

16 Creative Ways to Think About Stewardship and Generosity (No Offering Plate Required) - The ReImagine Group with Jack Alexander - Gấu Đầy

Are you a church leader looking for creative ways to educate your congregation about the true meaning of stewardship?

Every time the word “stewardship” is mentioned, do you see people gently slide down in their church pew or move to protect their wallets?

At ReImagine Generosity, we believe in whole life stewardship as Jesus taught. We believe that God doesn’t only want our money, He wants our whole lives. Our approach seeks to equip churches and individuals to understand generosity and stewardship in a whole new way. Pastors such as Chip Ingram, Randy Pope, Michael Yousef, Crawford Loritts, and more are using these methods with incredible results!

Here are 16 creative ways to think about stewardship and how “re-imagining” this concept can help you build a culture of generosity.

1

Generosity = More than Money (Giving Is for EVERYONE)

Most of the traditional stewardship resources seem to focus primarily on finances. While having your finances in order is certainly important, often, the discouraging conclusion is, “I don’t have enough money to be truly generous.”

Our approach is different.

At ReImagine Generosity, we believe that financial stewardship is not the capstone, but merely the groundwork of a generous life. A biblical approach to stewardship starts with the realization that generosity is central to the heart of God. In light of God’s generous nature, it is almost laughable that we restrict so much of our efforts to finances. When we expand the conversation to the totality of our lives, including our finances, but not limited to, then giving becomes for everyone – not just the wealthy. We want those in our community to embody Jesus’ generous heart financially, but we also want that generosity to permeate EVERY aspect of their life.

First and Finest, not Stinky Sheep

Everyone agrees generosity and stewardship are valuable virtues to practice, but are we giving God our first and our finest? Or are we just giving God our leftovers?

In the days of Moses, God laid out an offering model that involved giving Him the choicest of options. He did not ask for the sheep that was sickly, the runt of the litter, or the animal that would place 2nd in a livestock competition. He asked for the FIRST and FINEST of what the people had to offer.

Today we are called to give God our best, not because He needs our gift. God doesn't. We are called to give for 2 reasons—1) He is worthy of our gift, and 2) It is a tangible way that we put Him first in our lives.

It is easy to give what we don't want, our used leftovers; but such gifts cost us little. **A gift that honors God is one that requires sacrifice, because that is the gift that reflects our hearts.** When we give our first and finest, we acknowledge the position God holds in our lives. In turn, the conversation becomes less about checking a box that a certain percentage was given and more about the heart with which people give. When you address the heart of the issue, rather than the topical behavior, lasting change is born.

Use Stories to Teach Stewardship

Jesus used parables and stories to communicate Truth and explain Kingdom concepts. Much of Scripture is the story of God's people played out from Genesis to Revelation.

How are you using stories to teach about stewardship?

At ReImagine Generosity, we model this same tactic using the method of storytelling most prevalent in our culture, film. We make biblical Truth accessible by using compelling stories to capture people's imagination, without the "cheese" so often present in Christian resources.

Story is the best vehicle for teaching on stewardship because it doesn't come across as finger pointing. Stories are relatable to a large audience with diverse demographics. Stories overcome obstacles and breach our defenses in ways that engage people in what is being told, and deliver truth with a degree of whimsy that is attractive, even to those new to church.

We have 3 Generosity Series: Living Generously, Loving Generously, and Leading Generously that walk churches on a path from transactional to relational to sacrificial generosity. Each series tells the story of the Donovan family as they seek to understand whole-life generosity and grow in their spiritual maturity.

These resources are available to churches looking for a new way to speak on stewardship, and we have seen the Lord use them in exciting ways.

4

Spoon vs. Ladle Thinking

Our culture consistently drives us to a life focused on serving ourselves, we call this “spoon thinking”.

Commercials, television, the Internet, movies, and more communicate that our individual happiness is only achieved by focusing on our own wants and desires. At ReImagine, we cast a different vision. We want to encourage “ladle thinking.” After all, a spoon is for feeding yourself, but a ladle is for serving others.

