

*"The message of this book is a powerful one: You are
never too young to be generous!"*

Mark Batterson, New York Times best selling author of *The Circle Maker*

EVERYDAY GENEROSITY

becoming a generous family in a *selfie world*



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CHAPTER 1

What Is Generosity?

The first time I spoke in front of a lot of people was on March 14, 2015, when I was in seventh grade. This was a big deal because I was speaking to the junior high group at my church and many of my classmates were in the room. I was really excited because I was happy to have the opportunity to share my heart in front of my peers.

Many of the adults asked me, “Did you get nervous standing up there in front of your friends and their parents?” I told them I didn’t get nervous a bit! I loved having the opportunity to speak and encourage people to do more for others and create a generous world. And after that moment, I knew that part of God’s plan for me was to speak to students and parents about living generously.

From the time I was in middle school, my dad would take me along with him as he traveled to this meeting or that conference. My dad, Brad Formsma, founded an organization called I Like Giving, and he speaks on generosity to large groups of people around the country. By having me with him, he was letting me meet his friends and we were building a special relationship. I love going to different places and meeting new

people. My first time speaking with him was at a church in Petoskey, Michigan. We had gone there for him to speak and he surprised me by asking, “Hey, Drew, would you ever want to share a giving story?”

I grinned. “Dad, I have been waiting for you to ask me!”

So, when we got into the meeting and my dad started his talk, I thought, *I hope he really does call me up to share my giving story.* A little later in the program, I saw him look at me and knew it was my time to shine. The truth is, I was more worried about tripping up the stairs than speaking. Once I made it up the stairs (safely), I shared a story I call “I Like Bed Bath & Beyond,” about a giving opportunity that had actually come up while I was on this trip with him.

I had been with my dad at Bed Bath & Beyond getting two pillows because the ones we had at the hotel were bricks and I had been having some neck problems. It was like a candy store in there, with so many different kinds of pillows to choose from, so we asked one of the salespeople how to know which to choose. We described what we were looking for, and she knew the exact pillow we needed because she had similar problems. She pointed us toward one particular top-of-the-line pillow. I grabbed two of them, and the saleswoman led us up front to the register so that she could check us out. Then my dad whispered to me to grab a third pillow, and at that moment I realized we were going to buy the saleswoman the pillow she had been hoping to get for herself.

We got up to the counter and the saleswoman scanned the first two pillows. When she scanned the last one and started to put it in our bag, we told her, “This pillow is for you!” She

almost fainted right there, and everyone around us was picking up on that rush you experience from giving and receiving. The clerk behind her said, "Whoa, you must have done a good job!"

After a moment of shock, the saleswoman said, "You made my day," and then repeated it a couple more times.

I walked out of there with the biggest smile. And, that night, as I lay my head on my new pillow, I couldn't stop thinking of the lady we blessed earlier in the day. I can promise you one thing: I had one great night of sleep!

After I shared this story at the church, a man from the back of the auditorium stood up and yelled, "I was there! I am the manager at that Bed Bath & Beyond, and we have been talking about this since it happened! Our whole team is so excited; there is so much energy. My employee said she hasn't had someone do something nice for her in thirty years!"

I was floored. That had definitely never happened before in all the times my dad has spoken, and I felt God was telling me to keep sharing my story. So, the next month I asked my dad if I could share another giving story at the next church, and he said yes. I am so thankful that my parents have always been there to support me and give me the opportunities I need to succeed, because I never would have been on that stage if my dad hadn't given me the chance.

From that point on, I have gone with my dad as often as possible when he speaks around the country, and I always look forward to the chance to speak. I believe my calling is to make sure my generation is known as the Generous Generation, not the iPhone Generation.

When I speak, I try to address the high school and middle school students through a twenty-minute keynote, and then I share a quick giving story with the parents. I'm just getting started, but I believe this is an important message and we will continue to be led to the right places to share it.

The most important reason I want to do this with my dad is that there are a lot of misconceptions about giving that keep people from choosing to live generously. I think this is especially true for my generation, so I want to go out and set an example for them so they can see how easy and rewarding it really is.

In addition to the speaking, I wanted to write this book because I see it as the best way to reach all the people who need to hear the message that I won't be able to share with them personally. Another reason is that I have the perspective that we only have today. A few years ago, my dad was diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia and given twenty-four months to live. This reminded me that each day matters, and between the speaking and writing, I saw it all as an opportunity to spend quality time with my dad.

