



EXPLORING GENEROSITY

A FOUR SESSION COURSE

 Seeking  Sharing  Sending

An introduction

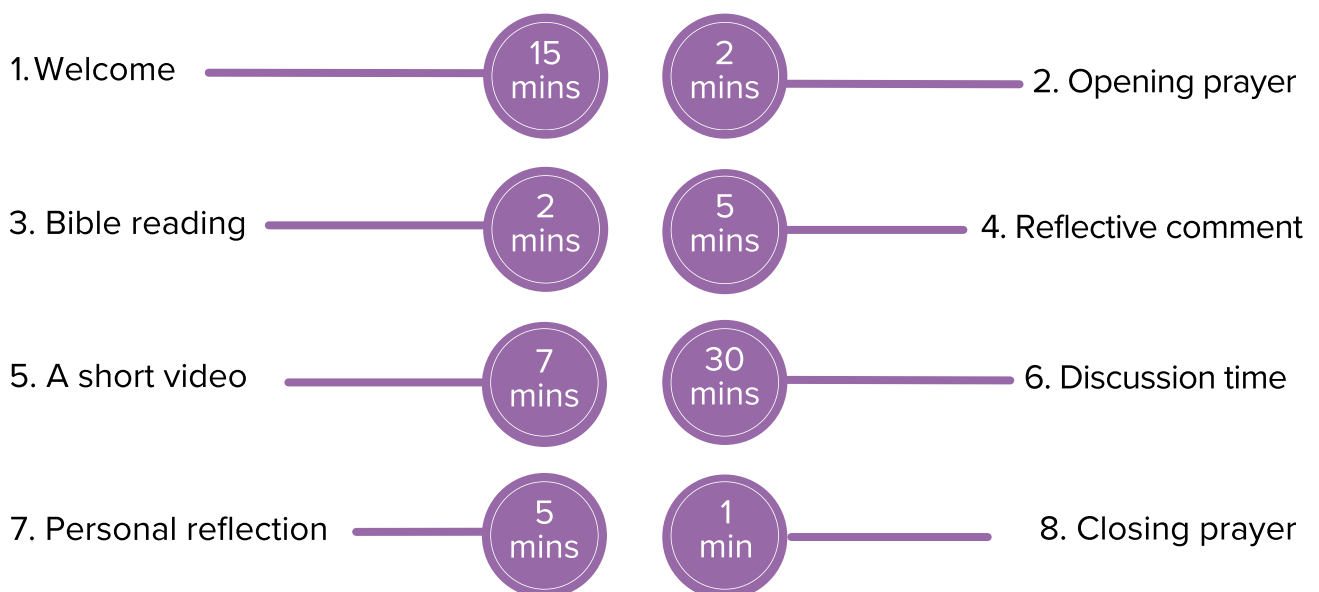
This course has been designed to help churches and groups of Christians explore the theme of generosity together, from a Biblical framework. It contains 4 modules. Each group running the course may use it how they wish but we suggest either once a week over 4 weeks, or possibly more intensively for 4 sessions in a single week, or over a weekend or church retreat.

The course can be run at any time, but may be particularly suitable as a lead in to a Giving Review or during a Generosity Week, thus providing an opportunity should any course participant wish to take action as a result of the material covered in the course.

The 4 modules of the course are:

- Module 1: Giving in the image of a generous God
- Module 2: Giving from what God's given to me
- Module 3: Giving to support the vision of my local parish
- Module 4: Giving when times are tough

Each module contains the following elements, with suggested timings, which you may vary to suit your local requirements.



It should therefore be possible to complete each module in 75 minutes, but we suggest you allow 90 minutes per module so you are not racing against the clock, and there is plenty of time for welcome, friendship and discussion.

Running the course

Before each module, the course leader should read the Bible passage and reflective comment, watch the film, and briefly review the discussion questions so they are fully prepared. Check the film can be played ok and audio will be heard.

Welcome & refreshments

Make sure people are welcomed and offered refreshments, and everyone is sitting in a position where they will be able to see the film when it is shown.

Introduction & opening prayer

Either use the prayer provided or feel free to substitute with one of your own, or a free format prayer. Perhaps ask a different person each week to lead the prayer.

Bible reading

It may be an idea to ask a different course participant to read the Bible passage each week. Ask in advance so there is no embarrassment or surprises on the day.

Reflective comment

This is just a short commentary on the Bible passage to be read aloud.

Short video

A link to the YouTube film is provided. Alternatively, particularly if your internet connection is poor, the Generous Giving Team can send you the films in advance.