The “spoon” vs. “ladle” thinking illustrates a mindset that is counter culture. **When we give up our spoon and pick up a ladle, we are following the example of Christ by choosing to think of others needs ahead of our own.** This kind of generosity does not come easily and always moves us beyond our comfort zone.

For some, “ladle thinking” does mean writing a check; for others, it involves inviting someone into their life or taking the time to serve another person. “Ladle thinking” requires faith and dependence on Christ. The “ladle” can manifest itself in different ways, but it always involves a putting off of selfish desires and a dependence on Christ.

5

Bragging on God – Encourage Each Other!

At ReImagine Generosity, we want to equip churches with stories that teach about generosity and stewardship, while building a community of churches where God’s story is shared. God is at work, but often times that work can seem distant. We talk to many pastors that feel like their churches are islands. Many are discouraged and overwhelmed by the darkness they see in their communities.

One of the exciting aspects about what we do is the chance we have to share a different perspective than is seen in the daily news. Working with so many churches, **we get to see how God is using His people to bring light into the darkness.** We want to share that perspective with you.

We offer encouraging stories connecting churches to each other across denominations, size, and demographics to build a network across the country and around the world. We want to be a hub for this community to brag on how God is using His church to love a broken world.

Whether it is a Sunday School class serving school kids who don't have hot meals on weekends or a ministry that provides fresh produce to a foodbank, we want you to know and be encouraged by the stories of our church partners.

6

Create Inspiration, Not Guilt

Ultimately, you want to create an environment where the Holy Spirit can move hearts and inspire generosity, not guilt people into writing bigger checks. Outwardly guilt and conviction can look similar, but they are born of different heart conditions.

Guilt burdens people, and encourages them to try to “do better.” On the other hand, **conviction is a product of the Holy Spirit in our lives and requires us to depend on God as we seek to be more like Christ.** When followed by repentance, conviction leads to joy. Authentic generosity is born of conviction, not guilt.

We are all born thinking about ourselves, but as we come to know Jesus and His sacrifice, we have new eyes to see the world. The sacrifice of Christ removes all guilt, and so we are no longer held captive by it. As we grow in our understanding of grace, we also grow in our desire to generously show grace to others. This process includes periods of conviction, as we see our tendency toward selfishness and repent.

While the heart transformation we are praying for is not something we can promise to deliver, because it is a product of the Holy Spirit, ReImagine resources can help you create the kind of environment where inspiration thrives.

7

Overemphasis on Gifts Can Cause Hurt

Many today have been wounded by teaching that focuses on the gift instead of the heart behind the gift. We encourage a different approach. Connect people with the privilege of being a blessing to others.

“I had just given some stuff to a guy that was struggling. He had recently moved here and was having a difficult time. And one of the things that I gave him was an old weed-eater that I had. And after I saw that video with the stinky sheep, I had to go out—I'd bought myself a new weed-eater—and now I had to go out and buy him a brand new weed-eater just like mine.”~ Sidney Brock

Does God care about weed-eaters? No, not the weed-eaters itself. Does the sacrifice of a new weed-eater matter eternally? Absolutely. What this pastor experienced was the joy of giving his best to the Lord. He was compelled to give, not out of guilt but because he saw the **opportunity** God gave him to give.

Loving Generously – It Involves Relationships!

It is easier to be generous – both with our finances and our relationships – when someone fits into our normal demographic. We are challenging you to reimagine your relationships and how you invite people into your life.

Jesus said in Luke 14:12-14, “Then Jesus said to his host, ‘When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.’”

Equipping churches and individuals to be the hands and feet of Christ means that we are to serve in love, not just from a safe distance, but to be present. It is difficult to carry the love of Christ when your generosity is a transaction, rather than a relational engagement.

As Christians, we are called to impact our communities and our world as defenders of the weak, wounded, and needy. As the Church, we are called to help exhort, encourage, and promote extending Christ’s love to those in our community who are weak, hurting, or have suffered injustice.

Call a Spade a Spade: Sometimes Giving Is Scary!