Maybe you are reading this book because you have read my dad's book, *I Like Giving*. Maybe someone gave it to you as a gift. Hopefully, you are giving this message (and me) a chance because you sense that living generously is something that will make a big, positive difference in your life and you want to know more. In any case, I hope you will find a few answers and the inspiration you need here to help you start making generosity a part of your everyday life.

GENEROSITY FOR GENERATIONS: SEVEN WAYS TO A GENEROUS LIFE

My dad's grandpa taught him that generosity is beyond just giving money. One Friday afternoon when Dad was twelve years old, his grandpa called him.

"Bradley," he said, "I will pick you up on Saturday morning and take you to my bakery to bake sixteen loaves of bread."

Dad's grandpa owned a large commercial bakery and his test kitchen was next to his office where he would make small batches of bread. My dad was so excited as he thought of all the fresh sliced bread and jam that he would eat that Saturday morning. Well, his grandpa had a different plan in mind. After the loaves of bread cooled off, they loaded them into the trunk of his car.

At their first stop Great-Grandpa gave two fresh loaves of bread and several kind and affirming words to a widow that he knew from church. He was modeling how to be generous with words.

My dad was hoping the second stop would be to sample that fresh bread, yet this time Great-Grandpa gave away several more loaves of bread along with a white envelope that contained a check. This time Great-Grandpa was modeling being generous with money.

As they drove down the road my dad kept hoping that soon they would pull the car over and enjoy that fresh bread! Well, not so fast. At the next stop, several more loaves of bread came from the trunk of the car and Great-Grandpa was giving someone a letter of referral to help him get a job because of the connections my great-grandpa had. This time he was being generous with influence.

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My dad shared how he slowly got the point that this particular Saturday morning was about his grandpa modeling the generous life. The next stop was Great-Grandpa spending time with a person who couldn't leave their home. You guessed it—generous with time.

The following stop he gave his full attention to a retired employee whose wife was very sick. He was showing my dad the power of being generous with his attention.

The last stop and the remaining loaves of bread were given with Great-Grandpa sharing a tool that someone needed to use. "Sharing with others the things we have is a powerful way to give," Great-Grandpa would always say!

As my dad looked back on his experiences with his grandpa later in life, he realized that his grandpa was modeling for him the seven ways to live a generous life: being generous with our thoughts, words, money, time, influence, attention, and possessions.

THOUGHTS

Generous with our thoughts might be hard to understand. Oftentimes we can make assumptions and judgments about a person without reason. The way we think about someone or something can be either kind or hateful. We truly never know what someone is going through. They could be acting unfavorable because they found out they had cancer, lost a family member, or just failed a test. Someone being thoughtful and empathetic to their circumstance could be the difference in their response to their situation. Instead of thinking whether someone needs

your generosity, think about the impact of your one decision. Most people just want to be thought of and heard from.

Our family was recently at a conference. One of my dad's longtime friends was also there and yet they missed talking to each other because of the busy schedule and commitments that my dad's friend had going on. They would pass each other briefly in the hallway and smile or nod their head, and yet they never had a chance to catch up on what was happening in each other's lives. As we flew home my dad shared how he was having negative thoughts that were not his own. They were thoughts that his friend was mad at him or that he had done something to offend this friend. He shared how he prayed that he would extend grace and that he would give the benefit of the doubt and see the best in his friend. He mentioned that he needed to pray this through over and over again until he got peace in his heart.

Four days after the conference ended, his friend texted him and apologized that they had not been able to connect and that he greatly appreciated their long friendship. Due to three major issues going on in his life, he had been greatly distracted. Prior to learning this, my dad had thought about confronting his friend, yet his early thoughts were so negative he realized that he could have damaged the friendship by allowing his less-than-generous thoughts to control the situation.

We all can benefit from being generous with our thoughts, and the more we become aware of what we are thinking about, the more we can live to give the benefit of the doubt and to see the best in people—even if that means praying and waiting for the situation to work itself out.

WORDS

One generous word can change someone's whole day. People just want to feel known and recognized. The weight of our words is more than we think. The words we use to another could make or break their day. Can you remember the times when someone affirmed you? A time that you were complimented or encouraged? I bet you remember many of those times. Sometimes being generous with our words is for people we are very close to in life. Other times it's for people who every day serve our country and our communities. It may mean thanking those who have a thankless job.

