



ReTHINK **GENEROSITY**

From Fundraising to Disciple-Making

A LEADERSHIP RESOURCE FROM



ReTHINK GENEROSITY

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The Story of the Early Church

Early secular historians have tried to determine why the early church spread so rapidly through the Roman Empire. Lacking possessions, power or prestige, there was nothing about these early followers of Jesus that would have made anyone think they were a movement that could impact the powerful Roman world of their time. Yet they did.

Historians have attributed the rapid spread of Christianity to four characteristics that made these early Christians counter cultural to the world around them:

- **They broke down cultural walls of separation.** The early church embraced and included slave and free, women and men, and a variety of races and nationalities.
- **They valued the sacredness of life.** The Roman culture often disregarded the lives of those deemed of low rank and status (slaves, children, women). The early Christians valued all life equally and sought to protect it.
- **They practiced sexual self-control.** In a Roman culture that consisted of sexual self-indulgence, the early Christians were committed to sexual self-control either as single people or within a marriage covenant.
- **They were radically generous.** The early church forgave their enemies, gave away their possessions to people both inside out and outside the church, cared for the sick, and visited prisoners.

This beautiful picture of radical generosity of the early church is described in Acts 4:

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power, the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:32-37)

Our friend Malcolm Webber gives us a taste of this new, generous way when he says, *"These new believers had deeply experienced the grace and Presence of God and one of the first practical results was generosity. They had found the generous God. They had experienced His life, His love, His self-giving. As a result, they immediately began to pour out their lives and possessions for one another."*

“IN VIEW OF THE EARLY CHURCH, MODERN-DAY FOLLOWERS OF JESUS HAVE A PROBLEM : WE’VE CONFUSED BIBLICAL GENEROSITY WITH FUNDRAISING.”

It's time to recapture the energy and enthusiasm of the generosity portrayed throughout Scripture, in the life of the most generous one, Jesus, and in the practice of the early Church. This short book contains 9 core ways to **ReTHINK Generosity** to move the conversation from fundraising to disciple-making.

From Programming Ministry to Making Disciples

I was meeting with a pastor to discuss the “state of stewardship” in the church. I began by reporting the latest giving statistics. The picture was not a good one. Christians were giving less even in nations where wealth was on the rise. Church leaders were struggling with how to engage larger groups of people in their churches who gave nothing. The false teaching of the prosperity gospel was spreading rapidly in many nations. God’s people live under a mindset of scarcity versus a mindset of abundance.

This wise pastor stopped me.

“THIS IS NOT A STEWARDSHIP PROBLEM,” HE SAID DEFINITELY. “THIS IS A LEADERSHIP PROBLEM.”

That single statement changed the conversation. Stewardship problems are often addressed with a new small group curriculum or sermon series—programming more ministry. A leadership problem is something deeper and more systemic. This pastor’s comments launched **GenerousChurch** into a multiple-year journey to diagnose the church’s underlying leadership problems and to find more sustainable remedies. Our experience has shown that church leaders need to shift their focus from programming more ministry to making generous disciples. We need to discover new approaches that feel both authentic to the leader and bring spiritual growth to the giver.

From Inspecting Fruit to Deepening Roots

Jesus often used the metaphor of a tree to show the connection between a person's inner life and visible behavior. "A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit" (Matthew 7:18 ESV). Many leaders are fixated on a certain type of behavior—the failure to give more money. The pressures to fund programming cause leaders to narrow their focus on giving rather than on the deeper issues that are preventing it. This is a central leadership problem in the church today—we are trying to change behaviors rather than hearts. We are addressing fruit issues rather than root issues.