Often, generous giving is preceded by discomfort, fear, and even skepticism. In our Living Generously series, the main character, Frank, experiences those same feelings and discovers joy in overcoming those obstacles. As one of our church partners said, the ReImagine Generosity resources helped:

“To paint a picture of what living generously looks like and what getting over that fear looks like and what joy comes on the other side when you’re able to overcome [those fears].”
~ Jonathan Anderson

There is tremendous freedom in calling out the fears that tend to lurk around generosity. Bring these into the Light of Jesus and let His perfect love cast out those fears!

Reconciliation Is Primary to Giving

In Matthew 5:24 Jesus says, “Leave your gift there before the altar, and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” Our broken relationships affect our generosity. If we want to be truly generous, we must first seek reconciliation in our relationships. What does that mean? It means we must forgive, serve, and care for people as Christ’s hands and feet.

As followers of Christ, we are all called to be agents of reconciliation bringing healing where there is hurt, peace where there is conflict, and righting the wrongs of this broken world. This sort of generosity is individual and corporate.

The person who writes large checks, yet is harsh with their spouse or deals with employees unjustly or quarrels with neighbors is not a generous person. Jesus put such an emphasis on reconciliation that he advises us to hold off on giving financially until relationships are made right. Rally your church around this truth and unleash a reimagined form of giving!

11

Re-gifting – It isn't Always a Bad Thing

The term re-gifting actually came from a "Seinfeld" episode on recycled gifts. In it you see one character incredulous when her gift is re-gifted and another angered at receiving the gift because it wasn't heartfelt.

At ReImagine Generosity, **we want re-gifting God's blessings to be a normal part of our faith.** The Apostle Paul says, "What do you have that you have not received?" (1Corinthians 4:7). All of our resources come from God. Any gift we give is actually a re-gifting of what we have been given. It isn't our stuff so we shouldn't be stingy with it.

Unfortunately, that's not how many look at their resources. It is easy to view our condition as a product of our own hard work, determination, and good choices. The danger in so doing is becoming blind to the reality of God's generosity.

If we treat what we have been given, whether it is our relational capital, financial capital, physical resources, or intellectual capacity as something that is ours, then it removes our sense of humility and gratitude. It is important that as we shepherd our communities, we continually remind people that our resources aren't ours.

12

Give of Essence, Not Excess

Our position in life is not an accident. God had a plan when we were born into our particular families and communities. Our choices as we picked professions, homes, spouses, and places of worship are also opportunities. Are we using those spheres of influence for His glory?

Many church leaders would quickly answer yes, but let's reimagine our influence. How could we disadvantage ourselves for the benefit of others? That is what Jesus did!

Jesus left the glory of heaven to walk in a broken world. He could have stayed in heaven and just rained golden coins if He only wanted us to know financial wealth. He didn't. He wanted to give us much more than prosperity.

Jesus gave Himself. He suffered under the tyranny of sin, so that we could know freedom from its oppression. **As His followers, we must follow His example of generosity. True generosity is about sharing of your essence, not just your excess.** Taking everything you are, everything worth sharing, and giving that away.

We all hold positions of influence in our families, in our neighborhoods and communities. Those spheres can be small or large, but in each of them we have the opportunity to give sacrificially of ourselves.

13

Recognize You Are in a Fight for Influence Over Culture

We live in a secularized, humanistic, and technological culture. In it, the church is fighting for influence. Many people don't really want to hear about Christianity. They have seen the scandals and the hypocrisy on television and in the papers. Many doubt "religion" is real.

Yet, **our generosity has the potential to be a powerful and irrefutable defender of our faith.** When words are held in suspect, actions born from living out our faith are harder to deny. In that sense, seeing **is** believing.

Miserly Christians miss the opportunity to testify. When we limit our giving to 10%, and do that begrudgingly, the world is not surprised or impacted by our giving. When we move from transactional to relational to sacrificial giving, we are allowing our lives to mirror Christ and stand as a witness to a broken and lost world.

14

Generosity Is Caught, Not Taught

In the classic book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie makes the case that most people feel justified in what they do. Even the most hardened criminals see themselves as good people in difficult circumstances. Carnegie says that few people are influenced by criticism, condemnation, or complaining. This is true when it comes to generosity, as well.

