



**CANADIAN
BAPTISTS**
of Ontario
and Quebec

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

GENEROSITY

All of life. All we have. All we are.



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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Welcome to this study on whole-life generosity! Over the next five weeks you will be invited into the joy of giving from a place of trust, surrender and peace. So much of our lives can be characterized by anxiety, fear and a sense of scarcity. Most of the time we are so busy giving all of ourselves to everyone that we don't stop to examine where these feelings are coming from. What drives our giving? What cultivates generosity that flows from freedom and joy? Take this opportunity to journey from Genesis to Revelation with friends, wrestle with new ideas, and begin practices that cultivate deep-down abundance and joy-filled giving.

Generosity leads us down a good and life-giving path. It begins with trusting that God is our generous host. Once we begin to trust: Relationships deepen with God and others, gratitude clears the way to focus on the right thing and surrender ends the fight to hold on to everything. Finally we are free to joyfully release ourselves to God's purpose and extend God's blessing to the world.

In a culture that often makes us feel like we are giving to everyone and everything beyond our capacity, may this study bring you peace, freedom and a new way to give.



GROUP EXPECTATIONS

Take a couple minutes during the first study to go through the group expectations together.

- We want everyone in this group to feel safe and comfortable sharing and learning together. Cultivate this atmosphere by listening well to one another and keeping everything that is shared confidential.
- Be willing to participate in the group discussion. There is no 'right' answer that you have to find somewhere in the text. Approach each passage with genuine curiosity, wonder and critical thinking skills. If you disagree - that's ok! If you have another insight, share it. Honest discussion is what makes a study like this rich and valuable.
- As much as possible, keep the scripture itself at the centre of your comments and discussions. What do you see in the words themselves that is interesting? How does it reflect on life? What are the feelings, impressions and thoughts that come to mind as you hear it being read? Staying focussed on the text, as opposed to outside sources of information, helps everyone engage equally.
- Are you doing all the talking? None of the talking? Be self-aware in order to keep the conversation engaging and helpful. Everyone has something to contribute!
- Commit to doing the generosity practices each week and being willing to share about your experience. Our faith is not just an intellectual pursuit. It is a practice we cultivate together.

WEEK ONE: THE GENEROUS HOST

Catching Up: Take a few minutes to have everyone introduce themselves and what brought them to this group.

Video: Bible Project: *Generosity*

Study Texts: Genesis 2:4-15, 3:1-7, John 2:1-12

Introduction:

Creation is an expression of God's generous love. He is the host and we are the lucky guests. We don't have to worry about whether or not there will be enough because God has abundantly provided for our needs.

Even though we know this is true, it doesn't always seem true. Most of the time it doesn't feel like there is enough of anything - time, money, kindness, clean air. Anxiety characterizes much of our life and poverty is a reality for many people in the world. So, how do we live authentically in this tension?

The story we find in Scripture tells us that our scarcity problem began in the garden with Adam and Eve. The serpent convinces them that God is not really a good and generous host and that they must take matters into their own hands - which they do. This gives birth to generations that cultivate inequality, jealousy, and injustice. The rest of scripture can be read as God's answer to this human condition of distrust and greed. Over the next five weeks you are invited to wrestle with the idea of God as a generous host, challenge the worldview you hold and be shaped by the very words and ideas that shaped Jesus. What would our lives look like if deep down we believed that there is more than enough for everyone - including us.

Group Discussion:

THE GENEROUS HOST

Read Genesis 2:4-15 together.

- What are your first observations? Any surprises?
- In what way does this passage support or negate the idea of God as a generous host?
- In what ways have you experienced this to be true about God?

IS GOD REALLY A GENEROUS HOST? THE LIE OF SCARCITY

Read Genesis 3:1-7 together.

- The serpent introduces the idea that God might not be so generous after all. Why do you think this tactic worked on Eve?
- In what ways do you see this lie being worked out today?
- How have you struggled with the lie that there might not actually be “enough” - whether that’s time, money, love etc.?

JOHN 2:1-12—THE GENEROUS HOST REAPPEARS

Read John 2:1-12 together.

Choose one of the characters in the story and put yourself in their shoes. Have someone read the Scripture again and as they do, imagine yourself in it. What do you see? What do you hear? What is going through your mind? What do you feel? Take turns sharing your observations with the group.

Take a moment and reflect on the idea of Jesus as a generous host. What does this mean to you? How does this relate to your struggle with scarcity?

