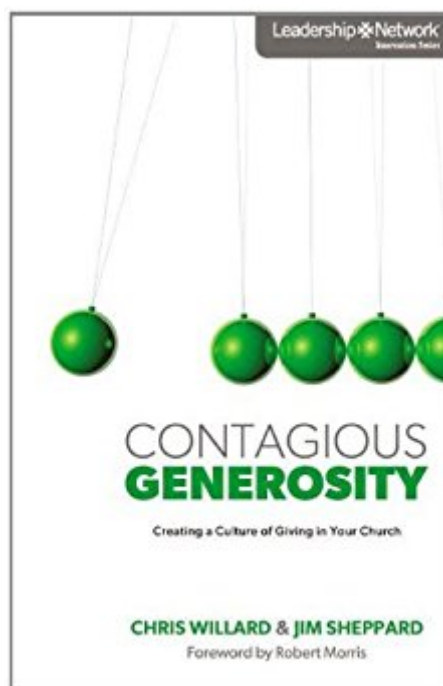




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Contagious Generosity: Creating A Culture Of Giving In Your Church (Leadership Network Innovation Series)



Synopsis

The general practices related to church funding aren't producing the same results they have in the past. There is a general acceptance that something has changed but little talk or interest is coming from traditional church leader training sources such as denominational entities and seminaries. Pastors are largely left to their own devices to "figure this out." They need a lifeline. While some churches are experiencing exponential growth, some churches - despite their best efforts - have been unsuccessful at moving beyond survival mode. Coupled with increased competition from other nonprofits and a decline in the commitment to give to the church first, churches risk losing the funding they need. A growing number of leaders are beginning to discover there is another way and are struggling to understand what makes one church generous and another not. There is a need in the market to offer a simple, working definition of "generosity" and reveal the "secrets" some church leaders seem to have simply stumbled upon which are resulting in unexplainable ministry growth and unprecedented church funding even in the midst of tough economic times. The content of this material was developed and refined by Jim Sheppard and Chris Willard through years of ministry leadership in the local church, consulting with church leaders across a broad spectrum of church settings, and through participation in and leadership of the Generous Church Leadership Community facilitated by Leadership Network. Of particular benefit will be the collection of observations and best practices gleaned during the Generous Church Leadership Community that originated within real-life church leadership situations and scenarios by highlighting specific challenges, methods, and successes.

Book Information

File Size: 3110 KB

Print Length: 192 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 0310893135

Simultaneous Device Usage: Up to 5 simultaneous devices, per publisher limits

Publisher: Zondervan (July 3, 2012)

Publication Date: July 3, 2012

Sold by: HarperCollins Publishing

Language: English

ASIN: B006IC1CDI

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #257,580 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #56

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living > Stewardship #170 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living >

Stewardship #234 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Christian Books & Bibles > Churches & Church Leadership > Church Leadership

Customer Reviews

It is not enough for the church to talk about generosity, nor is it enough for individual Christians simply to commit to being generous; what makes generosity a real and powerful witness to God's love is our action, according to Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard in this book. Generosity flows from understanding that God is the owner of everything, and the resources we possess are assets to be invested in the kingdom. Interesting observations made by the authors include:*

- * One of the biggest mistakes church leaders make in the area of preaching about generosity is that they raise the issue only when they are trying to raise money*
- * Generosity needs to be a thread which runs through the mission and organisation of the entire church*
- * Generosity is cultivated by pastors when they celebrate giving which goes beyond the church as much as giving which goes to the church*
- * Scarcity is a cancer, for which generosity is the cure*
- * As a church leader, if you want to create a culture of generosity in your church, you will have to find a way to stay informed about the giving habits of your people*
- * Generous churches are led by generous pastors*
- * Conversations about money need to be connected to stories of changed lives*
- * Churches are notorious for taking their donors for granted

I found the book both enlightening and inspiring. When comparing church income with church expenditure, most pastors wish that they could encourage their members to become a little more generous. Ironically, a culture of generosity amongst the members of a church really starts flowing only when the church sets aside its own financial needs and demonstrates by example generosity in its giving to others.

