Not at FPCA, of course, but you know the one!) It lists all the needs, the budget shortfalls, the programs that might get cut if people don't step up. The implicit message is clear: if we don't give, we're letting everyone down. The church needs you. God needs you. Don't be selfish.

That kind of appeal might work short-term. Guilt is a powerful motivator. But it's a terrible foundation for generosity.

Miroslav Volf writes, "Christian giving flows from gratitude, not guilt."

Guilt-based giving always keeps score. It gives what's required to ease the conscience and avoid feeling bad, to satisfy the obligation. But underneath, there's resentment, a grudge, a sense of being cornered into it. And it breeds bitterness over time because nobody likes being manipulated into generosity.

Gratitude-based giving is different altogether. It gives because it has received. It gives because it can't help but pass on what it's been given. It gives joyfully, freely, without keeping track of whether others are pulling their weight. Gratitude doesn't need to be guilted into generosity, it's already looking for opportunities to share.

Here's the test: How do you feel after you give? If you feel relieved that you've met your obligation and can move on, that's guilt-giving. If you feel lighter, freer, joyful, more connected to God's work in the world, that's gratitude-giving.

The challenge for all of us - and I include myself here - is to pay attention to what's actually motivating our generosity. Are we giving because we'll feel bad if we don't? Or because we're grateful for what we've already received?

The good news is that gratitude can be cultivated. We can practice noticing God's generosity in our lives. We can train ourselves to see the abundance we've already been given. And when we do, generosity stops feeling like an obligation and starts feeling like a joy.

Prayer for Today: *Generous God, free me from guilt-based giving. Help me see clearly all that you've already given me. Let my generosity today flow from gratitude, from a heart that's noticed your abundance and wants to share it. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.*

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Jan 20: Forgiveness Releases Us from the Tyranny of Repayment

Most of us keep mental ledgers. You took advantage of me, so now you owe me. You let me down, so you need to make it up to me. You borrowed money and didn't pay it back, so I'll remember that. We tally the debts, track the balances, and wait for repayment that may never come.

The mental and emotional load gets heavy. Because the ledger never balances. The person who wronged us can never repay what they took. The apology is never quite sufficient. The restitution never makes up for the loss. So we stay stuck, bound to the person who hurt us by the very debt we're demanding they repay.

Miroslav Volf writes, "Forgiveness releases us from the tyranny of repayment."

Notice the word tyranny. Unforgiveness doesn't just hurt the person who wronged us. It tyrannizes us. We become slaves to the scorecard, prisoners of our own resentment. We rehearse the offense, calculate what's owed, fantasize about the day they finally pay up. Meanwhile, our lives shrink around the wound.

Forgiveness breaks this tyranny. It says: You owe me nothing. The debt is canceled. I'm releasing both of us from this endless cycle of repayment that was never going to satisfy anyway.

This doesn't mean the wrong disappears or the hurt evaporates. Forgiveness isn't pretending nothing happened. It's acknowledging what happened and letting go of the right to get even. It's stepping out of the prison we've built from our justified anger.

Here's the connection to generosity: When we're trapped in cycles of repayment - keeping score, demanding what's owed, refusing to forgive - our hands close. We can't give freely when we're obsessed with what's owed to us. Forgiveness opens our hands. It frees us to give without calculating who owes us what.

We can hold grudges for years, maybe even a lifetime. And looking back, the person we hurt most is always ourselves. The tyranny of repayment keeps us small, bitter, and trapped. Forgiveness doesn't excuse what they did. It releases us from spending the rest of our lives collecting the debt.

Prayer for Today: *Forgiving God, release me from the tyranny of repayment. Help me let go of the debts others owe me, trusting that you will settle all accounts in your time. Free my hands to give generously, without scorekeeping. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.*

(These devotionals are inspired by ideas in Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace by Miroslav Volf.)

Jan 21: To Forgive Is to Refuse to Demand What Is Owed

Someone owes you an apology. Or money. Or an explanation. Maybe they owe you years of life that they wasted, opportunities they squandered, trust they betrayed. The debt is real. You're not making it up. They actually do owe you.

So what happens when you forgive? Does the debt disappear? Does forgiveness mean pretending they don't owe you anything?

