

7 Indispensable Ways to Build Generosity

Into the DNA of Your Church





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Innovation is key to Faithlife's growth. In the last few years, we've expanded from our flagship software product, Logos Bible Software, to a variety of tools to complement your faith and Bible study experience. In June of 2011, we launched Faithlife Ebooks, a Christian ebook store and ereader app. In 2012, we released Faithlife Proclaim Church Presentation Software along with the Faithlife Study Bible and faithlife.com, a social network that allows Christians from all over the world to connect and share ideas online.

Most recently, we've launched an entire suite of church administrative tools including Faithlife Sites, Faithlife Sermons, Faithlife TV, Faithlife Giving, and more! And we're still just getting started.

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Introduction

Your church’s DNA will set your church’s agenda. It’s no accident that the term “DNA” is often used to describe elements at the core of a church’s identity. Think about what DNA does in your body. Every cell has a DNA molecule that contains a code with instructions for everything of consequence—from how you grow to how you reproduce. Your body behaves in a way consistent with your DNA.

Your church also behaves in a way consistent with its DNA. You don’t need to create this DNA either. It’s already there. Hidden in the hearts of the people who make up your church are the instructions that build your church. You may not like all the instructions, but they’re already there, concealed in what your church does habitually. That’s why there’s nothing more important than developing your church’s DNA and ensuring it matches up with God’s heartbeat defined by his Word.

No one characteristic will represent all of your church’s DNA, but generosity is undoubtedly one of the most important because it’s at the heart of the gospel. God’s generous love—demonstrated supremely by Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross—should compel us to act generously toward others.

To understand how vital generosity is for your church’s DNA, consider what your church will look like if generosity isn’t built into the hearts of the people. When your church doesn’t have a generous DNA, you’ll constantly need to have awkward conversations about money because people won’t give otherwise. Your budget will be continuously under-funded. Your church’s relationships will be starved because the generous love of God won’t be their foundation.

Building generosity into your church’s DNA requires generous habits. This guide describes seven that will transform your church’s DNA and ensure your church community lives generously—without nagging your people about giving.

Model Generosity through Church Leadership

Your most important lessons will always be caught, not taught. Generous pastors lead generous churches. To build generosity into your church's DNA, start by taking a long hard look at your habits.

- **Are you giving consistently and sacrificially to fulfill the mission of the church?**
- **Are you generous with your time, or do you check out when it's time to clock out?**
- **Are you regularly looking for opportunities to be generous with your time, talent, and treasure?**

At its heart, generosity isn't about fulfilling your church's mission. It's about spiritual formation. Jesus tells us unapologetically in Matthew 6:21, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Leading people to be generous out of genuine conviction plays a part in developing a Christlike heart. Your congregation needs to know you understand this—not just at a head level but at a heart level.

To model generosity, you must do more than practice it regularly. You must communicate what you're doing to those you lead. Yes, it can feel awkward, but challenge yourself to push past those feelings. To lead a church with a generous DNA, your congregation must see and experience your generosity.

Practice Corporate Generosity Quarterly

Generosity isn't limited to individual opportunities. When your church demonstrates generosity corporately, it builds synergy and accountability within your congregation and shows your community what you value. Try to plan a quarterly experience where you give to your community without expecting anything in return. With four a year, you can try multiple types of projects to engage more people in your church and the community.

Here are a few ideas.

- **Host an annual “serve day” in your community where you perform acts of kindness together as a church family.**
- **Take an offering to meet a specific community need outside of your church. Pay off medical debt for people who can't afford to do so. Pay unpaid school lunch debt for local kids.**
- **Raise money to meet a need on the mission field (either local or international).**
- **Mobilize small groups to do acts of service in their neighborhoods.**
- **Challenge your church to become eligible to be foster parents in your community.**

Planning activities like these will show your congregation (and your community) that your church values generosity and sees it as a regular part of the Christian life. As your congregation “practices” generosity through these activities, they'll get hooked!

Preach on Generosity (at Least) Annually

Your church's pulpit is the rudder that forms the direction of the church. You can't build generosity into the DNA of your church without emphasizing it in your preaching. Make sure you regularly teach the biblical foundations of generosity. Once again, it's not just about finances. It's about aligning your congregation's heart with the heart of Jesus.

Consider planning two short sermon series each year about generosity. Center the first one around financial management built on biblical teaching about how to be generous with money. Your second series can touch on generosity more broadly. Ideally, align these series around the corporate generosity projects mentioned earlier. Help your people get a vision for not only what Scripture says about generosity but also what it looks like for a Christ-follower to live out those principles.