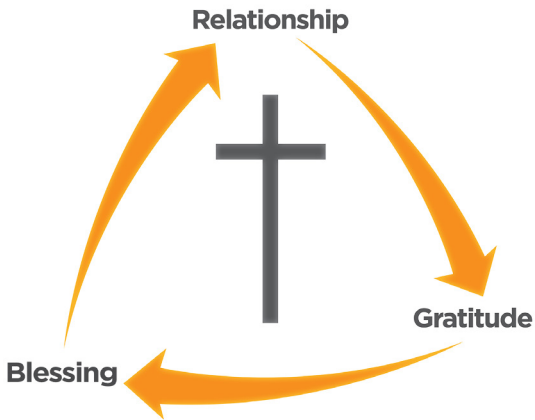
There is a solution. It starts when leaders consciously step back from the immediate demands of funding programs to see a person's entire life—all the fruit on all the branches. This usually reveals much more than a failure to give money. It uncovers uncharitable relationships, stinginess with time, a self-centered view of vocation, and a lack of empathy for the hurting. Seeing the whole tree of a person's life radically changes the leader's goal from temporarily replacing one bad fruit—boosting giving—to transforming the entire tree by going deeper—cultivating disciples who are generous in all areas of life.

We call this deeper way Whole-Life Generosity. We believe it gets to the roots—the core life issues that must be engaged for sustainable change in people.

From a Linear Outcome to a Virtuous Cycle

Whole-Life Generosity is not an act; it's a way of living. It's not focused solely on financial giving; it is an integrated approach to life. It doesn't happen linearly, it's a virtuous cycle. In the center of it is Jesus, the model and motivator of a whole, generous life.

WHOLE-LIFE GENEROSITY CYCLE™



 GENEROUSCHURCH™

With Jesus at the Center.
All of life is lived in relationship with God.
All we have is received with gratitude from God.
All we are is released to God for the blessing of others.

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Generosity Cycle
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WHOLE-LIFE GENEROSITY IS ABOUT MUCH MORE THAN MONEY—IT'S ABOUT ALL THINGS.

Paul is referring to this comprehensiveness when he says, “And God is able to make *all* grace abound to you, so that in *all* things at *all* times having *all* that you need you will abound in every good work.”

(2 Corinthians 9:8 NIV, emphasis added)



PROFILE OF WHOLE-LIFE GENEROSITY

The profile of Whole-Life Generosity is different for every person. There's no “generosity formula” other than asking God what He would have you do and listening to Him. Even though each person's generosity is expressed differently, we've seen these qualities in individuals living a whole-life of generosity:

- Views God as the source of all resources (time, skills, money, relationships)
- Desires to give back in response to God's grace
- Expresses daily gratitude to God and others
- Looks for those who need encouragement
- Cares for widows, orphans and those in need
- Welcomes the outsider and practices hospitality
- Intentionally seeks ways to serve
- Plans generous acts
- Creates margin with time and money to respond to others' needs
- Sacrifices for others

From a Business Owner to a Loving Father



Scripture employs many different images when speaking about generosity and giving, but traditional financial ministries focus almost exclusively on one—the steward. They emphasize God’s ownership of everything and our stewardship of His property.

This idea is solidly biblical and helpful. We wonder if this metaphor is popular because it fits with the business mindset and good management principles that have come to dominate contemporary ministry culture. If we view the church as a factory, then the metaphor of managers makes perfect sense. While acknowledging the usefulness of stewardship language, Whole-Life Generosity focuses on the more intimate language of God as Provider. He ensures that we have all that we need (2 Corinthians 9:8). He is our generous Father in heaven who

provides for His children every good thing (James 1:17) and gives us our daily bread (Matthew 6:11).

Viewing God as the Provider, and not just the Owner, fundamentally changes how we view ourselves and our relationship to God. Rather than fearful stewards who must give an account for how we've managed God's property, we can see ourselves as grateful recipients of God's blessings, called to share everything with others. It exchanges the sterile owner-employee relationship for the more intimate father-child relationship emphasized by Jesus Himself (Luke 12:32).