Miroslav Volf writes, "To forgive is to refuse to demand what is owed."

The debt doesn't disappear. Forgiveness doesn't erase the reality of what happened or pretend the ledger balances when it doesn't. What changes is your posture toward the debt. You stop demanding repayment. You release your claim. You write it off. You choose not to collect.

If this feels unfair, it is. Forgiveness is fundamentally unfair, and it's important to acknowledge that. Someone wrongs you, and instead of making them pay, you absorb the cost yourself. You take the hit. It goes against our sense of justice that tells us what is right.

But insisting on repayment doesn't make you whole; it gets you a relationship defined by debt. Every interaction becomes a transaction. Every conversation circles back to what they owe you. You stay the creditor, they stay the debtor.

But when you refuse to demand what's owed, you break out of the trap. You're no longer caught in the creditor-debtor dynamic. The relationship might not be restored, sometimes it can't be, but you've set them free. And more significantly, you've set yourself free. Free to move on. Free to give your energy to something other than collecting what you're owed.

This connects to generosity in a direct way. We can't give freely when we're constantly demanding repayment from others. The posture of demanding what's owed and the posture of generous giving are opposite stances. One closes the hand, the other opens it.

Prayer for Today: *God of grace, help me refuse to demand what is owed to me. Give me strength to absorb the cost of others' wrongs rather than spending my life trying to collect. Free me to give generously, even when others owe me. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.*

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Jan 22: Grace Interrupts Cycles of Retaliation

You hurt me, so I hurt you back. Then you retaliate, so I escalate. Around and around it goes - marriages, friendships, church conflicts, international relations - and where it stops nobody knows. Someone has to win, someone has to lose, and neither side will back down first because that would mean admitting defeat.

The logic of retaliation is terrible, but it feels justified. They started it. I'm just evening the score, protecting myself, making sure they don't get away with it. And maybe that's all true. But retaliation never actually solves anything. It just keeps the cycle spinning.

Miroslav Volf writes, "Grace interrupts cycles of retaliation."

Grace refuses to play by those rules. It absorbs the hit without hitting back. It breaks the chain of cause and effect that says every offense must be answered with a counter-offense. Grace doesn't deny the wrong or minimize the hurt. It just refuses to perpetuate the cycle.

Can this be costly? Yes. When you choose not to retaliate, you choose to take the loss. You're letting them have the last word. You're absorbing pain without passing it on. It feels like weakness, like letting them win.

But the alternative is vicious. Keep trading blows until someone is destroyed. Spend years locked in combat over who gets to be right. The logic of retaliation promises justice but delivers exhaustion and bitterness.

Grace offers something different. It says: I could retaliate, but I won't. I could make you pay, but I'm choosing not to. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, I could strike back but I will turn the other cheek. I'm breaking this cycle right here, right now, even though it costs me.

This is the heart of Christian generosity. We help people who did nothing to deserve it. We forgive debts we could rightfully collect. We absorb costs we could legitimately pass on. Why? Because we've learned something better than the logic of retaliation. God has shown us the logic of grace.

Prayer for Today: *God of grace, help me interrupt cycles of retaliation today. When I'm tempted to strike back, to even the score, to make them pay—give me courage to absorb the cost instead. Let grace flow through me. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.*

(These devotionals are inspired by ideas in Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace by Miroslav Volf.)

Jan 23: Forgiveness Names the Wrong and Lets Go of the Debt

From Free of Charge, Chapter 4 — Forgiveness

There's a version of forgiveness that goes like this: "It's fine. No big deal. Water under the bridge. Let's just forget about it." Except, that's not really forgiveness. It's avoidance. It minimizes the offense to make ourselves feel better about letting it go.

Real forgiveness is more honest and more costly than that.

Miroslav Volf writes, "*Forgiveness names the wrong and lets go of the debt.*"

Both parts matter. Forgiveness starts by naming the wrong. This is what you did. This is how it hurts. This is the real damage. No minimizing, no excusing, no pretending it wasn't that bad. The wrong gets named clearly, honestly, without flinching.

Only then comes the letting go. After the wrong has been fully acknowledged, forgiveness says: And I'm releasing you from the debt this created. You owe it, but I'm not going to collect. The account is settled, not because you paid but because I'm canceling what you owe.