Discussion time

The course includes a list of discussion starter points or questions. Try to ensure no one person is allowed to dominate the conversation. Gently prompt those who might be more reticent to speak to share their thoughts but don't place anyone under pressure to speak if they don't want to. Try to keep to time so that all the questions can be considered.

Time for personal reflection

This is essentially a silent time for course participants to reflect on the material covered, and resolve what, if any, actions they propose to take. Encourage participants to bring a notebook so they can write down anything they might decide to do, but remember this is a safe space so participants should not be asked to share their thoughts at this point.

Closing prayer & goodbyes

Either use the prayer provided with the course or substitute with one of your own.

MODULE 1

Giving in the image of a generous God

Opening prayer

Dear God, we acknowledge you made us in your image, and designed us to be generous in the same way that you are.

Help us now as we work through this course together to recognise your generosity to us, and that we are called to be like you.

Help us to keep our minds and hearts open and responsive, and guide us as we seek to increasingly reflect your image and learn to give freely, cheerfully and without fear.

Amen

Bible reading

Psalms 8:3-9

Reflective commentary

Most people recognise that every single one of us, is made in the image of God. The Genesis account goes out of its way to make this clear, repeating the point three times in a single verse (*Genesis 1: 27*).

But perhaps we don't always realise how close to God's image we are. Humanity is the pinnacle of God's creation. So much so, the Psalm tells us that we are only just a little bit lower than the angels, or as some versions translate it, God himself! So, it is not a question of thinking of an animal and then thinking we are a little higher than that. More a case of start with God but drop down just a tiny bit!

We also know that God is generous. No expense was spared in the creation of the Earth. God looked at everything He'd made and declared it to be good. Likewise, God does not hold back in His love for us. Everything He could possibly do for us, He has already done.

But do we make the connection between being created in God's image, and God being generous? Do we realise that means it is our destiny, our calling if you like, to also be generous? This is the way we are made. The way we are designed to be. Created in the image of a generous God. Anything less than that means we are not functioning correctly as human beings - not operating according to the way we have been designed.

So, the first step in our journey into generosity is to understand we are created in God's image – just a little lower than the angels, and to understand even more deeply that our God is an overwhelmingly generous God, who calls us and equips us to be like Him.

Watch

Chip off the old block

(6 MINS)



Scan for film clip

Discussion questions

1. To what extent do you understand that you've been created in God's image, and crowned with glory and honour (*Psalms 8: 5*)?
2. In what ways has God been generous to you? To what extent do you feel that generosity in your everyday life?
3. What barriers might prevent any of us from understanding and appreciating God's generosity even more deeply? What Bible passages might be helpful in enabling us to overcome any such barriers?
4. To what extent is it possible for someone who is themselves struggling financially or with some other hardship, to nevertheless reflect the generosity of God in their lives. How can the following Bible passages help us to understand that even those of us who have very little can still be outstandingly generous: *1 Kings 17: 12-15*, *Mark 12: 41-44*, *2 Corinthians 8: 2-3*?

Personal reflection time

Take some time to think about the main Bible passage that has been read, the reflective commentary on it, and any points that arose from the discussion time. Are you prompted to do anything differently from now on, or at least try a new approach? If yes, why not make a note of this somewhere, so you can come back and review in a few months' time.

Closing prayer

Dear Lord Jesus,
open our eyes to understand more deeply both your overwhelming generosity, and the fact that we are created in your image. Help us to see that we are designed to reflect your likeness in every way.

Help us now as we resolve to take positive and practical steps to be more like you, growing in generosity of spirit towards you, our Church and the wider needs around us.

Amen

MODULE 2

Giving from what God's given to me

Opening prayer

Dear God, I recognise everything I have comes from you. You are my great and generous provider. Even my own best acts of generosity are simply a dim reflection of your nature and are only possible because you have first given to me.

I reject the image of success the world thrusts upon me, marked by wealth, status and power, and ask you to mold me into your image, reflecting your humility, servanthood and generosity.

Release me from wanting more and striving to retain what I have. Help me to learn how to be content regardless of the situation I find myself in, and empower me to give sacrificially, not under compulsion, but in joy and faith.

Amen

Bible reading

Ruth 2: 8-19

Reflective commentary

The law of Moses included some outstanding provisions for the poor and destitute. One was that when a landowner harvested grain, he should allow anyone who was destitute to freely glean fragments of crop left at the edge of each field (*Leviticus 19: 9-10*).

