

# 7 Secrets

to a More  
Generous Church





# 7 SECRETS TO A MORE GENEROUS CHURCH

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Studies show that Americans are generally more generous with their finances than non-Americans, and Christians are more generous than non-Christians. Yet studies also show that Christians give far short of a biblical tithe, and give a smaller proportion of their income today than they did during the Great Depression. For all the efforts of the generosity movement, awakening generous churches remains a stubbornly difficult thing to do.

On the basis of our experience engaging churches with generosity campaigns, here are seven tips for the pastor who's seeking to awaken a rich, joyful, whole-life congregational generosity:

## **1. Hold before your people the amazing generosity of God.**

Before we even begin to imagine that we can be givers of generosity, we must recognize that we are first and foremost receivers. Generosity does not begin with us—it begins with God, the author of everything good and perfect and beautiful. We possess nothing to give that has not already been given to us. “What do you have that you have not received?” asks the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 4:7. We never gift; we only re-gift.

Generosity is cultivated when we meditate regularly on the generosity of God in Christ. We need to let ourselves be overwhelmed at God's generosity: in the beauty and abundance of creation; in the gift of life; in the love of friends and family; in the blessings of grace and forgiveness and eternal life. Only then, will our increased gratitude lead to giving that is offered as it was originally intended: as an act of worship to this loving, gracious, radically generous God. Paul explains in 2 Cor. 8 that the Macedonian Christians experienced the grace of God and in return gave themselves “first to Him”—and they expressed that worshipful devotion in the practical act of sacrificial generosity.

## **2. Focus less on money and more on vision.**

If generosity is not primarily about money, then help people understand the invitation we have from King Jesus to join Him in His mission of rescuing and restoring the world. Cast a vision for the joyful adventure that this is. Share the stories of the transformation in real people's lives that your church and its supported ministries have helped to make possible. These

stories translate generosity theology into tangible, everyday reality and activate people to participation.

Talk about the generosity of God the Father, the generosity of Jesus, and the generosity of so many who have gone before us, giving their resources, their talents, even their lives for the joyful mission of God. Get people excited about what their giving makes possible—and the money will follow.

### 3. Model a generous lifestyle.

If your actions are not consistent with a generous life, you will always undermine the message you preach. Are you actively seeking opportunities and making choices that expand your capacity to give? Are you living in such a way that demonstrates you trust God enough to live simply, give sacrificially and engage with community? Are you modeling a life of love, pouring yourself out, being unselfish because you trust God to meet your own needs? Are you cheerfully giving yourself and your stuff away because you know that doing so delights your Loving Father and is a means used by Him to love your neighbors? Do you care enough about the recipients of your giving to take the time to ensure that the ways you are helping are truly benefiting them? Recent books like *When Helping Hurts* and *Toxic Charity* demonstrate that some gifts can actually do harm, even when our intentions are good.

Look at your budget, your calendar, your attitude, your effectiveness—they will tell you the answer. Be a person who gives with both your heart and head.

In 1 Chron. 29:9, we learn that when the people saw the willing, wholehearted generosity of their leaders, they themselves were encouraged and also gave freely and gladly. As a pastor or church leader, you may have more influence than you realize. People will watch your actions and imitate them, so be sure you are living a life worth replicating.

### 4. Don't be afraid to talk about money.

This may sound like a contradiction to principle #2. It's not. While money is not the sum-total of generosity, it is important. Jesus talked about money more than just about any other subject. He offered both promises and warnings. He promised that it's more blessed to give than to receive. He promised that those who seek first the kingdom of God will have "all these things" provided. The Bible tells us that God repays those who are generous to the poor.

Jesus also warned that money is the chief competitor with God for our worship. If money is God's leading rival, isn't it important that we understand it properly? The Bible describes money as something animate—as something that speaks (testifies) and deceives, flies and ensnares. If you withhold teaching on money, you are withholding a means of blessing and joy from people. If you never talk about the dangers of money, you leave your flock open to its deceptions and destructiveness. Money is either your master or your servant. Articulate a vision for your church on how to consecrate money, transform temporary goods for eternal gains, and deploy financial resources for the kingdom of God.