This is why real forgiveness is hard, because it requires us to feel the full weight of what was done. It's easier to say "no big deal" than to say "this was a very big deal, and I'm forgiving you anyway." False forgiveness protects us from the pain. Real forgiveness walks through it to the other side.

Real forgiveness is also more liberating than false forgiveness. When we minimize the wrong, part of us knows we're lying. The resentment stays buried but alive, poisoning us. When we name the wrong and then genuinely release the debt, something actually changes. We're not pretending, we're choosing freedom.

This connects to generosity because generosity also requires honesty about cost. Giving that pretends it doesn't cost us anything isn't really giving. Real generosity names the cost.

This is what I'm sacrificing, this is what it's taking from me. And then gives anyway, and finds freedom in the giving.

Prayer for Today: *Honest God, help me name wrongs clearly without minimizing them. Give me courage to feel the full weight of what I'm forgiving. And then help me let go of the debt completely. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.*

(These devotionals are inspired by ideas in Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace by Miroslav Volf.)

Jan 26: We Forgive Because We Live by Mercy, Not Fairness

From Free of Charge, Chapter 4 — Forgiveness

Fairness is a powerful instinct. From childhood we're attuned to it. "That's not fair!" might be the most common protest on any playground. We want people to get what they deserve, good for good and bad for bad. When life doesn't work out that way, when people get away with things or we get less than we earned, we feel it viscerally.

Forgiveness violates fairness. The person who did a wrong deserves consequences, deserves to suffer, deserves to pay. Fairness demands it. But forgiveness says: I'm releasing you from what you deserve.

Miroslav Volf writes, "*We forgive because we live by mercy, not fairness.*"

That doesn't mean fairness doesn't matter. It matters. Justice matters. Consequences matter. But mercy operates on a different level entirely. Mercy says: Yes, you deserve punishment. Yes, fairness demands repayment. And I'm choosing to extend grace anyway.

Here's the thing: if we got what we deserved from God, we'd all be in trouble. Every one of us has debts we can't repay, wrongs we can't undo, failures we can't fix. If God operated

purely on fairness, none of us would make it. But God operates on mercy. We receive grace we don't deserve, forgiveness we haven't earned, love that has nothing to do with our merit.

When we forgive others, we don't need to pretend to ignore fairness. Instead, we should acknowledge that we ourselves live by mercy. How can we demand fairness from others when we're dependent on God's mercy - and the mercy of others - every single day?

This is the foundation of Christian generosity. We don't give, ultimately, based on whether others deserve the gift. We give because we've received mercy, and mercy has a way of spilling over. We forgive not because it's fair but because we've been forgiven and blessed. We extend grace because we live by grace.

Fairness is important. But mercy is deeper. And in God's economy, mercy gets the last word.

Prayer for Today: *Merciful God, help me live by mercy rather than fairness. Remind me of all the mercy I've received, all the grace I didn't deserve. Let that mercy overflow into forgiveness and generosity toward others. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.*

(These devotionals are inspired by ideas in Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace by Miroslav Volf.)

Jan 27: Grace Opens Doors We Are Tempted to Close

From Free of Charge, Chapter 5 — Exclusion and Embrace

We all have our circles. There are the people we let in, and the ones we keep out. With those circles, we decide who gets our time, our resources, our attention, our generosity. Some boundaries are wise and necessary, but some are just fear, or self-protection, or prejudice dressed up as prudence.

There are people we've decided don't deserve our help. People who made their own mess and should clean it up themselves. People whose politics or lifestyle or choices we can't

condone. People who took advantage once and won't get a second chance. We close the door, and we feel justified doing it.

Miroslav Volf writes, *"Grace opens doors we are tempted to close."*

Grace has this inconvenient habit of expanding our circles beyond our comfort zone. It keeps pushing us toward people we'd rather not deal with. The annoying neighbor. The difficult relative. The person whose values clash with ours. The one who keeps asking for help we're tired of giving.

Grace doesn't ignore wisdom or erase boundaries. But it does challenge our tendency to close doors too quickly, too permanently, too self-protectively. It asks: Are you closing this door out of genuine wisdom or out of fear? Out of legitimate boundaries or out of prejudice? Out of self-care or out of selfishness?

