

GENEROSITY

What is a Culture of Generosity?



It is more blessed to give than to receive.
(Acts 20:35)

Generous persons will prosper; those who
refresh others will themselves be
refreshed. (Proverbs 11:25)

Hear the word “generosity” in a church, and the first thing you might think of is “finances.”

But a culture of generosity isn’t just about filling the offering plate.

A culture of generosity is about helping others pursue a God-centered mindset around how we use our time, space, energy, compassion, and yes, money.

A culture of generosity is beneficial for everyone, not just the recipient.

A culture of generosity defeats selfishness, encourages love and kindness, and even builds greater emotional and mental health.

Most importantly, a culture of generosity is built on the words and teachings of Jesus—and the character of God.

In the following guide, we’ll talk about:

- what a culture of generosity is
- how to address challenges related to giving
- And practical strategies for building a culture of generosity at your church.

Generosity, Defined

The English word “generosity” has its roots in the Latin word generōsus, “of noble birth” (The root word gen means “to beget.”)

As a result, “generosity” was commonly associated with nobility up until the 17th century, when it became more common to describe a person as generous because of their character, not their lineage.

Today, we know a generous person to be someone who is open-handed with what they have, especially with their financial resources. A person who frequently pays for dinner, for example, might be known as generous. Or, a family member who pays for a child or grandchild’s college education might be known as generous.

But generosity isn’t just about money. It’s also about being open-handed with:

- **Time.** Generosity applies to how we use one of our most valuable resources: our time. A generous person, for example, might offer to take a friend or coworker to the airport even during a busy week of work.
- **Space.** Generosity can also apply to how we offer our personal space or home. Hospitality is widely celebrated in the Bible—not as well in Western culture. A generous person might offer to have neighbors over for dinner frequently, or

open their home to a friend in need of a temporary space to live.

- **Energy.** Many of us feel we have limited amounts of energy to apply to our relationships, conversations, or ministry activities. Generous people are willing to pour their energy out for the sake of loving others well.
- **Compassion.** Generous people are loving and compassionate. When they see someone with a need, they seek to meet it.

While generosity is frequently practiced on an individual level, it can be taught and learned on an organizational level. In fact, churches and organizations that have cultures of generosity are healthier, happier, and even more effective.

That being said, building a culture of generosity can be a challenge.

In the next section, we'll take a look at barriers to generosity...and how to address and overcome those barriers.

Why It Can Be Difficult to Encourage Generosity

It's easy to say that giving is a challenge because of one very obvious fact: Giving away a resource means that we lose something, whether that's money, time, or energy.

But a lack of generosity goes far deeper than a simple calculation of how much you can afford to keep or lose. Generosity is an issue that starts in the heart.

Jesus observes a widow giving away everything she has.

He comments to His disciples:

“Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.” (Luke 21:3-4)

The point? Jesus wanted to highlight—among other things—that being generous doesn’t depend on how much money we have, or how much we can afford to lose. The widow’s heart was in the right place. She gave as an act of worship.

Teaching that generosity is a spiritual act helps put it in its right place. Giving is not a transactional obligation; it’s worship.

Breaking Out of a Scarcity Mindset

A scarcity mindset is rooted in the belief that “there isn’t enough” to go around. In other words, we’ve got to hold on tightly to what we have.

God is generous and abundant (Ephesians 3:20), but everyday realities can make it challenging to stay rooted in this belief without faith. Whether church members are facing financial difficulties, packed schedules, or emotional burdens, giving might feel overwhelming or even impossible.

But Scripture is clear about the blessing of generosity. In Luke 6:38, Jesus said, Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together

and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Talking about the blessing of generosity can help people break out of a scarcity mindset. Most importantly, it can help them see, experience, and understand the character of a generous God who loves them.

The Value of Generosity From a Secular Perspective

Even the secular world understands the value of generosity.

According to Psychology Today, “Neuroscience has demonstrated that [giving is a powerful pathway for creating more personal joy](#) and improving overall health.”

“Happiness” chemicals like dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin are released during small acts of generosity and kindness. Author and researcher Ami Campbell teaches that generosity can actually improve your physical health and well-being.

“Healthier bodies, greater empathy, lower rates of depression, longer lifespans...doing just one thing will allow you to accrue all these physical and emotional benefits,” says Campbell. “[What is the magic pill? It’s generosity.](#)”

Business consultants also teach on the value of building generosity in business. A 2020 article in Harvard Business Review claims that “[families need to create a culture of generosity](#) and communication to keep a family and a family business together.”

In this article, the authors explain that generosity is key to better communication, more empathy, and less arrogance, which are critical to running a family business well.

Generosity has emotional, physical, and psychological benefits—researched, documented, and most importantly, Bible-backed.