Generosity as a whole lifestyle, is attractive. We often see it displayed in classic stories. The bishop in "Les Miserables" brought redemption to a runaway convict through the gift of silver candlesticks.

In Dickens' "A Christmas Carol", we see Scrooge transformed from a miser to a philanthropist. The story has been remade countless times (every sitcom seems to have a version) because its themes of redemption, generosity, and love resonate with all audiences. Then, there are characters like Daddy Warbucks from "Annie", the Fairy Godmother in "Cinderella", and Aslan in the "Chronicles of Narnia." Each are popular for their benevolence.

Les Miserables clip:

We all want to be generous, to respond with the Bishop's gracious spirit to the Jean Valjeans of our lives. But, as anyone who has ever held a hungry infant knows, we aren't born generous. We are born serving ourselves, wanting our own way, wanting what we want more than what God wants. How do we foster a generous culture in our churches?

At ReImagine Generosity, we encourage churches to begin with the leadership of the church. We believe that a generous leadership will impact its congregation. Instead of just teaching generosity, people respond better to generosity lived out in front of their very eyes.

Church leadership modeling generosity of spirit, relationship, finance, community – all serves to call forth the generosity in others. By in large, generous churches are led by generous pastors and generous ruling bodies.

One of the churches that recently used our Living Generously resource is led by a pastor who understands the impact of modeling. She grew up in a home where her father modeled giving. Every week, she saw him ready his tithe. Every summer she saw him plant and tend a garden so that he could give away its produce. As she talked with us about her small congregation, she talked about dedicating Living Generously to the memory of her father since he had recently passed. She used a portion of the small inheritance she received to buy our resources because she believed they could help inspire others to that same mission of generosity lived out.

15

Knowing Where Security Is Really Found

Security in God makes risk less risky. Knowing God is Sovereign; God is our Provider; and our Redeemer, should inspire confidence and cast out our fear. God promises to complete the work He has begun in each of our lives (Philippians 1:6), and He is good (Psalm 73:1). Part of faith is believing that He can make even our mistakes work out for our good. (Romans 8:28). When we know God, we can be courageous.

At ReImagine Generosity, we want people to function in faith, not fear. We want to equip churches with the message that the work of Christ enables us to live our faith in confidence. Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." As Christians, part of living our faith is taking risks.

In Living Generously, we see our main character, Frank, learn how to trust God:

We are called to be generous. Being a good steward of our resources means sometimes we have step out in faith, get out of our comfort zones, and trust God.

16

5 Small Steps Toward Generosity

As we have worked with hundreds of churches, here are some ideas our church partners have implemented to teach about whole life generosity and stewardship:

- Make a Blessings Tree

Encourage your community to think about resources they can give other than money. Provide “leaves” for them to write the resource on and hang from a branch.

- Surprise Someone with the Opportunity to Steward

A handful of church attenders were surprised to discover different gifts of cash (\$1, \$5, \$10, \$20 and \$50) in envelopes under their seats with the challenge “Everything we have is a gift we’ve been given by God. God has now entrusted you with this additional gift. We challenge you to live generously with it.” The church then encouraged attendees to share their stories of “re-gifting” on the church Facebook page or blog.

- Give a Weekly Challenge to Live Generously

Print simple acts of service as a challenge each week to take a small step toward thinking more generously. Do your best to make some of the challenges specific to your community. Other, more general challenges can be used; such as, open the door for someone entering or exiting a store, look someone in the eyes, smile and say ‘hello,’ take a neighbor a baked treat, or invite someone you would not usually to dinner.

- Random Acts of Kindness Cards

A church handed out cards and challenged their community to pray for ways to bless someone. When an opportunity would arrive, they would anonymously help and leave the card behind. Again, gather these stories on your church Facebook or blog.

- Encourage Individuals and/or Families to Take a Life Inventory by asking “How Could God better Use Our Resources?”

So, What Are You Going to Do Now?

At ReImagine Generosity, we want to partner with you in developing a culture of generosity. We want to know you and the specific challenges you face. We want to pray with you and then see how God can use our partnership for His glory. Our community is growing every month and we invite you to be a part of a growing movement of individuals and churches that are pursuing whole life generosity.