

THIS IS THE WORD:
TEACHING AND
PREACHING ABOUT
GENEROSITY



"The kingdom that Jesus preached and lived was all about a glorious, uproarious, absurd generosity."

N. T. WRIGHT



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INTRODUCTION

Teaching about giving in our churches is an invaluable way of building a generous culture, and embedding sound theology to sit alongside practical information. Preaching forms a major part of this, opening scripture and applying it to the way we might grow in living generous lives. Teaching and preaching has often been seen as a challenging subject within church leadership – but by drawing wisdom from scripture and inspiration from our churches' visions, we can grow in confidence as we seek to nurture generous communities.

In this workbook, we'll begin with the theology which underpins what we teach about giving, before moving into practical suggestions in how to preach and teach well about generosity.

"Let us more and more insist on raising funds of love, of kindness, of understanding, of peace. Money will come if we seek first the Kingdom of God – the rest will be given."

MOTHER TERESA

THEOLOGY OF GENEROSITY

In order to preach and teach well about giving, we must first have a good understanding ourselves of a theology of generosity. This underpins all that we say and do to encourage a culture of generosity in our churches.

The Nature of God

What springs to mind when you think about the nature of God? Generosity is at the heart of God's character – we see this weaved throughout the Bible in many guises. Here are some examples to get you started:

- *Gift of Creation*

“God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” – Genesis 1.31

- *Gift in Relationship*

“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.” – 1 John 3.1

- *Gift of Jesus Christ*

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.” – John 1.14

- *Jesus giving up his life*

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” – John 3.16

- *Gift of Holy Spirit*

“When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” – John 20.22

- *Gifts of the Spirit*

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.” – 1 Corinthians 12.4-6

- *Generosity in Trinity*

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever.” – John 14.16

- *Gift of life everlasting*

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Romans 6.23

Created in God’s Image

As human beings created in God’s image:

- *Generosity is in the nature of God, so it’s in our nature as well*
- *We are created to express God’s nature,*
- *We are created to share God’s love and generosity*
- *We are called to grow in the likeness of Christ, whose life was one of radical and sacrificial generosity*
- *Generosity is a hallmark of a lived-out faith*

Narrative through the Bible

It's possible to read the entire Bible as a narrative of giving. Here are some examples:

VERSE	THEME
Genesis 1	Gift of creation, gift of life
Genesis 12	Blessed in order to be a blessing to others
1 Chronicles 29	All things come from God
Luke 21	Widow's Mite
Matthew 25	Whole-life generosity
John 19	Jesus gives up his life for us on the cross
2 Corinthians 8-9	Joy of giving, blessing to others, thanksgiving to God
1 Timothy 6	God richly provides everything for our enjoyment

What verses come to your mind when you think about giving and generosity?

PREACHING ABOUT GIVING

Beginning with God's Generosity

Like with any topic, we begin with God before applying it to ourselves. In this case, we reflect on God's generosity before thinking about our own giving – our giving becomes a response to what we learn about the generous nature of God. This also helps us to understand our identity as Christian people, through experiencing God's character.

Thinking back to the first part of this workbook, what might you draw out in a sermon about God's generosity?

Shaping a Message of Joy and Love

After we have grounded our thinking in the generosity of God, we move to shaping the rest of our preaching message. Remembering the theology we've looked at, our giving becomes:

- *a response to God's generosity to us*
- *a gift*
- *a priority as something we value*
- *a commitment as disciples*
- *an act of worship*

Our preaching message can also explore the relationship between love and gift. As human beings, we give because God first gave to us, and we love because first loved us. Because God's love is *gifted* love, our love needs to be expressed through giving as well. Our giving becomes an outpouring of love. It's also a joy to give to those we love, and the same is true of our giving to our churches when it is grounded in being a central part of our faith.

Building Confidence by Looking Beyond the Immediate

In order to build confidence in what we are preaching, we need to be secure in the message we have shaped. A lack of confidence can be found when linking giving with clergy stipends – thinking that your preaching message is one for self-gain. But we can be grounded in the fact that it's not about us – it's about the mission and ministry that is enabled by giving, and the resource for us to be Christ in our local communities.



By focusing our preaching on growing in Christ-like generosity, enabling mission and reflecting the love of God in the world, we are better grounded in confidence as we seek to build generous disciples.

