



Believe:
Building Your
Foundation of Culture



Have you ever ridden in a car with an aggressive driver? It can be quite a whiplash inducing experience as the driver quickly accelerates, then slams on the brakes, just to floor the gas again. This is how the topic of church money can feel at times. We can run after a financial emphasis or fundraising initiative when we need to, then we hit the brakes the day after and go silent on the topic. Then, when we need to discuss the budget or raise capital for a facility, we punch the gas again.

Building a culture of generosity is different. Rather than punching the gas at different times of the year to fundraise, building a generosity culture is more like driving down a country road: consistent and patient. Generosity culture permeates everything that is done within the church, it is not a season of emphasis, but a discipline instilled over time. When we lead from temporary emphasis rather than a consistent culture, it is a short season that is sure to fade. Building a generosity culture takes longer, but the result is worth the dedication.

As you build your generosity culture, go slow. Take the time to focus on each exercise. You and your leadership are not running a sprint. Here are some critical foundation points before you start your journey.

1. The Lead Pastor Must Lead The Effort

Generous churches begin with their senior most leader. You do not have to be a financial guru to lead a generous church. You do, however, need to be growing as a biblical expert on generosity, and this happens in both practical and spiritual ways.

First, make sure you are growing in your understanding of the church's finances. Invite a business person, accountant, or church finance officer to tutor you on the basics of finance and cash flow. Organize a team of financial experts to oversee the details and keep you updated. This does not mean you should abdicate financial leadership, but it will give you confidence in the inner financial workings of the church, which will free up your bandwidth to focus on the spiritual climate of generosity.

Second, you must lead the congregation towards generosity through prayer, Bible study, and spiritual growth, gaining a new vision for how the spiritual attribute of generosity is applied in a person's life. Work on each stage in the Generosity Cycle by yourself privately—even do them repeatedly. Journal about the principles and incorporate them into your prayer life. Then practice using them in a leadership meeting, staff devotion, or prayer before the offering. When you are ready, invite team members and leadership into the process.

2. Watch Your Language

Words create worlds. This cannot be understated as a pastor, speaker, or leader. Every word you choose has the potential to be a purposeful act of discipleship. These words find their way into our everyday vocabulary, emails, texts, personal exchanges, announcements, and sermons. Each meeting with a staff member and team leader is an opportunity to transform culture through empowering language. Every announcement, prayer, and social media post has formative power.

But culture will not be transformed until you can succinctly state what you believe in a memorable way. And you cannot state what you believe until you know what your beliefs are—which is why the first stage of the Generosity Cycle is **Believe**. Learning to clearly articulate what you believe about stewardship and generosity is one of the first steps in transforming your culture. You will probably need to learn to draft the most simple forms of communication to help you get the hang of it. You know you are getting there when your announcement time has become a discipleship moment along with your Offering Prayer.

3. Repeat, Repeat, Repeat

To grow a generosity culture, you have to keep planting the same seed over and over again. For farmers to make their work worth the effort, they plant rows and rows and acres and acres of the same seed. They focus on growing one bountiful crop at a time. It is easy for leaders to feel the pressure to alter their words in order to bring fresh insight on a subject or to infuse a topic with creativity.

Unfortunately, the more words we use, the less clear we become. While insight and creativity have their place, culture will only become transformed when you say the same thing over and over again. Plant the same seed. Do not succumb to the temptation of feeling like a broken record when you speak. People may not hear you the first, second, or third time. You know you have communicated clearly when your words start showing up in the sentences of others. Be creative and insightful in the way you state the principle the first time, then repeat it exactly the same way every time you mention it.

4. Train Your Leadership Team

Culture is carried by words, but it is made permanent by practice. This is why the second step in the Generosity Cycle is called **Train**. It is critical that you transfer your belief into the lives of those who will directly impact the team, volunteers, and ministries. So do not bypass this stage.

Once you have previewed the content, invite your team into the process of developing the **Generosity Theology**. This collaboration will not only increase ownership, it will also help you see through the eyes of different ministries, generations, and passions. Every staff member and leader should set an example in both stewardship and generosity, but you do not want this to be something people begrudge. Rather, they should live it out of a passion for the promise of what is ahead. You can encourage them by having your staff and leaders regularly attend a financial money management class that your church will sponsor. Make sure your leadership utilize the digital giving platform in their personal lives and ministries. The more confident and proficient your leadership base, the faster the culture will grow.

5. Release The Topic Of Money

Release money from silent obligation and embrace it with joy-filled, Biblical promise. Money is an everyday topic making it unavoidable. Try not to isolate the topic of money within the church to the finance team, stewardship team, church budget season, or capital campaign. Help generosity and stewardship become a core value like prayer, Bible study, serving, and loving. Don't let a negative wall be built around the topic. This will keep people in bondage and your ministry under-resourced. Release the topic by giving it power and promise.

Here are some ways you can release the topic of generosity:

Be positive. Speak in terms of what God promises.

Be person-centric, not church-centric. Proverbs 11:25 says, "A generous person will be enriched, and the one who gives a drink of water will receive water." Who doesn't want that as a lifestyle? Being refreshed and prosperous is an amazing way to live. Unfortunately, most churches address money from a transactional point of view as money is needed to perform ministry and to fulfill our programming.

Be transformation-minded. God owns everything and has promised to meet all our needs as we live as open-handed, generous stewards. Envision that your people's best life is on the other side of generosity and help them get there. Don't allow your church to get to a place of having to lead with need.

6. Don't Quit

When we quit, we fail 100% of the time. Know what you believe and lead with your words and actions. Be positive and be consistent because consistent leadership wins over time. You cannot change your financial habits in the course of a sermon series, it is one step at a time.

Remember to take two to three months to focus on each stage of the Generosity Cycle and it will take three years to feel confident and competent as a leadership team. It will not be until year four or five that it has become second nature so do not be discouraged. You will see financial results quickly and new steps towards freedom along the way. Plant, pray, water, reap, and repeat. Just don't quit. You will get there.

Notes