Like Conrad.

My dad travels to speak at leading businesses and churches across the country, which requires him to go through a lot of airports. Now anyone who travels knows that a clean airport bathroom is a huge bonus. One day as my dad was leaving the cleanest airport bathroom he had ever used, he got that nudge to give a kind word to the man who had just cleaned it. As my dad introduced himself to the worker and they exchanged names, he noticed that the worker's name patch was blank. After learning the man's name was Conrad, my dad said, "Conrad, if you worked for me your name would be on your shirt. You matter. I think you're a good man."

My dad saw a little tear well up in the corner of the man's eye. My dad floated away and caught up with my mom. She said, "You're glowing! What happened?"

My dad said, "I just met Conrad, the guy who cleans the bathrooms. I had the greatest conversation with him. I thought I was doing the giving and yet I received so much joy from giving him a kind word."

MONEY

It doesn't matter if you're giving ten dollars or ten million dollars, a financial gift is often connected to our heart. I give to my church, yet I also try and find other nonprofits to give to that I feel relate to me and my passion. Mr. David Green of Hobby Lobby shared with me that the habits I'm making now will be similar to the ones I have in fifty years. He encouraged me to give financially now even with a small amount because the habit will live on. When I do have a steady paycheck and make good money, I won't have to struggle in making the decision to give because I made it already during my teenager years. And in times of hardship and being tight on money I will give because that decision was made already.

One day I told my dad that I was looking for a good place to invest money on a regular basis. I told him I wanted to give to something that was effective and had been proven to be a good organization. The look on his face told me that he was a little surprised to hear me use the word *invest*. That's exactly what we are doing when we give—investing in God's work and the lives of others. He told me to get my antenna working, which is his favorite line to get me looking, listening, and asking questions to find the next giving opportunity.

The following day I had the chance to attend a meeting with my dad and fourteen businesspeople, including the aforementioned founder of Hobby Lobby, Mr. David Green. It was a huge privilege to hear Mr. Green's views on giving, and I have to say it was one of those days I will never forget. At one point Mart Green (David's son) shared a story that changed his life.

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He was on a trip across the world to deliver a Bible that had been translated into Eastern Jakaltek. After a crazy long journey, he arrived for the presentation of the newly translated Bible. A man named Gaspar came forward to get his new Bible and he wept. This was a life-changing moment for Mart. But Mart's experience impacted me as well.

How many Bibles do I have access to? I can access God's Word on my YouVersion Bible app in so many translations. I know I have never wept getting a Bible. As Mart shared the number of languages that have yet to receive a Bible in their language, he mentioned how many translating agencies were combining forces to share their best practices and to not duplicate work. And then he said, "For thirty-five dollars, a single verse can be translated each month."

It hit me—here was the investment I had just been asking my dad about! That day I went to the Illuminations website and decided that I could translate two verses each month. I am excited that I can play a small part in helping bring God's Word to people like Gaspar—twenty-four verses each year!

TIME

In a world that has become faster and faster, it seems like it's become harder and harder to be generous with our time. It takes intentionality to give your time. One day my dad said to my brother and me that we were going to go on a surprise ride. Well, we piled into his car and drove down the road for what seemed like forever. We didn't know where we were going and

were kind of anxious to find out what we were going to get out of this surprise ride experience. We pulled into a great big building that had flags lining the driveway, and we started asking Dad, "Where are we? What are we doing at this big building?"

As we parked the car my dad explained to us that we were at a veterans' facility. He told us that we were going to go inside and look for someone we could strike up a conversation with and spend some time with that afternoon. Well, there was a man in a wheelchair who was headed out the door to smoke and we asked him if we could go with him. As we stood next to his wheelchair he pointed at a huge American flag hanging between two large oak trees in the middle of the lawn. He asked us, "Do you know what that flag stands for?" Then he answered his own question. "That flag stands for freedom!" he exclaimed.

He said every morning he goes out to salute the flag and smoke a cigarette all alone. But this day was different. He said, "Why are you guys here?"

"I wanted to come here with my boys today and spend some time with one of the great heroes of our country," my dad said.

A big smile broke across this old soldier's face, and as we said our goodbyes and walked away he yelled at the top of his lungs, "You made my day!"

The three of us stopped in our tracks, turned around, and yelled back, "You made ours!"