The purpose of Willard and Sheppard's book *Contagious Generosity* is not to help churches raise funds, but to help churches create a culture of generosity that raises up generous stewards. Generosity for them is "... a lifestyle in which we share all that we have, are, and every will become

as a demonstration of God's love and a response to God's grace." The authors insist that it is what they want for you, not from you. Willard and Sheppard claim that money is perhaps the most measurable aspect of our faith. Examining an individual's spending and giving patterns are an indicator of his faith commitment. Similarly examining a church's spending outside of itself gives an indication of the faith maturity of a church as a whole. Because individuals and churches can easily fall back into old selfish habits, a culture of generosity must be continually cultivated. The authors list six actions that leaders can take to develop a culture of generosity in a church: Build trust, Cast (and recast) vision, Shape culture, Demonstrate impact, Enhance relationships, Highlight good stewardship. Contagious Generosity has three parts: Church Development, Leadership Development, and Impact. At the end of every chapter is a summarized list of key ideas and a list of discussion questions. I recommend the book to church leaders who know their church is not generous and would like vision and tools for creating a culture of generosity.

This book radically changed my approach and understanding to generosity. For myself, this has been one of the woefully neglected areas of my ministry. I was one of those guys described in the book who felt it was a mark of holiness for me not to know who gives and really be completely ignorant of what was going on financially. After reading the book, I simply looked at stewardship/generosity in a new light. I am taking my leadership through the book and will be making sure that the concepts and principles therein will find their way throughout the church.

I loved this book. It was like reading Saul Alinsky's Rules for Radicals or C.S. Lewis' The Screwtape Letters, only it's not a parody. This was like watching Gordon Gekko teach Bud Fox how to make money in the movie Wall Street, because greed is good. It was like having an expert church money maker sitting next to me, the average pastor (which I'm not), and telling me all the secrets for getting "generosity" going at my church. Pastors need "generosity" going at their churches sort of the way an employer needs physical fitness going among his employees, so he can make them work longer hours. Or, the way a king needs chastity taught to the young women, so he can have all virgins in his harem. Or, the way a cult leader needs unity taught to his followers, so they'll shut up. This book describes how pastors can promulgate the virtue of "generosity" so they can get a lot of money for their churches and themselves. What follows are some of my favorite quotes, with commentary. When you read all those red-letter words in your bible, make sure you are obsessed with money. "Yet by counting the number of verses in Scripture, one could argue that Jesus spent more time talking about money and possessions than about any other subject, including heaven

and hell." (page 31). Well, you could make that argument but you'd be wrong. I did that study twice, and Jesus taught more about the Kingdom of God than anything else. Make sure you have a strategy. "The storehouse of tools to teach generous giving and biblical stewardship is rapidly expanding -- with solid off-the-shelf resources that are being refined to meet the needs of modern-day churchgoers." (page 44). Yup, my money is someone else's big business. It's awesome to know that. You've got to have a plan! "...we must learn to craft a strategy for generosity and implement a plan to make it happen." (page 45). The same thing we do every night, Pinky: Try to take over the world! If you want something done, make it someone's job! "Those churches that have a dedicated stewardship staff member resoundingly affirm this position's role in advancing generosity in their congregations." (page 49) "Whoever is appointed to carry this responsibility must also be held accountable for it's results." (page 49) So, then are the "results" really "generosity?" And, it's great to know that in many churches my money would go to pay someone a full time middle class salary with benefits who's only purpose is to plot and plan to get more of my money. So here's how to get more "generosity" from people. You have to "constantly challenge people to take the next step." (page 52) "If a person is giving nothing right now, you can urge them to give 1 percent. If they are currently giving a tithe, you can encourage them to begin giving 11 percent." (later page 52) George Orwell wrote that if you want a vision of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face - forever. If I want a vision of my church, I imagine a pastor urging "mo' money, mo' money, mo' money" - forever. If you don't believe the authors, believe Robert Morris, the pastor of the great Gateway Church. (page 70) This is the same pastor who once taught that David's friend Jonathan had a "Jezebel Spirit." Right on! There's someone I can trust. Of course, in any dystopian regime -- I mean church -- the leaders have to watch each other. "If staff members or leaders are contributing less, they will need care and counsel." (page 88) "Pastors need to hold their staff accountable for generosity if they want to communicate a consistent message to the congregation." (page 89) This is where the serious doublethink starts kicking in. Pastors' staff should be forced to be "generous." Got it. Make sure to "cast vision" using the "blast" (fire hose), "soak" (garden hose), and "drip" (soaker hose). "Use the blast sparingly, relying more on the soak and drip so that your people really absorb the vision and own it for themselves." (page 97 to 98) Well, examples of the three hoses aren't provided so when I'm sitting in church I'm not sure when I'm being blasted, soaked, or dripped on. I'm only sure that I'm getting hosed. Any scripture can be used to get money. "...and regardless of the text you preach, you can call your congregation to generosity by presenting them with the message of God's love and gracious, generous work on our behalf." (page 103) Embrace the ministry of asking. Learn to find and target the richest in your