From Stewarding Resources to Sowing Generously

A shift in the way we talk about God will also change the way we see ourselves and the church. Although culture has taught us to think about ministry through industrial metaphors — the church is a machine run by managers who supply its resources — scripture uses agricultural imagery because it fits naturally within the context of the preindustrial world. Let's not too quickly dismiss the farming analogy simply for that reason.

Operating a factory requires knowing the right tactics and principles to produce the right outcomes. It's methodical, mechanical, and formulaic. When we focus primarily on the allocation of resources and providing the right principles to increase giving, we fail to address deeper discipleship issues.

For that reason, Whole-Life Generosity prefers the agricultural imagery of scripture where we find the call to sow generously in faith with seed provided by God. We plant seeds and water them,

but we must trust God for the growth (1 Corinthians 3:5-6). It is a vision of investment predicated on relationships not principles.

We must be connected to the soil—the people—where we sow. And we must be in ongoing relationship with God, who provides the seed and causes its growth, so we may discern His leading.

This approach requires links between what we know, how we feel and what we do as we are led by the Holy Spirit.

A look at Jesus' life and teaching indicates a great emphasis on sowing generously with all of one's life. There are eight stories in the book of Luke alone that illustrate this "sowing principle." Jesus prioritized relationship over the outcome. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," He said, "and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33 ESV). When we start with our desired outcome—increased giving to the church—we miss the life and source that makes sustainable generosity possible—our relationship with God and each other.

WHOLE-LIFE GENEROSITY STARTS BY ACKNOWLEDGING:

“ALL OF LIFE IS LIVED IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.”

**IT LEADS US QUICKLY TO THE SECOND HALF OF THE
GREAT COMMANDMENT: LIVING IN LOVING RELATIONSHIPS
WITH OUR NEIGHBORS.**

(MARK 12:28-31)

From an Internal Focus to an Outward Focus

Many churches, in large measure, are internally focused. In our consumer-oriented cultures, we build churches and ministries that concentrate on providing goods and services to members. Churches and ministries are not meant to be vending machines, pumping out the programmatic goodies we want for our own comfort and convenience. The church is God's agent for demonstrating and advancing His Kingdom. God pours Himself out to us in grace, empowering us with natural and spiritual gifts that are meant for the building up of the Body and for loving our neighbors well.

Jesus is on a grand mission to make all things new, and He's invited His church to join Him in it. Whole-Life Generosity focuses us on that outward mission, giving us tremendous joy in knowing that the lavish abundance God has showered upon us is for blessing others. A Kingdom focus catalyzes His followers for a glorious adventure with Jesus, where we learn to deeply rely on Him for His empowering grace to bring flourishing to our churches and our communities. Everyone plays a part in this exciting mission because God has given each of us gifts and talents—financial and non-financial—that we can share with others. Whole-Life Generosity focuses on our purpose: loving Jesus with all we have and all we are as we enjoy true life in His kingdom. Knowing our purpose and living in it increases our joy and enables us to freely give even as we have freely received (Matthew 10:8).

From Increasing Giving to Unleashing Fruit-bearers



Because Whole-Life Generosity is a call to release “all we are,” narrow categories don’t fit. Measuring success by a single metric—increased financial giving—limits vision of success to the fiscal. Whole-Life Generosity looks for evidence of the fruit of the Spirit throughout a person’s life. As we live and lead others into Whole-Life Generosity, the fruit becomes evident in how people sow their time, skills, influence, forgiveness and, yes, their money.

The fruitfulness, of course, is going to look different in each person’s life. Whole-Life Generosity recognizes the diversity of callings and vocations God has given to each person. The ground each sower is called to work is different, and we must apply God’s principles to our unique context. There is no formula or percentage that fits everyone. It’s not about checking a box; it’s being led by the Spirit.

Everyone can excel in the grace of Whole-Life Generosity. It applies equally to every person in the church—the rich, the poor, and everyone in between. All are valued because every sower has something valuable to contribute, not just those “entrusted with much.” The role of church and ministry leaders is to unleash generous disciples to sow for the Kingdom wherever and however the Lord has called them.

From Obtaining Knowledge to Practicing Faith

Research shows that believers' generosity is linked to their knowledge of scripture. While essential, knowledge alone is insufficient. God doesn't want us to just know the Scriptures; God wants us to know Him. Jesus' ministry showed that right knowledge without love for Him was just religiosity, not genuine faith. Whole-Life Generosity helps us progress from learning biblical principles to actually following Jesus: getting to know and share His heart.

Jesus leads us into His kingdom and reveals its mind-boggling abundance. We're enabled to throw off the culture's false teaching that scarcity reigns. As we delight in the Triune God's inestimable love, our eyes are opened to God's lavish generosity towards us. Increasingly, we're able to obey Jesus' command not to worry about material things, trusting that our Provider knows our needs and won't be stingy. We learn to experience God's goodness, not just memorize Bible verses about it. As our faith is enriched from head knowledge to increased heart knowledge, our joy increases, and we become more open-handed.

“INTIMACY WITH OUR FATHER, WITH JESUS OUR GOOD SHEPHERD, AND WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT OUR COMFORTER CALMS OUR FEARS AND EMBOLDENS OUR LOVE.”

From Casting a Different Vision to Changing Culture

Creating a culture of generosity in your church or ministry is not about casting a bigger vision that motivates people to give. It's about changing culture.

And culture is shepherded by leaders.

That is why Whole-Life Generosity starts with the personal walk of generous leaders. It examines the key leaders' relationships with God, how they recognize God's provision and how they are growing in gratitude as a result. It asks whether they are releasing all they have, with joy, to God and others. It's only when the key leaders themselves experience transformation around Whole-Life Generosity that they will have the moral authority to lead others. They must model it, not just talk about it. Simply put, Whole-Life Generosity is built on the fact that more is caught than taught.

As leaders experience this new vision of generosity, their focus can shift from the immediate need to boost giving to cultivating deeper connections with the leaders around them. Rather than trying to use the people in their church, they can sow a vision for a richer relationship with God and cultivate grateful disciples who

will want to release all they are to bless others. The leaders' focus moves what they want *from* their people to what they want *for* them.

Leadership author Max De Pree said, "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality." The reality we face is that popular ministry models are expensive to operate, burdensome on leaders, too internally focused, and often force us to prioritize short-term financial programs ahead of long-term healthy discipleship. We believe that Whole-Life Generosity can begin to change this reality by focusing on the root issues of our relationship with God and by integrating gratefulness, generosity, and missional purpose into the entire culture of a church, starting with the leadership.

“WHOLE-LIFE GENEROSITY IS A CONTINUOUS APPROACH THAT MAY TRANSFORM THE ENTIRE CULTURE OF A CHURCH OR MINISTRY, BEGINNING WITH THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP.”

Next Step

Begin your journey to
ReThink Generosity at
GenerousChurch.com

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What other are saying about GenerousChurch

“GenerousChurch spent one day with our LeaderSource family from around the world. As we heard their vision and passion for the biblical truth of generosity, our hearts were stirred with the importance of the message. Moreover, we saw how whole-life generosity is a critical component of the life of the Christian leader and in the life of the Healthy Church.”

- Malcolm Webber, Ph.D.

Founder and Executive Director, LeaderSource SGA

“I highly recommend whole-life generosity for youth and discipleship groups. I saw its impact on the lives of our youth group, and our church has flourished. It is both Biblical and practical.”

- Rev. Botross Fadel Gubrael

Pastor, Second Evangelical Church, Tanta, Egypt

“Growing people in whole-life generosity is a profound discipleship ministry. GenerousChurch and their work is helping us change our culture from one of ‘giving to fund a budget’ to ‘giving time, service and resources as an act of worship.’”

- Trish Nelson

Executive Pastor, Christ Church Anglican, Kansas, United States