My grandma also modeled generosity to me. One day, I was spending some time with her, and she suggested that we visit her long-time elder at the rest home. I could tell that this

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elder meant a lot to her, so we went and spent hours with this eighty-nine-year-old lady named Lavon.

My grandma had been visiting Lavon for over ten years. She would bring Lavon food, take her out, and love on her. As Lavon was blind, my grandma would also bring her audio books and often read to her. Sitting there, I realized that Lavon would be so lonely without the generosity of my grandma and her weekly visits. The joy on Lavon's face when we sat with her was overwhelming to see. No money could buy what my grandma was giving to her. All people want is to feel known and cared for. She loved it so much that she wanted us to stay the night.

As my grandma would oftentimes bring visitors with her, including friends and grandchildren, she was modeling generosity to everyone she brought with her to the rest home. I believe that when we are generous with our time we truly understand who a generous person really is. Someone who serves and takes the spotlight off of themselves and places it onto others instead.

INFLUENCE

Generosity with our influence could make all the difference in someone's life. Everyone has influence. When I was twelve years old my dad told me that he and his friends had decided to help a man named William who had just moved from Nigeria. He was a janitor at a museum trying to save enough money to buy a used van. My dad and his friends delivered the van to William, and he was overjoyed. Now not only would he be able to get to work in a timely way, but he also could now lead a Bible study at a local jail. And his six kids would now have a place to sit!

A few months later my dad asked William how things were going at the jail.

"Well, there's a little bit of a problem," William said.

"What is it?" Dad asked.

"I don't have a driver's license," William admitted.

My dad was shocked. He didn't see that one coming!

"Yes," William said, "I continue to go to this place where they keep charging me to take the test and I keep failing."

My dad decided to go with him to the test center and soon realized that because of his language barrier the Department of Motor Vehicles was sending him to an outside contractor who was taking advantage of his poor English. He realized that William needed somebody with influence to help him get his driver's license. My dad was able to bring his influence and ability to communicate with the people who ran the driver's test agency, holding them accountable and keeping them honest so that William was able to get his license. With his license William was then able to visit the jail, bring his family to church, and get a better, more flexible schedule.

As I look at my life, the best example of someone who has been generous with his or her influence is my dad. In fact, he shared his influence with me, giving me the opportunity to share that first giving story on stage. His trust that I wouldn't mess up or do anything dumb was amazing to watch. I could have said something that could mess up his whole career, but he trusted in me.

Now, trust is built over time; it's a process. I have felt like God has given me a message and my dad trusts what God is

doing. Through his relationship and connections, he has opened me up to the most amazing people. And he has done the same for my siblings and so many of his friends.

Sharing your influence is helping someone get somewhere they couldn't get on their own. I see my dad introduce people to others without expecting to get anything from it. Your connection could be abused, but if you get the nudge go for it, even if it doesn't make sense at first.

ATTENTION

Being generous with our attention is tricky. If you are having a conversation with someone and become distracted by what is going on over your shoulder, it might seem you don't care about who you are talking to. It can be so difficult to not be interrupted by something else but to give your full, undivided attention to the person in front of you.

I was at a conference and ran into the CEO of Southwest Airlines. I walked up and introduced myself and we talked for ten minutes. The amazing part is that though there were several people around us, the whole time he was locked in on me. This leading influencer in today's society was generous with his attention, and it made me feel like I was worthy to be talking to him even at my age. I look at the culture in his company today and it carries the same legacy of being generous in all circumstances. I oftentimes catch myself being distracted by my phone or another person, but really, I just need to be in the moment with who I'm with. When we are distracted while talking to someone, our nonverbal communication tells them that they're not good enough to be talking to.

Next time you are with someone, try giving them your full attention and see what happens. It might be hard at first, but as you start the habit of being fully engaged it should become easier.

POSSESSIONS

Sharing our possessions is a huge deal. It seems so easy but can be challenging. It's easy to share a few eggs with the neighbor when they run short while they are making chocolate cookies. But when the neighbor's car stops working and they ask if they can use your brand-new SUV, that's when it can be a little harder to be generous. I like to remind myself every day that everything I have is God's and if he gives me an opportunity to share I should lean into that and do it!