All of us have looked back and realized we closed doors we should have kept open. Sometimes we've need the help of people we ignored. Realized opportunities for connection that we missed because we were too quick to judge, too protective of our resources, too certain about who was in our circle and who wasn't.

Grace keeps showing up at closed doors and asking: Are you sure? Is this really where you want to draw the line? What if you cracked this door open just a little?

Opening doors can be uncomfortable. It exposes us to risk, to being taken advantage of, to people who might not appreciate what we offer. But it also exposes us to community, to love, and to joyful surprise - in other words, to grace.

Prayer for Today: *God of open doors, show me where I'm closing doors out of fear rather than wisdom. Give me courage to crack open doors I've shut too quickly. Help me be generous even when it's risky. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.*

(These devotionals are inspired by ideas in Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace by Miroslav Volf.)

Jan 28: To Embrace Is to Make Space for the Other

From Free of Charge, Chapter 5 — Exclusion and Embrace

Think about a literal embrace. You open your arms. You make space in your personal area for another person. You create room where there wasn't room before. It requires you to move, to adjust, to make yourself vulnerable to someone entering your space.

An embrace is the opposite of exclusion. Exclusion says: Stay over there. Keep your distance. There's no room for you here. An embrace says: Come closer. I'm making space for you. You belong here with me.

Miroslav Volf writes, *"To embrace is to make space for the other."*

This is what generosity does. It makes space. Space in our budgets for others' needs. Space in our calendars for others' celebrations or crises. Space in our lives for people who are different from us, who see the world differently, who might challenge or inconvenience us.

Making space always costs something. If I make space in my budget for another person's needs, that's money I can't spend elsewhere. If I make space in my schedule for someone else's emergency, that's time I won't have for my plans. If I make space in circles for people different from me, that might mean changes I'm not comfortable with.

We feel this cost, and often we resist. Our lives are already full. Our resources already stretched. Our emotional bandwidth already limited. Where exactly are we supposed to make space?

Yet, this is the question grace keeps asking: Where can you make space? It's not about finding unlimited capacity—none of us have that. But what can you shift, where can you adjust, rearrange to create room for someone else?

Making space for what is meaningful and worthy of my attention doesn't deplete me the way I fear it will. Usually it enlarges me. When I make room for what is most important, my life doesn't shrink—it expands. My capacity grows. My soul gets bigger.

To embrace is to make space for the other. And in God's strange economy, making space somehow creates more space.

Prayer for Today: *God who makes space for us, help me make space for others. Show me where I can shift, adjust, rearrange to create room. Give me courage to embrace rather than exclude. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.*

(These devotionals are inspired by ideas in Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace by Miroslav Volf.)

Jan 29: Grace Resists the Fear That Leads to Exclusion

From Free of Charge, Chapter 5 — Exclusion and Embrace

Fear is one of the most powerful forces in human life. We fear scarcity, that there won't be enough. We fear being taken advantage of, that our generosity will be exploited. We fear losing what we have, that helping others will cost us too much. We fear the unfamiliar, that people different from us will threaten our way of life.

These fears drive us to exclusion. We draw tight circles around "us" and keep "them" away. Sometimes this feels like wisdom. Better safe than sorry. Sometimes it feels like comfort. We feel better around people we already trust. Miroslav Volf writes, "Grace resists the fear that leads to exclusion."

Notice he doesn't say grace eliminates fear. Fear is real. The risks are real. We live in a world where people do take advantage, where resources are limited, where opening ourselves up can lead to genuine harm. Grace doesn't deny any of that.

But grace resists letting fear be the deciding factor. It challenges the reflexive move from fear to exclusion. It asks: Yes, there are risks. But is fear really the best guide for how we live? Is self-protection really the highest value?

Grace operates from a different starting point. It starts with God's abundance rather than our scarcity. It starts with trust rather than suspicion. It starts with the belief that we have enough to share because we've been given enough to share.

This doesn't mean willy-nilly generosity that ignores wisdom or boundaries. It means refusing to let fear make all our decisions, and resisting the impulse to exclude everyone who might possibly be a threat.

