

12

Offering Talks Worth Giving



Generosity
by LifeWay

Where Did the Offering Go?

The past three decades have brought about a lot of changes for the church. There are more possibilities today than ever for the church, and much of it has to do with the guys who went before us.

What was previously referred to as the "Contemporary Church Movement" ushered in a fun day for all of us. I, Todd McMichen, was a college student at the time living out my calling as a church planter. This was back in the day prior to ARC, Acts 29, and the plethora of church planting organizations today. Back then we had two heroes: Rick Warren and Bill Hybels. Both men had planted churches in urban settings outside the Bible-belt and saw tremendous results. These two pastors had not yet begun hosting mega-conferences and writing books, and Al Gore had not invented the Internet yet. If you knew the right people, you could find some cassette tapes of pastor training events where Bill and Rick were speaking.

Independently of each other, both men introduced a practice that has been largely embraced across the nation today by churches. It is a new liturgy that has had far reaching effects. It is how a church handles the offering. It began with just a few simple comments. "If you are a guest in our service today, let the offering plate pass. This service is our gift to you and we have no expectation of you contributing so you can relax and enjoy this moment." These comments were created largely because of two reasons:

First, the nation was in a repetitive news cycle of stories displaying major national television ministries mishandling millions upon millions of dollars. It was more than embarrassing and the church could not run from the negative stigma these stories created in the mind of the public. It was paralyzing.

Second, many Americans who did not attend church became very distrusting of local churches and money. Even though the national incidents were isolated to large television-based parachurch ministries, the local church was feeling the brunt of Americans' skepticism.

Over time, more and more pastors adopted this phrase and little by little the offering time in the service has disappeared. In just three short decades we have moved from the certainty of every church passing the plate just prior to the message, to having no idea if or when a plate, bucket, or even a giving kiosk will be seen. You might have to hunt for a box on a wall or find an usher to figure out how to make a gift. The offering has become something for the super-secret saints.

But then in 2008, something occurred to begin reversing this trend. The banking crisis hit America and money was suddenly a topic again. Our people were hurting. They needed help. Organizations like Dave Ramsey were on the rise and pastors began to gain a little more confidence on the topic of money. But how do you reintroduce the topic of money when it has been preceded by years of darkness and silence? Believe it or not, a simple 30-60 second offering talk is an effective first step in beginning a new conversation and reintroducing the topic of money to the church.

Release the Topic of Money

In order to gain confidence when discussing money, it is helpful to create a personal Generosity Theology. You can create your own Generosity Theology by finding 3-5 key Scripture passages that discuss giving. You then develop a brief belief statement based off each passage. These 3-5 biblically-based statements make up your Generosity Theology. Knowing what you believe

theologically about generosity helps you move from the fear of money and fundraising to a discipleship and shepherding mindset. Pastors are visionary disciplers who are wired to shepherd their people. Learn to think about money in the way you do best—through a discipleship mindset. Your Generosity Theology statements will also serve as a basic guide and template for crafting your offering talks.

Generosity is cultivated through intentional discipleship. Living generously with your resources is the result of a loving, grace-filled heart, not as a result of an abundance of wealth. Everyone can be generous. It has nothing to do with income level or age. You can even live generously when you are in debt! God's call of generous living is for everyone, every day, and His blessings await those who thrive in giving. There are many ways in which someone can live generously, and there are many generous disciplines of the heart that need to be developed through discipleship.

My favorite generosity verse is Proverbs 11:25, "A generous person will be enriched, and the one who gives a drink of water will receive water" (CSB). Who wouldn't want this promise for their life? Who wouldn't want this for the lives of others?

So what theology points would you need to craft to help a person regardless of age, income level, or spiritual maturity level experience the fullness of this verse? It has nothing to do with the pressure to receive a bigger offering to pay the church bills, but everything to do with discipleship and shepherding. With this verse squarely in front of us, let's frame a personal Generosity Theology you can learn to lead with. Then, we will craft some offering talks that come straight from His Word and your heart to make a difference in the hearts of your people.

Generosity Theology Categories for Consideration

1. God owns it all and is a generous God.
2. God gives to us to meet our needs, for our enjoyment, and so we can live generous lives.
3. The generous life is the best way to live. God promises favor, blessing, protection, and provision.
4. Giving is joy-filled and fun.
5. Giving is for all ages.
6. Giving empowers our legacy together as we fulfill His vision as a church.
7. Giving is rewarded today and tomorrow.

These are a few categories you can consider. I would suggest that you limit your theology points to 3-5 statements. The Bible certainly has more to say, but we are simply trying to craft some memorable offering talks that you will be excited to deliver and your congregation will be impacted by. Feature the points that you are most passionate about. These will flow easily from your lips and your authenticity and exuberance will be undeniable. You may even consider some motto-like phrases to help your theology points stick such as, "God is a generous God;" "Generosity is fun;" and "The best life is the generous life."

Draft your statements, then run them through this filter of questions:

1. Can I share this theology point from passion and personal practice?
2. Do I have a theology point that can relate to every stage of life?
3. Do I have a theology point that will help me disciple and shepherd my people?
4. Do I have a theology point that will unite us around God's vision and our legacy?