A Discipleship Journey

Our preaching takes people to a place of deepening discipleship – as with our worship, we are sent out as changed people. Preaching about generosity is partly about inviting people to reflect on where giving sits within their lives, and the following journey can be quite helpful:

- *What do I do with my gifts and resources?*
- *What do I do with the gifts that God has given me?*
- *What does God want me to do with what God has given me?*
- *What does God want me to give from what God has given me?*
- *What does God want me to keep from what God has given me?.*

Language

The words that we choose when preparing sermons helps to shape our message, and influences how that message is received. Preaching about generosity is not the place to ask people for a particular practical giving response – it is the place to explore the generous nature of God and how that influences the way we live our lives.

Language helps us with this as well – moving away from transactional language and words associated with a tax or payment, to language which echoes gift, love, and joy. For example, moving from ‘pay’, to ‘give’, or ‘take the collection’ to ‘receive an offering’.

What examples of good words or phrases can you think of which would help shape a sermon on generosity?

‘You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.’

2 CORINTHIANS 9.11-12



TEACHING ABOUT GIVING

Preaching is one of many ways that we teach in our churches. When reflecting about how we teach about giving, it's useful to think about forms of communication already at hand which could help in embedding this culture of generosity.

Leading by Example

Generous churches have generous leaders – those who model what they teach in the way they live out their faith. By modeling generosity in our leadership, we teach our communities about the value of giving, and the value that has as we grow in our discipleship. This lived-out faith inspires others to catch the vision, and prayerfully adopt Christ-like generosity within their own lives.

Teaching through generous leadership is also about looking out for generosity and celebrating it where it is found.

“Giving is, first and foremost, a form of ministry. It is a way of announcing our vision and inviting other people into our mission.”

HENRI NOUWEN

Giving as Ministry

Giving itself is a ministry. It is a witness to our faith, and an expression of the love of God to the people around us. As God gifts people to one another, we each minister to each other as we learn to both graciously receive as well as generously give. As we teach about giving as a form of ministry, we grow in an understanding that we must first receive before we can give, and how being a gracious receiver gives the gift of giving to someone else.

Quite often, we tend to only talk about giving when our churches are experiencing a financial challenge – but giving isn't a response to a crisis. As a ministry, we should be teaching about the ministry of generosity throughout the life of our churches, embedding this ministry through the lens of joy.

Use Small Groups

Small groups can be a really good way of teaching about generosity through learning and praying together, in a safe space and shared community. Teaching happens as we grow together, each listening and learning from each other, and sparking ideas within conversation. These conversations help us to articulate what we think about faith and giving within a group of people we trust.



There are plenty of small group materials exploring giving, generosity and gratitude, which can help guide these conversations. In doing so, we help to build a culture of generosity.

Celebration and Gratitude

We also teach about generosity through celebration and gratitude. We teach about the joy of generosity as we share stories and give thanks for all the giving we experience in our community. This helps us to become more confident in our teaching as well, as we ground our communication in celebration and thanksgiving.

All our Christian giving begins with gratitude, as we give thanks for the blessings we receive from God and cheerfully respond in our own giving. We should model this within our church leadership as well, beginning with gratitude for all that is given to support our life and work, and using the opportunity to explain the difference that giving makes.

Gratitude is also a good teaching mechanism as a springboard into greater generosity – people tend to give more generously when thanked or acknowledged. It helps people to feel seen and valued, and trust that their gifts are being used wisely.

Teaching through Worship

As Anglicans, we learn so much of our theology through our worship. Worship itself becomes a form of teaching, as it expresses our theology, forms our faith and shapes our learning. As disciples, we are shaped by our worship – and so when generosity is weaved throughout our liturgy, it helps to build generous communities.

At the end of an act of worship, we are sent out as changed people. In weaving a theology of generosity in our worship, we are sent out changed more into the likeness of the self-giving nature of Jesus Christ.

Lord, teach me to be generous.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve;
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labour and not to ask for reward,
save that of knowing that I do your will.
Amen.

ST IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA



FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

- *National Giving Team's Building a Generous Church website:*
<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/building-generous-church>
- *Giving in Grace sermon series – Matthew, Mark, Luke, Exodus and 2 Corinthians:* <http://www.givinginGrace.org/Preaching>
- *Stewardship for Sundays – sermon ideas for each Sunday of the Lectionary year:* <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Stewardship%20for%20Sundays.pdf>
- *Our Calling Under our God – A Harvest Stewardship Series:*
<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/HArvest%20Stewardship%20series.pdf>
- *Growing Generous Church Small Group Guide:*
<https://d3hgriq6yacptf.cloudfront.net/5f3ffd8a9f6aa/content/pages/documents/1598442295.pdf>
- *Generous God, Generous People Small Group Guide:*
http://www.givinginGrace.org/userfiles/files/Design/GGGP_readings.pdf

