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THE GENEROSITY PROJECT



LEARN, PRAY AND WORK TOGETHER
TO BECOME THE BIG-HEARTED PEOPLE
GOD CALLS US TO BE

PASTOR'S GUIDE

The Generosity Project: Pastor's Guide

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This guide is for pastors and church leaders. It sets out:

- what *The Generosity Project* is and what it's trying to achieve
- how you can utilize *The Generosity Project* to change the culture of generosity in your church.

1. A generosity problem

The problem that *The Generosity Project* seeks to address is far deeper than the ongoing battle to meet the church budget—although that is one symptom of it.

It's seen in how hard many churches find it to recruit members to give their time and effort and expertise to ministries within the church and without.

It's seen in the constant struggle of parachurch ministries to fund their basic operations, let alone expansion.

It's seen in the harsh reality of how little money Christians give, overall, to church and parachurch ministry causes. Try this sobering exercise if you haven't already:

- Work out how many regular members in your congregation earn a salary.
- Google the average weekly earnings for your area.
- Calculate what your church budget would be if 80% of those earning a salary in your church gave just 5% of their income to support the work of the church.
- Compare it to what you currently receive.
- Get depressed.

Apart from all this, our difficulty with generosity is seen in how awkward many Christians and churches find it even to *talk* about money, giving or generosity. (An old joke: How do you get a traditional Anglican to look at his shoes? Mention money or Jesus.)

The conviction that lies behind *The Generosity Project* is that in the church networks we know and love, especially in the UK and Australia, *the culture of generosity is weak*. We don't talk about it, we aren't excited by it, and there is precious little evidence that we are driven by it.

This is a problem worth addressing, and not (we hasten to add)

just to improve the bottom line of our church budgets.

It's important because generosity is a basic fruit of the godly Christian life. It's a glad response to the grace of God in the gospel. If generosity is weak, then something is weak in the spiritual hearts of our congregations.

2. How to address this problem

The way to address a generosity problem is the way to address any problem in church or Christian living—with the sharp sword of the word of God, preached, spoken and grappled with by God's people over time, in prayerful dependence on the Spirit.

God has given us these five gifts—his word, his Spirit, prayer, each other and time. There is really no other way to see change happen among God's people than through these. If a culture of generosity is going to grow in our midst, it will be through God convicting and changing our hearts to respond to his gracious gospel more deeply and thoroughly.

This conviction has profoundly shaped our approach to *The Generosity Project*. There are practical discussions to be had, and real-life case studies to illustrate the main points, but at the heart of any significant change in hearts and lives must be a fresh engagement with the transforming power of God's gospel.

Our aim, then, has been to put together an integrated resource that applies the word of God to people's hearts so that, by God's power and grace, they might arrive at:

- a powerful, clarified understanding of what generosity is and how it grows
- a renewed, generous heart that longs to give to others
- a fresh language for talking about generosity within the congregation
- a new resolve to put all this into practice in various areas of their lives.

Now, seeing this kind of change take place will require time, persistence, prayer and a multifaceted approach. Church cultures don't change simply by running everyone through a few Bible studies—the existing culture is usually too deep-rooted and slow-moving for that. It takes long-term persistence (and especially persistence in prayer) to get it to shift.

That's why we strongly recommend that you view *The Generosity Project* not as a one-off cure-all for your generosity problems, but as one central piece in a much larger effort at church culture-change.

3. The overall plan: a sample 'church culture-change' strategy

The Generosity Project is a six-part teaching resource for use in small groups that stands at the centre of a larger strategy to shift the culture of generosity in your congregation. What might that larger strategy look like?

Each church will, of course, need to come up with its own particular actions and timing, but here's a sample plan to give you a place to start. This plan assumes that you already have a network of small/home groups in your church.

1. Gather a small team of people as allies and co-workers in this particular church culture-change strategy. You might want to work through *The Generosity Project* together over six weeks to clarify your convictions, and to be enthused for the task.
2. Gather your small group leaders together over a number of sessions to explain what's happening and why, and to train them in their part of the process (i.e. to help them understand the whole culture-change strategy, and how to lead the small groups in which *The Generosity Project* will be used). Use the Small Group Leader's Guide as a resource in this training (available for free download at thegenerosityproject.com).
3. Plan ahead for how people who aren't in small groups might participate—either by running some special small groups for six weeks to work through the material, or by grouping 2-4 people together (with a leader) to work through the material at their own pace.

4. Plan the promotional and profile-raising phase. Allow 6-8 weeks to start laying the groundwork within the congregation for the main, intensive phase, where small groups will work through *The Generosity Project*. In this awareness-raising phase you could:
 - 4.1 send out a series of emails to the whole church explaining what you're planning to do
 - 4.2 utilize some of the trailer videos or 'Real world stories' videos (available at thegenerosityproject.com) to give people a taste of what they're about to study
 - 4.3 set aside some church time to interview a team member about the project, show videos, pray, and so on.
5. Run the intensive phase of the strategy, in which you use *The Generosity Project* in your small groups over a 6-8 week period (see further below on what the resource contains and how to make the most of it). If possible, recruit every small group to do it at the same time so as to promote discussion and prayer about the issues throughout the congregation.
6. During this intensive phase, or just after it, do a short preaching series on generosity, focusing on key aspects of the material covered in *The Generosity Project*. A three-part series might be about right—enough to give the ideas some additional traction and push, but not so much that the congregation feels overwhelmed or browbeaten. These could be normal expositional sermons on key passages. Here is a sample three-part series with possible key passages:
 - 6.1 (The problem) The inward curve of the heart: Luke 12:15-31 or Matthew 6:19-24 or 1 Timothy 6:6-19 or Ecclesiastes 5:10-17
 - 6.2 (God's action) God's generosity in the gospel: 2 Corinthians 8:1-9 or Philippians 2:1-11 or Romans 5:1-11
 - 6.3 (Our response) A big-hearted life: Matthew 22:34-40 or Mark 12:38-44 or Titus 2:11-14 or Colossians 3:9-17 or Ephesians 4:17-5:2

7. Plan for a concrete ‘next step’ in which members can join together and take practical, immediate action in response to *The Generosity Project*. Providing an easy-to-join but not compulsory next step is a very helpful way of translating ideas into action. It might be some combination of:
 - 7.1 a community project that involves being generous with time and effort more than money
 - 7.2 a focused gospel opportunity or need outside the church that everyone could contribute to together
 - 7.3 a particular person in ministry or missionary work that you decide as a congregation to be generous towards.

You might consider holding a special thanksgiving or ‘generosity event’ at which to talk about this concrete step, and rejoice in it together.

It’s probably best, particularly as an initial follow-up step, that the focal point is *not* the church budget. There is a risk that making ‘giving more to church’ the immediate follow-up step may make the whole exercise feel like a set-up. (By all means, when it does come around to talking about the church finances, tie your appeals in to all that has been learned in *The Generosity Project*; but perhaps don’t start there.)

8. Plan for longer-term momentum and follow-up. Consider some of the following ideas:
 - 8.1 Have a ‘generosity revisited’ focus 4-6 months after you finish the intensive phase, in which you highlight some of the positive changes or initiatives that have happened (in church and in small groups).
 - 8.2 Encourage your small groups to keep praying about generosity, and particular projects, over time.
 - 8.3 Use some of the real world story videos in church, or as a regular part of the small group diet, to keep generosity on the agenda.
 - 8.4 Work out when and how you will keep the conversation about generosity going over the following 12 months (e.g. one or two follow-up sermons on the subject; or a

prayer focus in relation to the particular ‘generosity initiatives’ you might have taken as a congregation).

- 8.5 Plan for when to revisit the ‘intensive phase’—that is, to run some one-off small groups through *The Generosity Project* for six weeks in (say) nine months’ time. This is for those who weren’t able to participate the first time around, or who have joined the church since.

4. About *The Generosity Project* resource

The small group resource that sits in the middle of this larger strategy is designed to give those who participate:

- a fresh, clear understanding of the generous life that God has called us to in Christ
- a new desire to change, and to live that generous life
- a personal, practical plan to put that understanding and motivation into practice
- a fellowship within which all of the above takes place.

This final point is significant. *The Generosity Project* does contain some sections of text to read, and looks like a book, but it is not a ‘book’ in the normal sense of that word. It’s not something for someone to pick up and read on their own. It is specifically designed as an interactive resource—as something you work through with others. Hence the subtitle: *Learn, pray and work together to become the big-hearted people God calls us to be.*

The resource falls into six parts or chapters, with the expectation that a small group would work through these parts over six weeks. (See below for an outline of the main ideas in each part.) Each part contains three subsections:

- a. **Read and reflect**—an engagement with the text of Scripture, where participants dig into various Bible passages, grapple with their meaning, and discuss together what these texts teach about generosity.
- b. **Input**—some teaching input that ties together the various themes emerging from Scripture, and presents the key content

for that part. This input comes in *two forms* that groups can use in various ways:

- a 10-15 minute video, featuring various Bible teachers and stories (available for free online)
- a chapter of text (usually 1500-2000 words long) that contains much the same content as the video, but in a piece of continuous prose.