Watch Your Language

If I am honest, when I hear most pastors speak about money, it makes me cringe. Their language can range from fear of the topic to lightheartedness to guilt and shame. I understand where this comes from, but let me help you with a few language tips.

First, be mindful that many of your people are living in financial stress. Their hearts are heavy, their marriages may be in trouble, their kids can be dealing with self-esteem issues, and they can be losing sleep over it every night. Second, they are probably clueless to all of God's many principles and promises related to money. Your people really do need to hear what the Bible has to say. Finally, your people probably have little idea how much good a gift does when it is given to your church. You may have talked about the financial needs of the church or even the vision, but few church attenders actually connect how their money is going to transform a life. The obvious is not so obvious.

So when you craft your theology statements and future offering talks, let these points of wisdom help you:

- 1. Speak with gracious words.** Your people are hurting. They need to be nurtured.
- 2. Speak with positive words.** Many of them already feel guilt over how they handle money, or shame regarding their giving practices. The Holy Spirit will do the convicting.
- 3. Speak with promising words.** Give them hope. You can pat them on the back, or kick them in the seat. It is your choice. My experience is promising words lead better most of the time.
- 4. Speak with inspiring words.** Everyone wants to live a big life. Many have quit dreaming and have little clue as to how their destiny is tied to the body of Christ. Give them hope in their future.
- 5. Speak with appreciative words.** Plain and simple, thank them for their generosity. It is a volunteer gift and they need to hear humble appreciation.

12 Styles of Offering Talks

There are many different styles of offering talks you can give. I would encourage you to create your own that best fit your personality and church. Remember, the more passionate and confident you are, the better received your offering talk will be.

Here are some topics to consider:

- 1. Discipleship.** Focus upon a point in your Generosity Theology with the purpose of simply growing your people in one small aspect of money. Give this a thought, *If I am not the lead discipler on topics of generosity and stewardship for my people, then who is?*
- 2. Shepherding.** People have money stress. They may have lost their jobs, be working harder than they should, or struggling as a single parent. Help them have hope and healing.
- 3. Vision.** The vision of your church proceeds at the speed of your resources. Help connect generosity to vision progress. Everyone enjoys being a part of a winning team.
- 4. Ministry Impact.** Tell a story of how generosity is making a difference in a recent ministry event and program. It could have been a student retreat, guest impacted by a greeter, or kids event. Try to cover the primary ministries during the course of a year.
- 5. City Impact.** Go beyond your acreage to where you are making a difference in your city. Highlight a corporation or organization you are partnering with for the better good in the lives of people. Your people love your community and want to hear about how your church is engaging externally.
- 6. Global Impact.** Some people are particularly passionate about global missions. The kingdom calls us into all the world, so take time to celebrate the impact your church is making in places far away. Be sure to include those who pray, give, and go as a part of the global impact effort.
- 7. Next Generation.** Kids and students are huge investments in ministry. It is a way that faith is passed from one generation to the next. The church's future leaders are currently sitting in a small chair, being rocked by a volunteer, or listening to really loud music in a shed-like room. This is where legacy can be found.
- 8. Capital Investments.** Buildings are some of the most important investments a church makes. The volume of disciples one church can create is often limited by things like parking spots and chairs. People enjoy buying new things to expand the vision. Make sure your building is always seen as an important vehicle toward the vision, but not the vision itself.
- 9. Non-Cash Gifts.** There are many benefits to helping people expand their ideas of generosity. Things such as securities, jewelry, cars, and real estate can be creative ways to give beyond cash. I know many churches have experienced the hassle of liquidating non-cash gifts. However, Generosity by LifeWay takes all the hassle away (you can check it out at lifeway.com/generosity). These types of gifts can also create additional tax benefits for your people.

10. Financial Integrity. Do not be afraid to discuss the level of integrity and financial accountability your church practices. People want to know you regard their funds with the highest levels of security and investment. Build their confidence and trust.

11. Digital Giving. Your church needs to have a robust digital giving plan. Every channel of digital giving needs to be available to people today if we want generosity to be unleashed. Be mindful that many people give at other times than Sunday. Make sure they are acknowledged and met where they naturally give.

12. First Fruits. The first weekend of the month is critical. It is often the day with the largest weekend offering of the month. More come prepared to give this day than any other. You can thank them, teach them, and bless them with a reference to Proverbs 3:9-10.

12 Offering Talk Templates

Here are some templates you can edit. They also provide you with a sample of grace-filled, positive language. When you begin to customize these offering talks remember to infuse them with your Generosity Theology and vision language that is true to your local context. Limit your time to 30-60 seconds and use images or graphics when appropriate.

Discipleship. "The Bible teaches that 'One person gives freely, yet gains more; another withholds what is right, only to become poor. A generous person will be enriched, and the one who gives a drink of water will receive water' (Proverbs 11:24-25, CSB). Who doesn't want this for their lives, their families, and their friends? It's a promised path of refreshing for others and replenishment for self. Our world would say, 'Get all you can and can all you get.' However, if you let money own you, it will. It is only a resource for your needs, good for some fun along the way, and best used by investing in others. Thank you for living generously and enjoying the freedom God promises."