But it seems most landowners only did so grudgingly. Destitute people following behind the harvesters were chased away and obliged to move on quickly from one person's field to another. There is even a hint (v9) that young women like Ruth were at risk of not just verbal harassment but physical harm too.

But Boaz was different. He went beyond his legal obligation. He didn't just tell his workers not to harass this woman; he went as far as to tell them to deliberately drop more grain, so there'd be more for her to pick up. He said Ruth could stay in his field all day, and took steps to ensure her physical safety too.

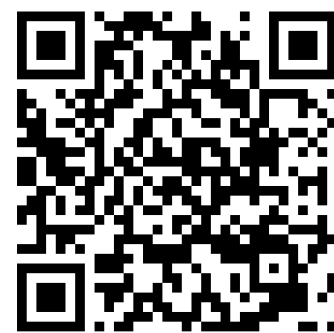
We can only speculate as to what made Boaz different to the other landowners. Boaz's mother was Rahab (*Matthew 1: 5*), most likely Rahab of Jericho (*Joshua 2: 1*). Boaz would have been only too aware that were it not for the outstanding grace and mercy of God who had rescued his own mother and extended salvation to her, arguably the most undeserving of people, he himself would be nothing. Or perhaps knowing his mother's former occupation and the circumstances which may have driven her to it, made him determined no other woman would be left with no way of providing for herself on his watch.

Boaz's story demonstrates how God's law was designed to work - with thanksgiving, grace, dignity, and understanding. For Boaz, giving back to God from what he himself had received was both a joy and a delight. As indeed it should also be for us.

Watch

The new home gift

(9 MINS)



Scan for film clip

Discussion questions

1. When we give to the Church, to what extent do we do so grudgingly or out of a sense of duty, and to what extent do we give joyfully, as part of our worship?
2. Boaz was clearly a relatively well-off landowner. But to what extent do the principles and values that Boaz demonstrated apply to us all, regardless of how much money we might have to start off with?
3. Most of us are aware of instances where people from outside the Church family have asked for or expected support or hand-outs of some kind. To what extent does Boaz's attitude to Ruth, telling her she could stay in his own field (v8) rather than pushing her on elsewhere indicate how we might respond to such requests?
4. The impact of Boaz's simple act of generosity to Ruth had implications significantly beyond what he could have imagined, and even beyond his own lifetime, with both King David and Jesus himself being descended from Boaz and Ruth's eventual marriage. In what ways could our own generosity have positive implications significantly beyond what we might imagine at the time, and even possibly beyond our own life?

Personal reflection time

Take some time to think about the main Bible Passage that has been read, the reflective commentary on it, and any points that arose from the discussion time. Are you prompted to do anything differently from now on, or at least try a new approach? If yes, why not make a note of this somewhere, so you can come back and review in a few months' time.

Closing prayer

Mighty and everlasting Father, we thank you for everything you give to us. Both the things we feel and those we don't. Most of all, thank you for your gift of salvation and that we are part of your family. Help us now to give back to you some of what you have given to us, to give joyfully and without compulsion, acknowledging you are Lord of all things, and we willingly submit to you.

Amen

MODULE 3

Giving to support the vision of my local parish

Opening prayer

Lord Jesus,
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
seek reward
except that of
knowing that I do
your will

Amen

*Often attributed to
St Ignatius of Loyola*

Bible reading

1 Chronicles 29: 6-16

Reflective commentary

Having set out the vision of building a temple fit to be the dwelling place of God himself, David then encourages everyone to give to see that vision fulfilled, being careful of course to lead by example. What a day it must have been. Grippled by the vision, everyone gave willingly, freely and wholeheartedly, from the greatest to the least amongst them, rejoicing as all the people came together.

David's prayer of thanksgiving after the offering had been received is likewise remarkable, acknowledging that they, both he as king and the people he led, had only given back to God what was His to begin with. All our wealth and money comes from God to start with. More than that, David recognises that life itself is nothing outside of God. "Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope," (v15) David prays. Now a king, perhaps David was also thinking back to his beginnings as a humble shepherd boy. A salutary point to remember that he has only got to where he is today by the overwhelming grace and touch of God.

These days, we may no longer need to build a physical temple but we are still building a spiritual one. Our call is to be the light that shines on the hill and to reach both our immediate community and beyond.

Does our parish or benefice have a clear vision as to how we will do that in our own particular context? Do we feel able to support that vision? Indeed, do we feel part of it, would we say it is "our" vision? And most importantly, are we prepared to give financially to see that vision fulfilled?