Left to our own devices, fear might close our hearts off completely. We might give only to people we know and trust. We might help only when we're certain it won't cost too much. Fear could shrink our lives down to a manageable, controllable, protected little circle.

Grace keeps pushing back against that fear, inviting us to take risks, to trust more than feels comfortable, to open doors we'd rather keep shut.

Prayer for Today: *God of grace, help me resist the fear that leads to exclusion. When I'm tempted to close ranks and protect myself, remind me of your abundance. Give me courage to take risks in generosity. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.*

(These devotionals are inspired by ideas in Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace by Miroslav Volf.)

Jan 30: We Steward What We Have Because None of It Is Ours

From Free of Charge, Chapter 6 — Living the Gift

We talk about "my money," "my house," "my time," "my resources." The language of possession runs deep. We worked for it. We earned it. We own it. It's ours to do with as we please.

But there's another way to see life: everything we have is gift. The abilities that allowed us to earn money? Gift. The opportunities that came our way? Gift. The health and time and circumstances that made our success possible? All gift. Strip away the gifts we've received, and there's not much left we can claim as purely our own achievement. We stand on many shoulders.

Miroslav Volf writes, "*We steward what we have because none of it is ours.*"

Stewardship is a fundamentally different posture than ownership. Owners ask: What do I want to do with my stuff? Stewards ask: How does the owner want me to use what's been entrusted to me?

This reframing changes everything about generosity. If it's all mine, then giving is optional. It's a nice thing to do if I feel like it, can afford it, am in a generous mood. But if I'm a steward of resources that belong to God? Then the question isn't *whether* to give but how to use these resources in ways that align with God's purposes.

The reality is we came into this world with nothing, and we will leave with nothing. In between, we get to manage resources that ultimately aren't ours. How we manage them matters.

This perspective is both humbling and freeing. Humbling because it reminds us we're not the sole source of our own success. Freeing because it releases us from the anxiety of trying to hold onto what was never really ours to begin with.

Stewardship means holding everything loosely, managing it well, and being ready to share it generously. After all, we're not the ultimate owners anyway.

Prayer for Today: *God and giver of all things, help me remember that everything I have is yours. Make me a faithful steward of the resources you've entrusted to me. Show me how to use them for your purposes. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.*

(These devotionals are inspired by ideas in Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace by Miroslav Volf.)

Feb 2: The Church Exists to Witness to God's Generosity

From Free of Charge, Chapter 6 — Living the Gift

What is the church for? We could answer that question in lots of ways. The church exists to worship God, to form disciples, to serve the community, to proclaim the gospel. All true. But here's another answer, maybe the one that ties all the others together.

Miroslav Volf writes, *"The church exists to witness to God's generosity."*

Everything the church does is meant to point to the extravagant, unearned, abundant generosity of God. When we gather for worship, we're celebrating a God who gives without calculating return. When we practice forgiveness, we're embodying a God who releases debts we could never repay. When we serve our neighbors, we're reflecting a God who gave everything for people who deserved nothing.

And when we give generously, with our money, time, resources, our very lives, we're participating in the most fundamental truth about God: God is forever giving.

This is why our generosity matters. The church needs money to keep the lights on, that's true. People in need require help, that's also true. But this is the deeper truth: generosity matters because it's how we bear witness to the character of God.

When Christians are stingy, anxious, calculating, and tight-fisted, we misrepresent God or betray the faith that is in us. We bear false witness.

But when Christians give freely, joyfully, extravagantly, not because we have unlimited resources but because we trust in God's abundance, we tell the truth about God. There will be enough because God is forever giving. We demonstrate what grace looks like. We become living testimonies to divine generosity.

This is the calling of the church. Not to be a club for people who have their act together. Not to be a business that efficiently manages resources. But to be a community that gives witness to God's lavish, unearned, abundant, grace-filled generosity.

The world is watching. What are we saying about God with how we give?

Prayer for Today: *Generous God, make your church a faithful witness to your generosity. Make me a faithful witness to your generosity. Let my giving today speak truth about who you are. Where do you want me in my generosity today? Amen.*

(These devotionals are inspired by ideas in Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace by Miroslav Volf.)