Wrapping up

- What is your one take-away from this discussion? Or, what do you sense God saying to you?
- What is one question you will continue to ponder or idea you will continue to wrestle with?
- How do you sense God calling you to respond this week?

Generosity Practice for the Week Ahead:

Henri Nouwen writes “Oh, if we could sit for just one half hour a day doing nothing except taking a simple word or phrase from the Bible and holding it in our heart and mind. “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1 NRSV). Say it three times. We know it’s not true, because we want many things. That is exactly why we’re so nervous. But if we keep saying the truth, the real truth - “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” — and let that truth descend from our minds into our hearts, gradually those words will be written on the walls of our inner holy place.” (Henri Nouwen in *A Spirituality for Living*). Practice this breath prayer every morning and every evening this week. Sit quietly on the edge of your bed. Shut your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Say the phrase, in your head or out loud, pausing to take note of the thoughts that rush into your mind when you’ve said it. Imagine gathering all of those thoughts and gently offering them to God. Then repeat the phrase. Do this 3-5 times each morning and evening. Be prepared to share how it went next week.

Prayer

WEEK TWO: RELATIONSHIP

Catching up: How did last week's breath prayer practice go?

Video: *Relationship*

Study Texts: Genesis 12-13:2 and Matt 4:1-11

Introduction:

God's solution to humanity's struggle with scarcity was to give God's self. This is the greatest act of generosity! God comes to the struggling world first through Israel and then through Jesus and now, because of Jesus, through the Spirit-empowered church. Generosity begins in relationship with our generous God who made us in God's image.

Unfortunately our relationship with God was wounded. We struggle to trust that God is fully on our side. So instead of trusting, receiving and giving, we take and boast which leads to heartache and suffering.

The beauty in all of this is that God works in the midst of our pain to bring transformation and life and to gently show us that God alone is trustworthy. All is a gift. When we suffer from the scarcity induced by our broken systems, by evil and by our own sin, God continues to offer us God's self as a gift to bring us back into abundance. God does this to the extent of coming to live with us in the very midst of our scarcity.

Group Discussion:

GOD OFFERS TO BLESS THE WORLD BY BLESSING ABRAM

Read Genesis 12:1-9

- What does this story tell us about God?
- What does this story tell us about Abram?
- Abram and Sarai go to Egypt

Read Genesis 12:10-20

- Do you think Abram was justified in heading to Egypt? Explain why or why not. What would you have done?
- What does this part of the story tell us about God?
- What does this part of the story tell us about being human?

JESUS SHOWS US HOW TO TRUST GOD IN THE WILDERNESS

Read Matt 4:1-11

- What do you think fasting for 40 days in the Judean wilderness would be like?
- How do Jesus' temptations compare to Abram's temptations in the wilderness and in Egypt?
- Describe what stands out to you about Jesus' response.

Wrapping up

- What is your one take-away from this discussion?
Or, what do you sense God saying to you?
- What is one question you will continue to ponder
or idea you will continue to wrestle with?
- How do you sense God calling you to respond this
week?

Generosity Practice for the Week Ahead:

Fasting—Fasting is a spiritual discipline Christians are called to practice on a regular basis. We don't fast to beat ourselves up or be better people. We fast to practice trusting in God. As we release our grip on the things or practices we have come to rely on for our sense of wellbeing, we face our great fear of scarcity. We feel the gnawing hunger. We are tempted to take matters into our own hands. We also identify with those who face scarcity without choice and we reach towards God's promise. Without fail God enters the space that fasting opens up in us. Our generosity grows as we deepen our relationship and trust in our generous provider. Choose something to give up this week. It might be a meal, it might be meat, it might be Netflix. Take the time you would normally spend on that thing and devote it to a time of prayer and quiet reflection. It might be helpful to journal your observations—how you feel, what you are thinking, what you hear God speaking to you. Come prepared to share some of these things next week.

Prayer





WEEK THREE: GRATITUDE

Catching Up: How did last week's fasting practice go?

Video: *Gratitude*

Study Text: Luke 1:46-56

Introduction:

Gratitude defeats the lie of scarcity by re-shaping the way we see things. Gratitude acknowledges that God is the loving giver and we are the beloved recipients. It focuses on the “enough” and opens our eyes to the abundance of the in-breaking Kingdom.

