

MAKING CHANGE

GENEROSITY MODELS FOR THE CHURCH

AS WE ENTER A NEW YEAR AND A NEW SEASON

in our churches, we can refresh ourselves and our stewardship strategies by taking a fresh look at Biblical examples of generosity models.

Even if you have a clear strategic plan with set goals, pausing to reflect on Biblical models and principles will fuel your work.



BIBLICAL GENEROSITY MODEL

#1

GENEROUS PEOPLE GIVE AS A BY-PRODUCT OF THEIR OWN PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

The story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19 is the story of a transformed giver. I love this story: a tax collector forsaking the norm in order to give— moved by Jesus’s call to come back to God’s ways. This is the story of someone who morphs from “collector of money” to “giver of money.”

In my own fundraising and ministry journey, perhaps the most deeply satisfying stories are those of people who have been radically transformed in their giving due to a spiritual transformation. I’ve seen this repeatedly with givers who, at some extraordinary moment in time, suddenly realize why they are here: not simply to exploit their ability to accumulate wealth but to create a story much greater than themselves. This, in a way, is a picture of redemption as people rise above their personal limitations and see the supernatural potential of their own lives through their generous giving.

Nothing and no one has an opportunity to give donors that sense of transformation more than their own churches...but we so rarely see it. Pastors, look carefully at your communications calendar and how often you’re telling your givers the story of what they’re doing. What in your church would NOT have happened without donors last week, last month, last year? Who is your church connecting with, serving, partnering with? Would any of that happen without your offerings and tithes?

Some of your givers might have a passion for HVAC, facilities, equipment. These donors, too, can have a transformational experience if you and your staff show them the story of their impact. What happens if you don’t have a website or a way for members to make prayer requests? What happens if your gutters or pipes aren’t maintained over time? Look for creative ways to show your givers the difference they make in the life of your church, its ministries, and those you serve.

Pastors, as you begin 2022, pause, pray and center yourself on where God is leading you to make change in how you steward ...and transform... your donors. Help them see how they are helping advance God’s kingdom in small ways each day through their generosity.

BIBLICAL GENEROSITY MODEL



#2

GENEROUS PEOPLE GIVE MORE THAN JUST THEIR MONEY

In Luke 10:25–37, Jesus tells the classic story of the Good Samaritan— one who gave time, resources, and skill to meet the needs of a man who had been left for dead at the side of the road. The Samaritan makes himself vulnerable and available— the very definition of hospitality. Generosity and hospitality are often closely linked.

In today's culture, I see more and more that generous givers want to give beyond just their financial resources. This is especially true of younger givers. They want to get their feet on the ground with the causes they're supporting.

Volunteering with an organization or ministry you're passionate about is a great way to find a deeper connection to the cause. And sometimes— as in the story of the Good Samaritan— the opportunity is right there in the church. Volunteers just need a vision and an invitation for what God will do both in them and through them.

If the church is going to attract and retain younger members and donors, it has to learn to give them opportunities to give back through experiences. Many do not simply want to write a check but want to be involved in whatever they are supporting. The church has to give younger generations the chance to be the hands and feet of Christ in a hands-on and literal way.

One of the strategies for keeping ourselves and our members focused on what matters is getting our hands dirty. If you or your staff leadership have been “behind a desk” too long, it's time to show up on the frontlines of the messiest part of your ministry. It might be the diaper station in the nursery, the service at the nursing home, the youth group pizza night. Where do you have the most difficulty recruiting volunteers? Be intentional about serving in those roles at least once during the year.

Besides keeping you connected to the foundations of your church's impact, those volunteer opportunities are the best way to attract and grow generous donors, especially younger givers.

BIBLICAL GENEROSITY MODEL

#3

GENEROUS PEOPLE GIVE OUT OF THEIR SUBSTANCE, WHETHER LARGE OR SMALL

In the story we find in Luke 21:1–4, Jesus compares the widow’s mite to the rich man’s gifts, demonstrating that the gifts of all are needed and used in God’s economy. This is a well-known story—your congregants have probably heard or read it many times—yet it holds a special meaning for me. In my world of working in philanthropy and managing many giving campaigns for organizations and ministries, the most powerful moments are when I hear stories of sacrifice, whether big or small, in people’s giving.

I’ve seen young children give of their allowance. I’ve seen people of means reach for the largest gift they’ve ever given to take a stand for a great cause. I’ve seen those who regularly need the support of the food pantry heed its call for volunteers and work to sort and distribute food to others. In each and every case, it’s the sacrifice that counts.