Watch

A penny for the car

(6 MINS)



Scan for film clip

Discussion questions

1. How clearly do you understand your parish or benefice's vision? How could you help the vision be made bolder and more appealing?
2. To what extent are you determined to see the vision of your parish or benefice take shape and are you willing to give or give more to see it flourish?
3. How well would you say you understand that everything we have has come from God's hand to start with, and we are simply giving some of that wealth back to Him? To what extent does it feel like that when we actually give?
4. Some of what is given to our local Church is passed on to the Diocese, to help achieve the vision for our area at Diocesan level. To what extent do you feel you understand this wider vision and what steps could you take to deepen your understanding of the Diocesan vision?

Personal reflection time

Take some time to think about the main Bible passage that has been read, the reflective commentary on it, and any points that arose from the discussion time. Are you prompted to do anything differently from now on, or at least try a new approach? If yes, why not make a note of this somewhere, so you can come back and review in a few months' time.

Closing prayer

Father God, help us
to see that your
Church is your
chosen way of
reaching our hurting
world with your
message of peace,
forgiveness and
reconciliation.

Help us to play our
full part in allowing
both our local church
and our Diocese to
be everything you
have called us to be,
and to be active and
fruitful in our mission
and ministry.

Thank you for
everything you have
given to each of us,
and inspire us and
envision us to give
cheerfully and
joyfully back to you.

Amen

MODULE 4

Giving when times are tough

Opening prayer

Dear God, thank you for your overwhelming generosity to me. No-one could give me more than you have given. Help me now to be like you, kind and generous to everyone I come into contact with, both those I know and those I don't.

Help me to find ways to give even in difficult times, and help me always to know the true contentment that comes from living at peace with you. You alone are my provider and I place my trust in you.

Amen

Bible reading

2 Corinthians 8: 1-7

Reflective commentary

The background to this passage is that there is a severe famine in Jerusalem. Paul is organising a collection amongst the churches he is responsible for (*Acts 11: 27-30*), in order that money can be sent to Jerusalem to help the situation there.

But the Macedonian Christians have got some financial difficulties of their own – severe in fact, and Paul, aware of this, is minded to excuse them from participating in this collection. However, when the Macedonians hear about the collection, notwithstanding their own problems, they insist on participating. And so, Paul, using their example in his letter to the Corinthians, explains that even without being asked, they still gave, in some cases more than they could afford. They were generous, and not just that, they gave with overflowing joy.

Where does that leave us? Most people are also feeling financial pressure right now, and some significantly so. It may even be our vicar or treasurer, like Paul, is reluctant to ask us to contribute or consider increasing our gift to meet the needs of the church right now, because he or she is aware of just how difficult things are. But would our response be to nevertheless insist we are given the opportunity to give or increase our giving, and then to respond generously and joyfully as the Macedonian Christians did?

Watch

The 50p
giver

(5 MINS)



Scan for film clip

Discussion questions

1. To what extent was it reckless of those Macedonian Christians who gave 'beyond their ability'? Should Paul have cautioned against that rather than holding them up as an example? Have you ever had an occasion where you have given more money than you could afford - how did things work out?
2. If you or your church became aware of a special collection or a need to raise more finances, but found that you hadn't been invited to contribute, would you plead for an opportunity to participate?
3. Why do you think the 50p giver, mentioned in the video clip, had not thought about giving his 50p before he was asked? What do you make of the fact he soon realised that actually he could give quite a bit more than the initial 50p?
4. Giving should always be a matter of our personal conscience, particularly giving to our local Church. But how can we find the right balance between not excluded ourselves from considering contributing financially or increasing our gift, whilst at the same not placing ourselves under pressure, ensuring that if we do give, we remain a 'cheerful giver'?

Personal reflection time

Take some time to think about the main Bible passage, the reflective commentary on it, and any points that arose from the discussion. Are you prompted to do anything differently from now on, or try a new approach? If yes, why not make a note of this somewhere, so you can come back and review in a few months' time.

Closing prayer

Dear Lord Jesus,
help each of us to
find the right and
honest balance
between prudence
and generosity. Give
us new perspectives
on our situation and
help us to find both
inspiration and
comfort from those
people in the
Bible of whom
it is recorded
nevertheless gave to
you during times of
incredibly severe
hardship. We thank
you Lord Jesus that
no matter how tough
the storm, you
remain with us and
are constantly by
our side.

Amen

*As this is the final
week, why not follow
the prayer above by
saying 'The Lord's
Prayer' together?*

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