Shepherding. "Let me encourage you today. Scripture teaches 'The Lord is my shepherd; I have what I need' (Psalm 23:1, CSB). I know that we all have expenses and life pressures that can cause us to experience worry and anxiety. You might be in a tight spot or maybe even unemployed. Some may be wondering how they will afford the future. Money is uncertain, but faith can be placed in a certain God. He is your shepherd and will care for every need that you have. Your money and job may let you down from time to time, but God never does."

Vision. "Our church has been living with the passionate, all-out pursuit of transforming lives in our community. This year it has been our big focus to locate three local non-profits that are powerfully impacting those struggling with chemical addictions, families in poverty, and foster children. I want you to know, we have recently completed formal partnerships with all three organizations. Here they are _____, _____, and _____. On your behalf, we have gifted each organization with \$_____ and we are just beginning. Thank you for your generosity, and let's pray for these new ministry partners."

Ministry Impact. "This month is a very busy season for ministry. We have just completed both kids camp and sent our high schoolers on a mission trip. I want you to know that the impact your generosity is having is only measurable by eternity. At kids camp, more than _____ children trusted Christ for the very first time and we have already begun to see them baptized. Our high schoolers roughed it in Mexico, personally constructing a new orphanage for children being rescued from child slavery. You gave, some served, and still more were impacted. Thanks."

City Impact. "I want to say thanks to everyone who was a part of our "Serve Our City" event yesterday. There were ___ teams of people involved in ___ service projects across our city. Public schools were painted, a widow received some much needed home repairs, and several single parents received a pantry full of groceries. Thank you so much for your generosity and making a difference in our city."

Global Impact. "Our missions team just returned from _____. They had quite an experience coming alongside of a ministry engaging local business leaders in developing job placement training. We have mission trips that engage our members trained in construction, medicine, and education. We also have opportunities for prayer, financial support, and those able to assist. I want to thank everyone who makes our global missions ministry thrive. Thank you for your generosity and service. You are making a difference."

Next Generation. "Today, we have more than ___ volunteers making a difference in the lives of the next generation of leaders. I am so thankful for our preschool, children, and student volunteers who prepare, pray, and serve our next generation. Right now, we are growing the future church. You can see the results in the baptisms and hear the results just walking down the halls. Thank you for generosity that resources our next generation ministries as you partner with our staff and volunteers in those areas."

Capital Investments. "When you drove on the campus today, I am sure you took note of all the new signage inside and out along with the landscaping. We even have several new guest parking spots up close to the entry ways. We are doing all we can to help guests feel welcomed and loved. From the moment they drive on the campus, we want to make sure guests know where to park, what door to enter, and where to go. The new signage, parking spots, and landscaping are beautiful. Thank you for your generosity that makes it happen. Let's extend that generosity person to person, welcoming our new friends."

Non-Cash Gifts. "Over the next 30 days we are going to be having some fun with generosity. We actually have the means set up for you to donate both cash and noncash gifts. Each week during the offering you give either by cash, check, or charge. This month we are seeking to fund our yearly mission investments with gifts such as cars, real estate, jewelry, and even unused gift cards. You can see the list in your worship guide, how to make a gift, and all it is going toward. No pressure, but do have some fun. We all have lots of stuff that just may be able to go for a better use. Thank you for being such generous people."

Financial Integrity. "I want to take the time to give you a brief financial update. So far this year you have been exceptionally generous and our leaders have been wise investors. We have seen a 5% increase in giving from last year. We have only spent 85% of what has been received. This is allowing us to make a drastic reduction in our current debt load as well as fund some new ministry opportunities God has brought our way. Additionally, we have just completed our annual financial review and received an A+ from our outside accounting firm. Thank you for your generosity and our leaders for their wise integrity. God is using your gifts."

Digital Giving. "Today, many people came prepared to give. However, over 50% have already given. You love our convenient digital giving options, so you have lived generously through our app, text to give, or online giving features. Thank you so much. I want you to know that there are a couple of added benefits to giving digitally. It actually saves the church money because it cost our staff less time to process the gifts. The money saved is amazing. Also, the ability to set up an automatic recurring gifts is so helpful in money management. We are able to have consistent giving even over

the summer and bad weather days. Thank you so much for your generosity.”

First Fruits. “Today is the first Sunday of the month and I know many of you have come prepared to be generous with your first fruits. Here is a promise just for you. ‘Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first produce of your entire harvest; then your barns will be completely filled, and your vats will overflow with new wine’ (Proverbs 3:9-10, CSB). This is God’s promise to you today. Enjoy His blessings over your life and thank you for being such generous people. Your gifts are making a difference, impacting lives, and advancing the vision of our church.”

It’s a Wrap

These Offering Talks alone will not create a generous culture in your church. However, when your Generosity Theology begins to impact the offering prayer, staff devotions, leadership meetings, preaching, teaching, budget spending, and mission action, then you have something. So get started and don’t stop. Reach out to me on twitter (@ToddMcMichen). I would love to hear how things are going. You can also check out our 2 for 1 Generosity System at lifeway.com/generosity.