Among many givers these days, there isn’t actually much sacrifice involved in their giving. In spite of the volume of their contributions, their giving is small relative to their total capacity. When you come across that person who sets something else aside in order to help accomplish a key task or vision— that is a special gift!

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to travel to some of the most impoverished areas of East Africa. I was taken to many villages to speak, and I visited with the leaders in those communities. I’ll never forget the moment I saw firsthand the generosity of people giving out of their own substance...in this case, they gave despite dire poverty.

After I had spent a full day in one village, the people gathered to send me off on my journey. They brought chickens, vegetables, fruit— even a goat. This was a poor village, where people had little to spare. Yet they gave of their own poverty to thank me— someone from far away, who merely gave them a day in his life. It took me years to fully grasp that moment of generous and sacrificial giving.

So how do we tap into Jesus’ message to shape our church’s vision for giving? In many ways, we’re challenged to find a place for each of our members - children and youth included - at the donor table. Whether giving of time or resources, we must be intentional about offering opportunities for sacrificial giving at many levels.

We also need to recognize sacrificial giving when we are inclined NOT to notice it. That is an additional layer of beauty in the story of the widow’s gift. As churches, we must strive to do a better job honoring those who give out of their substance.

This can take many forms. Pastors, encourage your team to creatively consider how you might add even one type of acknowledgment for those kinds of gifts in the coming year. Is there a way to thank those who have given to the church consistently for a certain number of years and celebrate those milestones? That recognition honors not the amount of the donations but the loyalty of the giver. Or can we thank those who have given a certain number of volunteer hours or over consistent years (10 years of mostly thankless parking lot duty or five years of Sunday School teaching)? That demonstrates gratitude but also showcases sacrificial giving (in its broadest sense) in your congregation.

Our members - at every capacity level - need and want to make a contribution that matters. It’s our job as pastors and ministry leaders to help them do that. Focusing on involvement and giving as indicators of how people show love and support the church will help you identify the widow’s mites in your own offering plate.

Besides keeping you connected to the foundations of your church’s impact, those volunteer opportunities are the best way to attract and grow generous donors, especially younger givers.



BIBLICAL GENEROSITY MODEL

#4

GENEROUS PEOPLE GIVE TO SEE THE IMPOSSIBLE BECOME POSSIBLE

A little boy offered Jesus his meager lunch in Matthew 14:14–21. He only had a few loaves and fishes, and Jesus had 5,000+ mouths to feed. But as we know in this familiar story of our faith, gifts in God’s hands can be— and often are— divinely multiplied to meet the demands of greater works.

This is one of the greatest- ever giving stories, a beautiful picture of the faith to see something profound happen because of your gifts. First and foremost, the young man had enough faith to give his own lunch away! He was risking his own provision, his own comfort, in the hope of helping others. One boy’s faith is what set in motion the amazing miracle of Jesus feeding the masses.

We have to be willing to imagine something much greater than ourselves in order to get behind a project; it can be difficult for a prospective donor to comprehend how it could possibly come together. Yet almost daily across ministries and churches, I encounter the miraculous— in responses from generous givers, people from all economic demographics. They are turning what seems impossible into the possible.

Our job as pastors and ministry leaders is to cast the vision God has called us into and invite others into that sacred space of making what otherwise might be impossible, possible.

Theologian Henri Nouwen in his transformational work, *The Spirituality of Fundraising*, so beautifully reminds us that our job is not to operate out of crisis or beg for funding. “Rather, we are declaring, ‘We have a vision that is amazing and exciting. We are inviting you to invest yourself through the resources that God has given you— your energy, your prayers, and your money—in this work to which God has called us.’ Our invitation is clear and confident because we trust that our vision and mission are like ‘trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither’ (Ps. 1:3).

“Fundraising is also always a call to conversion. And this call comes to both those who seek funds and those who have funds. Whether we are asking for money or giving money we are drawn together by God, who is about to do a new thing through our collaboration.”

PASTORS, IN DAY TO DAY PRACTICE, this comes down to relationships and communication. It means ensuring your members and donors hear in various ways - across multiple channels, platforms and from various people - the transformational impact their gifts have on the Kingdom of God. As we enter a new calendar year, it's a good time to look strategically at your communications calendar and how to gather and tell those stories of impact.

Keep what your donors are making possible in front of them regularly. Celebrate “the new thing” they are doing with you in collaboration. Doing so inspires them, inspires others to give, and keeps you as church leaders energized for your particular mission.

“Fundraising is, first and foremost, a form of ministry. It is a way of announcing our vision and inviting other people into our mission.” Nouwen asserts that this IS our role as pastors, ministry leaders and those who do development work in the church. This is ministry.

- Timothy L. Smith

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Let's Talk

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