The problem is that we tend to take credit for the good stuff in our lives. The flip side of this is that we believe that our security and wellbeing depend entirely on us. This leads us to take, hoard and control rather than give, distribute and release.

Nevertheless, it is often in the midst of our perceived scarcity, our stress and even our poverty that God demonstrates generosity to us. This may come in the form of provision and it may come in the form of an invitation to participate in what God is doing. As we learn to acknowledge these gifts and say “Thank you” we begin to cultivate a spirit of gratitude that leads to abundance and generosity.

Group Discussion:

MARY'S SONG OF GRATITUDE AND PRAISE

Read Luke 1:46-56

- What does this passage tell us about Mary?
- What are some of the main themes you hear?
- Compare and contrast this song of praise to the songs of praise we sing in church today. Where are there similarities? Differences?
- What does Mary's life and song teach us about generosity?

Many of the phrases in Mary's song are borrowed from other women's songs in the Hebrew Scriptures such as Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:10. This suggests that Mary knew these songs of gratitude and praise by heart. Tell us a story about a time something from the past popped into your head at just the right time to encourage and strengthen you.

- Have you ever memorized scripture or intentionally practiced gratitude? Tell us about that experience.

Wrapping up

- What is your one take-away from this discussion? Or, what do you sense God saying to you?
- What is one question you will continue to ponder or idea you will continue to wrestle with?
- How do you sense God calling you to respond this week?

Generosity Practice for the Week Ahead:

Practicing gratitude over and over—Studies have shown that practicing gratitude on a daily basis can actually rewire our brains for greater resilience, health and joy. Mary's song suggests to us that she regularly practiced gratitude as she meditated on the goodness of God. There are many ways that we too can practice gratitude: Journalling, naming five things we're grateful for before bed, praying before meals, or hikes, or concerts, or other experiences that demonstrate God's goodness to us. Or, like Mary, we can memorize parts of scripture or songs of praise and repeat them as prayers throughout our day. Choose one (or all!) of these ideas and intentionally practice being thankful this week. Come prepared to share what that was like for you when we meet again next week.

Prayer

WEEK FOUR: SURRENDER AND TRUST

Catching Up: How did your gratitude practice go last week?

Video: *Surrender and Trust*

Study Texts: Matthew 6:25-34, Romans 8:31-39

Introduction:

Jesus teaches us that we can surrender and trust ourselves to God because God knows what we need and will provide more than enough for us. He points to things in creation, like the birds and the flowers, to show that we do not have to worry.

And yet, we worry. It is difficult to trust Jesus' teaching in a world marked by environmental degradation and poverty. It can also be hard to trust Jesus when our own lives feel so overwhelming. It is hard to trust Jesus' words when God has disappointed us while blessing others.

Jesus' life itself speaks to our struggle. Jesus lived in a context of poverty, oppression and great inequality yet his worldview was shaped by the Hebrew Scriptures and his deep relationship with the Father. What seems like naiveté or foolishness was actually the powerful truth at the core of the gospel: that not even poverty, betrayal and death—the scarcity we fear most of all—can separate us from the abundance of life that God offers us. Where evil and greed destroy, love always resurrects.

Group Discussion:

DO NOT WORRY

Read Matt 6:25-34

- Paraphrase this passage in your own words. What is Jesus saying?
- What does this passage tell us about who God is?
- What does this passage tell us about people?
- How did Jesus model this teaching in his own life?
- “Seek first the Kingdom” can also be described as being preoccupied with the Kingdom. What do you think this looks like?
- What does this have to do with generosity?

Read Romans 8:31-38

- In what ways do these verses speak to the discussion that we've been having?

Wrapping up

- What is your one take-away from this discussion? Or, what do you sense God saying to you?
- What is one question you will continue to ponder or idea you will continue to wrestle with?
- How do you sense God calling you to respond this week?

Generosity Practice for the Week Ahead:

Throughout the last few weeks we have been working on deepening our relationship with God, building trust and fighting the lie of scarcity. All of these practices allow the Spirit to transform us into a people characterized by peace and generosity rather than worry and fear. This week's practice invites us to be preoccupied with God's Kingdom. One of the best ways to do this is by joining in the work that God is doing to bring his Kingdom to earth. As an individual, couple or family take some time this week to learn more about one of the organizations that you give to. This might be a charity, your church or a missionary. Set aside time to read their newsletter or stories on their web-site. Next take some time to pray for them. