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THE GENEROSITY PROJECT



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

SMALL GROUP LEADER'S GUIDE

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The Generosity Project: Small Group Leader's Guide

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This guide is for small group leaders who are planning to work through *The Generosity Project* material in their small groups. It sets out:

- what *The Generosity Project* is and what it's trying to achieve
- what general things you need to know in order to lead your group through *The Generosity Project*
- specific notes for each session.

1. A generosity problem

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*.

This weakness is seen not only in the struggle that many churches continually face to meet their budgets and grow their work, but also in how hard they find it to recruit members to give time and effort and expertise to ministries within the church and without. And it's seen in the constant struggle of parachurch ministries to fund their basic operations, let alone expansion.

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.)

'Generosity' isn't our strong suit. 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 and our small groups.

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 different 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—an effort that will include congregation-wide prayer, preaching, and other plans and activities at the congregational level.

3. Where small groups fit in

Within this larger church-wide effort, small home groups (Bible study groups, growth groups, gospel communities—whatever you call them!) can play a very significant role. Small groups are an ideal context for Christians to grapple deeply and personally with what the Bible says about an issue (in this case, generosity), and to talk and pray and work together towards lasting change.

The Generosity Project is a six-part teaching resource designed to help your small group do exactly that. The idea is that over six weeks or sessions, your group will work through parts 1-6 of *The Generosity Project*, using the material to teach, train, challenge, encourage, exhort and pray for one another to:

- come to a fresh gospel understanding of generosity and its importance in our lives
- examine yourselves and repent of your lack of generosity
- work out together what a new, big-hearted life of generosity would look like for each person
- start to put your new understanding and plans into practice.

It's all captured in the resource's subtitle: *Learn, pray and work together to become the big-hearted people God calls us to be.*

4. What's in *The Generosity Project* resource?

The printed resource falls into six parts, with the expectation that a small group would work through these parts over six weeks. 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 summarizes and illustrates the key points. 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 you 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 practical 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 (see below for a rough break-up of the time). 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. How to lead a group through *The Generosity Project*

Most of what you need to do in leading *The Generosity Project* applies to any Bible study you might be leading. The essential task is to *lead your group to the word of God, and let God do his work through his word*. For you as a leader, this means:

- working through the relevant material in advance, and planning how to guide your particular group towards the key lessons they need to confront
- bringing each of the group members, and your plans for the study time, before the Lord in prayer—asking him to bring fresh understanding and a changed heart to the group by his Spirit
- leading the group time as a collective journey of discovery into God’s word, rather than a didactic teaching time in which you deliver all the answers
- making sure that the group discussion lands in a practical discussion of what God’s word means for each group member
- leading the group to pray together for God’s Spirit to move and enable them to live out the truth they have seen from God’s word.

These are the sorts of steps any group leader should take in preparing and leading any Bible study.

However, topical Bible studies—which is essentially what *The Generosity Project* is—are always a bit more complicated. Rather than just working through one Bible passage and mining its riches, with topical studies we usually look at several relevant passages related to the topic in order to discover what the Bible as a whole teaches on the subject. This not only means less time to make sense of each passage; it also requires the sometimes tricky step of drawing the different ideas and aspects together within a group discussion.

This explains the main way in which leading your group through *The Generosity Project* will be a little different from your regular weekly studies. Each session starts with the kind of Bible study you’re probably used to leading, looking at a number of different passages

related to the topic (this is the ‘Read and reflect’ section). But then we provide a section of ‘Input’ (in video and text form) that summarizes and draws together the key points from the Bible passages. Unlike the Bible, this summary input is not inspired or infallible! In fact, some of the most fruitful discussions you may have as a group will come when you *disagree* with some aspect of the input, and talk through why that is.

This input section takes care of the often difficult step of drawing the different biblical threads together and summarizing them for the group—to form the basis of then discussing what the Bible’s teaching means for each group member personally.

You can make use of the input sections in one of two ways:

- by playing the relevant video presentation, available free at thegenerosityproject.com. These videos are 10-15 minutes long, and feature the input of gifted Bible teachers from the UK and Australia, as well as various examples, stories and illustrations. (This is stating the obvious, but make sure you’ve worked out and tested in advance a method for playing the videos in the group.)
- by reading the summary text printed in *The Generosity Project* book. The text contains much the same content as the videos (although with some differences, given its different format), and would also take between 10-15 minutes to read through as a group (either silently or out loud).

For many groups, the video option will be the more engaging experience. But regardless of which of the two options you go for, make sure you encourage your group to utilize the *other* option as well in their own time. If you play the video in the group, urge your group members to read the text summary themselves in their own time (and vice versa). This is an extremely valuable way of consolidating and solidifying the ideas for the group members.

The application and prayer section that concludes each part (‘What it means for us’) starts with an opportunity for group members to reflect on the input material—to say what struck them most, to clarify and to raise questions. It’s likely that you won’t

be able to touch on all the application questions that follow, so choose a couple to focus on that are particularly relevant for your group. If you have time, you can also watch some ‘Real world stories’ at thegenerosityproject.com—short videos that illustrate how the principles have been worked out in real people’s lives. Feel free to view and discuss some of these real world stories if you have the time.

We recommend that you allocate appropriate time to each of the three sections of material for each session. Assuming that you have around 50 minutes available, allow:

- 20-25 minutes for digging into the Bible passages
- 10-15 minutes to watch the video or read the text summary
- 15 minutes to discuss what it means for each of you personally, and to pray.

It is of course preferable that you have more time available (60 or 70 minutes), particularly to allow a little more time for ‘Read and reflect’ and for the ‘What it means for us’ section at the end. Work hard to make sure that this final application and prayer section of each session is not cut short or rushed (as it so often is in small group studies).

6. Notes for leading each of the six parts of *The Generosity Project*

In the notes below, we don’t provide answers for the questions in the ‘Read and reflect’ section of each session. This is largely because the Bible study sections are meant to be an opportunity for the group to dig into as many of the relevant passages as possible for themselves, to see how the Bible approaches the subject, and to get the key issues bubbling away in the group discussion. The purpose is not to arrive at all the answers at this point, nor to get bogged down in every issue of interpretation. The summary input sections (in video and text) are designed to draw together the most significant lessons that arise from the Bible texts.

In the following notes, you’ll find:

- a brief summary of the main concepts covered in each part, which not only helps to orient you to the main lessons and issues that each part will deal with, but provides a helpful overview of the logic of the whole resource
- some specific things to note or watch out for in leading each part.

Part 1: A world built on generosity

a. Main concepts

- 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.

b. Things to note

- Part 1 is different from the other five parts in its timing, because of the introductory video (and/or text) with which it begins; you'll need to be aware of this in your timings. For a 50-minute session, the timing for part 1 should be something like:
 - Introduction (watch video 1a or read text): 6 mins
 - Bible study: 20 mins
 - Input (video 1b or text): 12 mins
 - Application and prayer: 12 mins
- In the 'Read and reflect' section, after some introductory ice-breaking questions about generosity, the Bible passages focus on three key issues:
 - God's creation of the world
 - his ongoing sustenance of and provision for the world
 - what the human response should be to a God who creates and sustains the world.

Part 2: The inward curve of the heart

a. Main concepts

- 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.

b. Things to note

- Part 2 diagnoses the problem we have with generosity as directly related to our sinful hearts, and points to the solution in the gospel of Jesus.
- Money and wealth get a brief mention—as a common symptom or indicator of our heart attitudes—but we don't spend too much time on the subject at this point. This is, in fact, a feature of the logic of *The Generosity Project*. It's not until part 4 that we look explicitly at the issues of money and wealth.
- Given the focus on the gospel, and our heart-response to God, the discussion may cause some real soul-searching in the group, or even prompt some members to recognize that they are not right with God through Jesus Christ (question 4 in 'What it means for us' may particularly draw this out). Be ready for this, and think through how you want to follow up on this with those involved after the group time.

Part 3: A new, generous life

a. Main concepts

- 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.

b. Things to note

- In part 3, we look at all-of-life generosity. Our response to God's grace is seen fundamentally in a big-hearted, open-handed generosity towards others in every aspect of life, not just with our money (we'll get to money in part 4).
- In the 'Read and reflect' section, question 4 looks at a number of Bible passages that show generosity being lived out in a variety of ways and contexts. You probably won't have time to go through all of these passages together in the group. This would be a good opportunity to split up into pairs, give each pair a passage to look at, and then get each pair to report back to the group.

Part 4: Money and the new life

a. Main concepts

- 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).

b. Things to note

- The Bible has a great deal to say about money and greed, and that is reflected in the number of different passages to investi-

gate in the ‘Read and reflect’ section. It probably won’t be possible to work through all of these passages together as a group. Again, the best thing to do is to split the passages among the group in some way—between individuals or pairs or triplets—and then report findings back to the group for discussion.

- Of the two key themes that come out of the passages—faithfulness and generosity—the latter is clearly our focus. However, don’t skip over the ‘faithfulness’ material too quickly. In particular, it is worth noting the often neglected point that financial support of our local church is portrayed as an obligation in the New Testament; that is, as a matter of faithfulness. Of course, generosity is also involved!

Part 5: The partnership of the generous

a. Main concepts

- 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.

b. Things to note

- Part 5 returns to one of the key themes of *The Generosity Project*: that God’s generosity to us in the Lord Jesus sets us free for a new generous life; a life in which we *want* to be generous; in which we are eager for the privilege of being generous (like the Macedonians).
- However, it also focuses on how the gospel shapes the direction and character of our generosity. God has been so generous to us in the gospel; the greatest gift we can generously give others is the gospel as well. And this will naturally shape our priorities in giving our time, skills and money to others.

- Part 5 finishes with some ‘homework’ to do in advance of part 6. Make sure you allow time to talk this through at the end of your group time. It really is important that group members think and pray their way through the five steps that are listed—not only to make their participation in the discussion in part 6 meaningful, but also to begin the process of working out what practical, ongoing changes they are going to make in their lives in response to God’s generosity.

Part 6: Reflection, action and prayer

a. Main concepts

- Reflecting back over the course, summarizing and clarifying the key ideas.
- A fresh approach to the age-old question of ‘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 individuals 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.

b. Things to note

- Part 6 will require quite a bit of you as a leader—in being well-prepared, in keeping the discussion flowing, and in getting through everything in the time you have together. It may be that you run out of time to talk and pray with adequate care and depth about the personal plans that each member has made to be more generous. If so, it would be worth scheduling a further time—either a special end-of-course gathering or dinner, or simply the next week of your regular group time—to share and pray about your desires and plans to be more generous.

- This is where the small group context is so valuable in utilizing a resource like *The Generosity Project*—it allows you to keep thinking and talking and praying about what you’ve learned, and to keep encouraging and helping each other to put those new insights into practice. This is reflected in the final ‘Next steps’ section of part 6 (where you plan a time to return to the subject in three or six months’ time).
- If you elect to watch video 6 in the ‘Input’ section, it might be worth spending a few minutes also reading section c (‘How much?’) in the text version of the input. Or you may decide that you want to come back to that subject at some future time, and have a proper discussion about it.