Strategies for Building a Culture of Generosity at Your Church

To build generosity at your church, you'll want to do more than just talk about it (although that's important—see point #3 below).

You'll also want to strategize for creating culture around generosity, so that it's more than just a once-a-month decision. Generosity should become a part of the DNA of your organization, so that it becomes natural. (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Now, here are 5 strategies for making generosity a part of culture at your church.

#1: Model generosity.

When a leader models a behavior or a belief system, there's a natural trickle-down effect.

Think about organizations where leaders are particularly kind or empathetic, and engage frequently in conversation with their team members. That kind of behavior is contagious, right? The entire organization will likely follow suit, and become a warm, friendly bunch.

On the flip side, think of organizations where leaders have unhealthy habits, like poor communication or

unhealthy expectations. Once again, there's a trickle down effect: When others see that kind of behavior in their leadership, they'll learn the same habits (or leave the organization).

If you lead a church, your influence on others is powerful and contagious. If you model generosity, others will follow your lead.

Modeling generosity might look like:

- **Being flexible with your time.** Stop your busy day to have a conversation with someone who seems lonely.
- **Being open-handed with your resources.** You might not make a ton of money, but you can be creative with gift giving, and with recognizing and seeking to meet the needs of your church members.
- **Being transparent. Seek to be transparent with how your church uses its resources to meet the needs of the local, national, and global community.**

Ultimately, becoming more generous is a result of close relationship with God. Pursue generosity in your own heart, and modeling it well will become a natural result.

#2: Encourage counter-cultural generosity.

All forms of giving are significant, but not all forms of giving necessarily build a culture of generosity.

Writing a check (or sending an online payment), for example, is a fairly normal act of charity in many western countries. Likewise, handing out cash for a person in need or even organizing a food or supply drive are "expected" and certainly impactful, but not necessarily revolutionary.

To create a culture of generosity, keep regular rhythms of giving in place, of course. But also go above and beyond to pursue radical generosity—the kind of giving that’s counter-cultural, raises eyebrows, spreads like wildfire.

Counter-cultural generosity might apply to time. Taking someone to the airport at the last minute—and taking an hour out of your day—is counter-cultural. Giving your laptop to a friend for free is counter-cultural. Offering to pay for a stranger’s lunch is counter-cultural.

As a leader, you’ll not only want to model the behavior yourself; you’ll want to talk about these examples, and find ways to encourage others to pursue the same kind of radical generosity. Most importantly, you can encourage others to wait on God and ask Him, how can I be radically generous today?

#3: Talk about it.

Talk about generosity.

Offering on Sunday morning is not an afterthought. It’s a wonderful opportunity to address this beautiful aspect of God. It’s also a time to testify to stories of how God provides in miraculous ways.

You can also talk about generosity at staff meetings, in small groups, and in one-on-one conversations. Giving should be a natural part of the conversation and the culture.

Ultimately, generosity comes from the Giver of all good things (James 1:17). When we talk about generosity, we build faith in His goodness and provision, which may be demonstrated through His people.

#4: Listen.

It might sound strange, but one of the most important parts of generosity is taking the time to listen.

Why?

Because listening helps you see and understand real needs among your church members, on your staff, and in your community. Listening also demonstrates a genuine commitment to others—a key part of generosity!

Listening looks like:

- **Engaging in conversation** one-on-one with church members and staff members...and asking questions.
- **Exploring your community**—locally, nationally, and even globally—to understand where needs lie.
- **Taking the time** to pause your own assumptions when engaging with others and assessing where needs lie. Focus on what they're saying, and suspend judgment.

Once you recognize genuine needs, you can think of creative ways to meet them, whether that's through an individual gift or a corporate effort.

#5: Dive into Scripture.

The most powerful way to build a Kingdom-minded culture of generosity?

Dive into the Word of God, and find examples of radical generosity in Scripture.

Jesus was radically generous with His time, His energy, and ultimately, His life.

The early church shared and sacrificed to meet each others' needs (Acts 2:44-45).

The widow in Luke 21 gave all she had, disregarding her own needs as an act of worship.

The root of this radical generosity? God's own generous nature.

In Ephesians 1, we read about how God has "blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

God "give[s] good things to those who ask him," according to Matthew 7.

And in Psalm 139, we hear of God's "abundant....goodness, which [He has] stored up for those who fear" Him.

The most powerful incentive to become generous is that God is generous...and the character of God should ultimately be the most important shaper of culture at your church.

Make Generosity Convenient

As you've just discovered, generosity can look like any number of things: Giving time and energy to a relationship, giving away a possession, or seeking to meet a need in your local community.

But one of the most important and impactful ways to give is still through the gift of finances. The [Bible mentions money more than 800 times](#), and Jesus talked frequently about how money is a heart issue.