## 5. Encourage relational generosity.

Giving of ourselves—more than our stuff—is at the heart and foundation of biblical generosity. Generosity is rooted in the very nature of the Trinitarian God who is an eternal community of constant, self-giving love and deference. As such, God is most interested in growing us in love and calls us to love people in the way Jesus modeled.

There is one instance where the Bible tells us not to give. In Matt. 5:24, Jesus tells us that if we are in conflict with a brother or sister, we are to “leave our gift on the altar” and go and be reconciled. Jesus gives primacy and priority to relational generosity, to love and forgiveness. Of course, giving our sacrifice to God is not wrong. Jesus is saying to make things right with one another – we call this “One to Another” living. This is why focusing solely on finances and numbers is a mistake. Generosity is about people. We demonstrate our gratitude to God by laying down our lives one to another just as Christ laid himself down for the world. This is the core of the Gospel.

## 6. Expand your metrics.

How will you know your church is becoming more generous? For reasons explained above, the indicators must not be exclusively financial. Increased monetary giving may be a wonderful thing, but it alone does not signify that the congregation has become more generous. If a group gives large amounts of money, but treats people poorly and expresses ingratitude toward God, can we say that group is practicing generosity? Of course not.

Consider what's happening relationally inside and outside the church. Is the Body marked by a growing spirit of unity, grace, forgiveness, humility, and love? Are people carrying one another's burdens in tangible and practical ways? Are people not just writing bigger checks but giving more of their time and their gifts and their influence? Is your church becoming more outwardly focused? Are you spending yourselves on behalf of your neighbors—and especially on behalf of the vulnerable that hold a special place in God's tender heart: the poor, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan? When you can honestly answer in the affirmative, you know your congregation is maturing into a community of Christ-like generosity.

## 7. Teach that the attitude is as important as the action.

We often reference 2 Cor. 9:7, “for God loves a cheerful giver”, when talking about the attitude with which we are to approach giving. Certainly, it is an important text, but equally important are references like Deut. 26:1-15 and I Tim. 6:17.

In the Old Testament text, we learn not what or why but how the Israelites were to give: namely, with humility. They were called by God to recognize that whatever they were giving to the less fortunate was only made possible by God—that God was their Deliverer and Redeemer. They could not claim credit for their gifts, as though they had earned them through their own virtue. God commanded them to remember that they themselves were slaves and wanderers prior to God's gracious and generous deliverance. This would help them give to others humbly, without any sense of superiority. Our attitude is to be the same; after all, we were lost and enslaved before Jesus' gracious rescue.

Similarly, in the New Testament text, Paul tells Timothy to instruct the wealthy to give without arrogance. Jesus models a loving, humble, servant-hearted giving that doesn't just send food to the tables of the poor, but invites the poor to His table. His whole attitude is one of welcome and graciousness, free of condemnation and "looking down" on others. He is looking for His disciples to give quietly, without fanfare, without desire for recognition or return. In short, God cares about the quality of our generosity and not just the quantity of it.

In conclusion, generosity is essential to the heart of God and it should be—and can be—central to the heart of our churches. The more we are awestruck with the generosity of our Father, the more our hearts will be imbued with that same generous spirit. Challenge your congregation to start today with simple acts of generosity—first with those nearest them and then expanding outward. Churches awakened to the Father's generous heart can exercise a profound transformative impact and participate in His great calling in Isaiah 61:1 to heal the broken hearted and set the captives free.

## About the Organization & Author

The Reimagine Group partners with churches providing resources in the areas of generosity, stewardship, and discipleship. The three Reimagine Generosity series have helped hundreds of churches increase financial and relational generosity in their congregations. Reimagine Generosity equips churches to rediscover the joy and freedom found in giving by using high quality films based on solid Biblical truths to engage the imagination to inspire heart transformation.

The author, Jack Alexander, has served on the boards of, or been an advisor to, FCS Urban Ministries, Crown Financial and Living on the Edge with Chip Ingram. He speaks regularly to churches, pastors, and at conferences. Jack has a passion for the church and is excited to see God at work in increasing volunteerism in the church, service outside the church and financial generosity. With an extensive background in commercial real estate, technology, and business services, Jack has spent years consulting and working with various business, church, and ministry leaders.

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