Many groups will choose to watch the video together in their group time, and then read the text version later during the week to consolidate the ideas; alternatively, members could read the text section *before* they come to the group (to get the ideas flowing), and then watch the video together in the group time; or they may prefer simply to read the text aloud in the group (it will take about the same amount of time as the video). Both the text and video versions of the teaching input are very useful as a catch-up for people who miss a week.

- c. **What it means for us**—a final application section, where the key lessons and implications that have emerged are discussed, applied and prayed about.

Each of the six parts is designed to be done in 50 minutes, roughly broken down into:

- 20-25 minutes of Bible study
- 10-15 minutes of input (video or text)
- 15 minutes of application and prayer.

Groups that have the flexibility to spend more time (an hour or more) will be able to expand the time allocated to Bible study and application according to their circumstances.

It's important to obtain a copy of *The Generosity Project* book for every member of the small group. There are several reasons for this:

- so that each member can write down in one place the key biblical truths and insights that come out of the discussion and input, and be able to reflect and pray over these in the following week
- so that each member can read the text summary of the teaching input at their leisure, and consolidate the ideas

- so that there is a shared and visible sense that you are doing something significant together as a group and as a congregation—that you all bring your books along with you to the group, and use them together.

5. The content and logic of *The Generosity Project*

Part 1: A world built on generosity

- God graciously created us and our world; and he also generously sustains and provides for his creation.
- God does all this not because he needs to or because we deserve it, but because of his love.
- This is what generosity really is: kindly giving someone more than you're obligated or expected to give.
- Our response to God's generosity should be thanksgiving and praise, trust and lack of anxiety, and a corresponding generosity to others.

Part 2: The inward curve of the heart

- By nature we aren't generous or thankful; quite the reverse.
- The root of this problem is the selfish, inwardly curving nature of our hearts.
- Our bad attitudes to money are vivid symptoms of this deep-seated disease (e.g. greed, self-sufficiency, pride, corruption).
- But God in his massive generosity provides for us here as well, in the gospel of grace. By the death and resurrection of Jesus, he wipes the slate clean and sets us on a new path, to lead a new life.

Part 3: A new, generous life

- The example of Jesus, and the very nature of the gospel, drives us to lead lives of radical love and generosity to others; to live generously in response to God's generosity.
- This new, generous life is by no means just about money or even mainly about money. It is played out in every aspect of life: in our hospitality, in using our gifts to serve others in church, in giving our time and attention to others, in mutual

forgiveness, in praying for others, in giving to the poor and needy, in doing good to everyone.

Part 4: Money and the new life

- As a liquid form of God's provision, money is a potent gift that reveals a selfish or generous life.
- Money and riches have various downsides and dangers, including self-centredness, pride and corruption.
- By contrast, there are two main ways in which God wants us to use our money:
 - **faithfully** to meet our responsibilities (e.g. to provide for our families, and to provide for the needs of our pastors/churches)
 - **generously** to love and serve others, including those in need and those in our congregations, and to support the work of the gospel (in and through our churches, but also beyond).

Part 5: The partnership of the generous

- We shouldn't give our money away randomly, but with an understanding of God's purposes in the world—which are all focused on the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2 Corinthians 8-9 describes the privilege of gospel generosity and partnership.
- Paul's gospel partnership with the Philippians is a prime example—it's like being an investing partner in the greatest enterprise of all: the kingdom of heaven.

Part 6: Reflection, action and prayer

- Reflecting back over the course, summarizing and clarifying the key ideas.
- A fresh approach to the age-old question 'How much should I give?'—one that notes and respects the Old Testament tithing tradition, but which interprets it and applies it to our lives as those who live on this side of the fulfilling work of Christ.

- Developing an action plan (as an individual and/or as a group):
 - Where in my life is there an opportunity to be generous?
 - What could I do, in what timeframe?
 - How should I start; what are the practical steps?
- Praying about this, and working out how to follow through with each other to put these plans into effect.