congregation. "The more connection and respect the two of you share with one another, the more likely you are to be trusted and, ultimately, funded with a generous gift." So, target, plot, plan, to get that rich person's money, but "It's what we want for you, not from you." (page 111) Doublethink getting weirder. My favorite chapter: "Disciple High-Capacity Givers." This is where Orwellian doublethink goes wild. Here is where we institutionalize the precise favoritism that is condemned in the book of James (and later on pages 144 through 147 they explain why James doesn't apply). "Again, we want to emphasize that this is not a secret strategy for raising more money to fund your next project. Our suggestion that you begin discipling the most financially blessed people in your church is not a plan to get access to their money." But when it comes to getting their money, "...each challenge can be overcome by thoughtful planning." (page 120) So, I've got to keep it in my head that this is not about getting that rich person's money while I'm being told how to plot and plan to get that rich person's money. Classic Orwellian doublethink. They both can't be true, but they're both true. If this isn't a secret plan, then why not give that rich person a copy of this book and tell him or her to get in touch when they want to give?" Frequently, both wealthy people and their children don't know the motives and intentions of people seeking a relationship with them." (page 123) This book makes sure of that. And, tracking money reveals ministry opportunities. "Changes in giving patterns almost always represent an opportunity for ministry, and we believe it is critical that churches use the power that comes from tracking giving to observe those changes and uncover those opportunities." (page 139) So, if I've been regularly giving a certain amount per month and I start giving less, pastor Lovebucks will give me a call seeing if I'm OK (page 147), and I'll never know it's because a programmed software filter flagged me for attention. It's great to know that someone cares. OK, credit where credit is due. "The reality is that most seminary training simplifies teaching on stewardship and generosity by implying that church financial management consists of compelling people to give to the church and then letting the paid staff decide how to use that money." (page 128) Well, thanks for telling me that traditional seminaries teach pastors to do the opposite of what Paul wrote about giving in 2 Corinthians 9:7. The way to be more transparent about money is to be less transparent. "If the church is to attract the interest of generous givers, it must learn to become more financially transparent..." (page 138). "A viable alternative, or supplement, to presenting a traditional budget is telling stories of life-changing impact." So that's why so many megachurches do yearly financial reports that don't really tell where the money went, but they make you feel so good. Finally, generosity is the new evangelism. Here the pastor is taught to make as big a media circus out of giving as possible. "This weekend is so full of vision and celebration that members of Community Christian invite their friends and neighbors to the experience to they can

witness firsthand the hundreds of thousands of dollars that are given away -- all in a single weekend." (page 170). "Then be sure to capture the service on video as it unfolds. Just consider what would happen if your church's generosity prevented a family from losing its home to foreclosure, helped a single mom feed her kids, or helped a recovering addict pay for a treatment program." (page 171) So much for Jesus: "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." (Matthew 6:2) This book practically schools pastors in how to be hypocrites. This book is a sort of source document for a lot of mega-church teaching today. I'm not a pastor, but I'm glad I read it because now I know what many other mega-church pastors are being taught by an invisible web of behind-the-scenes consulting firms that they are spending their flock's money on, without the sheep knowing. I think every Christian should read this so we can know what is being done to us: endless conniving and chicanery by our supposed spiritual leaders who have been taught that it is a virtue to be obsessed with our money. I've decided that for the foreseeable future I'm giving money directly to the poor, and all those "generosity" consultants and their pastor clients can fund the kingdom (whatever kingdom that is) themselves. I bought a used hard copy so that nobody made money off this copy other than someone selling used books. I am now immune to "contagious generosity."

I use this book to teach future ministers and they love it. I also use it to coach Church Boards and the successes are making believers become tithers.

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