

Growing Generosity While Practicing Stewardship

A Travel Free Learning Article

By

Ruben Swint

Ministry Partner with The Columbia Partnership

Voice: 404.314.7273, E-mail: RSwint@TheColumbiaPartnership.org

Web Site: www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org

Generosity is a companion word to stewardship. Stewardship has long been the Biblical principle employed to encourage faithful giving of time, talent, treasure and indeed our total selves in order to resource the church's mission for the kingdom of God to be a reality on earth. In the last 10 years, generosity has emerged as a word in especially younger congregations to talk about giving in all its expressions. Age and life experience of the members, age of the congregation and age of the pastor and ministers strongly influence which word or concept will be used or emphasized.

This article seeks to create a conversation around generosity as a companion word for stewardship.

When the church needed to raise money in the 20th century for unified budgets and the cooperative expansion of world and global missions, stewardship was the word and principle used. Prior to the 20th century, stewardship was most often defined as responsible Christian living. The use of fundraising strategies created the need for a biblical rationale and stewardship became that rationale. God is owner of all creation. Christians are called to be trusted managers of all their resources for the work of the kingdom. Eventually stewardship became synonymous with fundraising and the tedium of the fall stewardship budget pledge drive known as the *Hunt for the Green October*.

Members of the Builder generation have lived lives of faithful stewardship and consider tithing to be the norm of Christian giving. Younger congregational members do not warm to the concept of stewardship and the practice of tithing as they do to living a generous life. The words steward and stewardship describe a role, a position and a responsibility for Christians. Generosity describes a trait, a behavior, a characteristic.

Younger and newer church members respond more readily to generosity as a giving principle and while they do, older members remain faithful to stewardship and tithing. Consider the following quote from Martin Marty: "Generosity, unlike stewardship, has no limits. It's not that you've got to be generous, but you get to be. It's not haranguing or threatening. It's liberation!" Generosity can lead younger members forward into faithful stewardship and tithing.

Generosity is rising in popular culture. Financial publications in print and online are including philanthropy as a regular topic. Businesses are considering generosity a killer app in their marketing strategy. ***The Go-Giver*** has become a best selling business book. Bono of the rock band U2 is the spokesperson for ONE, the campaign to make poverty history. Peacemakers took out a full page ad in the *Wall Street Journal* advocating generosity over domination as a superior strategy for homeland security. In observing popular culture, it is apparent that generosity is rising.

Generosity has several defining characteristics. It is,

- liberality in giving or a willingness to give.
- nobility of thought or behavior; the quality of being noble.
- giving to others beyond what is required of us.
- providing someone with a value that is not part of a definite trade.
- expecting no definite return.
- giving holistically of time, skills, knowledge, influence, empathy, money.

Biblical generosity is glimpsed in the stories of God's actions:

- Creation (Genesis 1) and its song (Psalm 104).
- Manna and quail in the wilderness.
- Oil and meal for the widow of Zarephath and Elijah.
- Lunch for 5,000 from five loaves and two fish.
- Full, breaking nets of fish that seemed scarce.
- Wine instead of water at the wedding feast.
- Banquet tables set for the homeless.
- God is not only generous, God is extravagant!
- The Bible speaks of abundance, not scarcity.
- God's generosity tilts toward the poor (Luke 4:18-19).

II Corinthians 8:7 – 9:15 tell us more about generosity:

- Generosity is excelling in the grace of giving.
- Generosity is not an obligation, command or duty.
- Generosity measures the sincerity of a person's love.
- Christ was rich, yet He became poor for our sakes.
- Christ is the example of God's generosity to us.
- Be generous with an attitude of enthusiasm, not reluctance.
- Generosity is good for us.

Mark Vincent has written ***A Christian View of Money*** in which he says that Christians are called to:

- Receive gratefully, understanding that God is the owner and giver of all they are and all they have.
- Manage faithfully and adopt modest standards of living to make good and wise use of all their resources.
- Share generously in as many ways as possible.

If generosity is a word or action that has value for the Christian life, how can one grow generosity in their congregation?

- Engage in a Bible study on generosity.
- Receive an offering and give it all away.
- Preach on God's generosity and that we are made in God's image.
- Train and empower a generosity team or task force.
- Plan an act or event of generosity for your community.
- Make generosity the guiding principle of budget planning.
- Remind, remind, and remind members of what they still have.

The book ***Generosity*** is a fresh approach to teaching about giving. It is designed so that people understand what God wants for them regarding their giving, not what the church wants from them. In this devotional there are four key weekly themes to help people move towards the life that is truly life that God desires for us. It is an excellent resource for a 30-day emphasis that includes sermons, Bible study and devotional reading.

If you are planting a new congregation or your congregation is less than 20 years old, then begin to emphasize generosity. Generosity is a term that you do not need to hide from your visitors either. They are used to the term from popular culture. In fact, your church may be more appealing if it is seen as being a generous group of believers.

If your congregation has many members from the Builder generation, then continue to use stewardship and add generosity. As long as stewardship and tithing are affirmed, then older members will not begrudge that use of generosity as a way to engage younger members in the life of the church.

A large church in Birmingham has bylaws that required an annual budget pledge drive built upon stewardship and tithing. One year the budget pledging committee was populated with middle to older adults as leaders for particular tasks, and recruited younger members to be assistants and understudies for each functional area. The second year, the younger members were the leaders for particular tasks on the committee and another round of younger members were recruited as understudies.

This pattern has continued for six years, involving younger members each year. The language has changed to include a heavy emphasis on generosity but stewardship is still alive and appreciated by the older members. The older members are extremely happy to see the younger members take the responsibility for the annual pledge drive and the younger members are experiencing joy in contributing their skills, time and devotion to the church. It is a win-win as together they grow generosity while practicing stewardship.

Important Things to Know

Ruben Swint is a Ministry Partner with The Columbia Partnership. He has the lead role for resource development. In this role he focuses on capital campaigns, planned giving, and annual giving for congregations, denominations, and parachurch organizations. The Columbia Partnership is a non-profit Christian ministry organization focused on transforming the capacity of the North American Church to pursue and sustain Christ-centered ministry. **Travel Free Learning** is a knowledge sharing emphasis. For more information about products and services check out the web site at www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org, send an e-mail to Client.Care@TheColumbiaPartnership.org, or call 803.622.0923.