Real-life testimonies of people who have grown in generosity and those who have been the recipients of it will help bring your teaching to life. Be sure the diversity of your testimonies matches your congregation's diversity (and that of your community, if possible). Focus on socioeconomic diversity so your congregation learns that generosity is something anyone can practice, regardless of income.

Offer Regular Small Group Studies Related to Generosity

While biblical preaching can help your congregation understand the doctrinal reasons for generosity, small group discussions will further build these principles into their lives. For more focused synergy with your small groups and preaching, encourage your small groups to teach this topic at the same time church leaders are preaching it from the stage.

Also, if you're going to connect preaching about generosity to small groups, be aware that this may increase requests for counseling. Through discussion, people may come face to face with debt for the first time. If possible, train long-time, generous church members to provide financial counseling during this churchwide focus on generosity.

There are plenty of great resources on generosity on the market. There is generally no need to create your own. Look for curriculum that not only reinforces your church's doctrinal convictions on generosity but also encourages discussion on the topic.

These small group studies shouldn't always focus on financial generosity. Make sure to mix in other small group studies that broaden the discussion on the topic.





Make Giving Easy through Technology

It's hard enough for your congregation to be generous with their money. Technology should help make the process easier by giving people opportunities to give quickly wherever (and whenever) God inspires them to do so.

Your people are accustomed to making financial transactions on their computers and their smartphones, regardless of your church's location and demographics. Technology is how they pay bills, buy groceries, and make travel arrangements. Don't make your church go through the effort of writing out a check or dropping cash in the offering plate to be generous in your church's context.

Most people spend five hours a day on their smartphones. Whatever digital giving solution you have, ensure you have a top-notch mobile option. Blend your digital options into your weekly "giving moment" at your church by telling and showing people how to give on their mobile devices during the worship service.



Regularly Tie Giving to Your Church's Vision

Stories communicate your DNA more than anything else you do. Ensure you are regularly sharing stories about what God is doing through your church. Share them as part of your worship services—or better yet, ask church members to share their stories. Show them on videos. Print them in your bulletin. Include them on your website. No matter how you do it, make sure you're regularly telling God's story and the story of generosity at your church.

Focus on the stories that show your fulfillment of God's unique vision for your church. If God has called your church to be a teaching church, tell stories about how God is changing lives as people apply biblical teaching. If God has called you to focus on social justice, share stories of justice accomplished. If you're an evangelistic church, share stories of people reached with the good news. Your stories will define you—make sure you define them in a way consistent with your vision.

Once you're telling stories regularly, include a simple sentence or two in each one that ties God's work to the faithfulness of his people. People want to know that their corporate gifts will do more significant work than what they can do individually. They already hear those messages from nonprofits asking them to give to their causes. You can help them connect the dots by tying your church's stories to their giving, too.

Set ‘Faith’ Goals

In the business world, you’ll often hear the term “stretch goals.” It’s a simple idea. Set a goal that’s tough to accomplish but will motivate those you lead to put in extra effort and “stretch themselves.” Technology CEOs often lean into stretch goals to push their organizations forward to places no one thought possible.

Your church should have a different motivation for setting stretch goals. Pushing your church to places where it has to trust God isn’t just good management. It’s what God has called us to do. Hebrews 11:6 reminds us, “Without faith it is impossible to please [God].” If you’re setting giving goals that your church can accomplish on its own, you’re setting your sights too low. Instead, set “faith goals”—goals that can only be accomplished if God steps in to do the impossible.

Whatever giving goal you feel like setting for the next quarter, the following year, or your next capital campaign, take it up a notch. If you feel comfortable with your goal, raise it. When you’re convinced you’re preparing your church to fail miserably, you’ve likely found the right number.

How do “faith goals” build generosity into your church’s DNA? They tell your church that biblical generosity ultimately has a foundation of faith. That message won’t just resonate in your church’s offering plate or your bottom line. You’ll soon see it take root in everything your church community does—whether it’s meeting a need in a neighbor’s life, participating in a mission trip, or tackling an impossible ministry endeavor.

Conclusion

These seven habits are the foundation of a generous church. Build them into how your church does ministry, and you’ll see your church’s DNA change. And as people begin to discover the joy of giving, you’ll be able to embrace the future into which God has called your church.



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