When I lived in Michigan we had a house with a lower level that was completely finished with several bedrooms, a kitchen, and a bath. My parents made a point of looking for opportunities to let people live with us who were in between jobs or houses. The way our house was designed allowed the people living downstairs to use a back staircase to come in and out of the house so that they could feel like they had their own privacy. I was so excited to have other people in our house that I would sneak down the staircase to see them, which was very fun for me and a little stressful for my mom because she couldn't always find me. I remember thinking this must be what everybody does—sharing rooms in their house with people that they have met either through other friends or at church. One time my dad became frustrated because he let one of the

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families park in the garage and their car leaked oil all over the garage floor. This was good for me to see, because sometimes when we share things we may not get them back, or sometimes you'll end up with that stain on the garage floor!

Another time, some people were staying at our home and they decided to play the guitar late into the night. That was also one of those things that we all needed to forgive and then move on.

GIVING IN THE TOUGH TIMES

I will never forget the Christmas of 2012. My dad and mom were cleaning out my sister's play room when one of the large toys fell on his foot, which caused it to bleed and the next day it got infected. This landed my dad in the hospital over Christmas. It was a total downer as we couldn't visit him because the hospital had a pneumonia outbreak! Several days later his white blood cell counts slowly dropped so they discharged him from the hospital. As the months went on my dad had to continue to get his blood monitored. One day his doctor called to tell him that he needed to see a hematologist. After further testing my dad was diagnosed with leukemia. I remember the day that I walked past our home office where my mom and dad were crying. My mom was really upset and my dad had a very serious look on his face.

They waited a week before telling us kids what was going on. The mood in our house was heavy. My mom looked sad most of the time.

One beautiful sunny day that spring my dad and I were kayaking at his friend's lake house. I was in the back of the kayak and said, "Dad, could you die from that thing with your blood?"

He waited for what felt like an hour and said, "Yes—I could."

I said, "Dad, I don't think you are going to die because I think God has work for you to do by encouraging people to live generously through *I Like Giving*."

I don't often talk like that—especially when I was ten years old—but I really meant it!

My dad underwent chemotherapy for several years, and after we moved to California he started to see a doctor at UCLA. One day the doctor told him that he was not able to detect the disease. We were so excited and thanked God for a miraculous healing. Still, we were told that he would have to continue chemotherapy for the rest of his life.

Since then I have gone with my dad several times to UCLA to get his blood checked and it seems like there is always a giving story that comes out of those trips. The guy has made the generous life such a part of everyday life, it's fun to watch and see what will happen next.

GENEROUS IN EVERY SITUATION

One day the nurse taking his blood was in a grumpy mood. Her name was Joy. (Seriously, some people just have the wrong name for the job!) My dad asked Joy if she ever went with a friend to Starbucks and got the 910-calorie drink with all the whipped cream and drizzle on top. She looked at him kind of peculiar and said, "I guess I would." Well, as she was labeling

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up his blood he slid a Starbucks gift card on her chair. As he and I left the lab he said, “Hey, Joy, have fun with your friend.” She glanced over to her chair, saw the gift card, and a huge smile broke across her face.

Walking down the hallway my dad said, “It’s just better to give than receive.” The interesting part was that even though I was only observing the generosity, I too was experiencing the joy of it.

GENEROUS TO EVERYONE

The day the doctor told my dad he was going to take him off of chemotropic my dad said, “Doc, it’s a miracle!” to which the doctor said, “Those don’t happen,” and then he complimented my dad’s shoes. Seriously, he transitioned straight from miracles to shoes. So, my dad said, “What size are your shoes? Size 10?” His doctor said, “You think you are so smart! They are size 9.5.”

My dad then thought to himself, *Yes, actually I am smart. I just learned your shoe size.* He went straight to the store where he had bought his shoes and bought the 9.5 for his doctor. Who does this? My dad. He wrote a note to the doctor along with the shoes, which said, “Dear Doc, thank you for using your God-given gifts to help a guy like me stay around a little longer.” And then he closed the note with, “These shoes will help you be one step more like me!”

The funny thing is that when the doctor got the shoes in the mail he called my dad and said, “You are crazy but thanks for the shoes.”

“Yes, I do,” Dad agreed.

What is generosity? My great-grandpa showed the seven ways of being generous to my grandma and my dad, and now my grandma and dad are modeling generosity to me. Generosity is not just about being generous with your money. It's about being generous with your thoughts, words, time, attention, influence, and possessions—no matter what's going on in your own life, no matter what situation you are in, and no matter who you are with.

That's generosity.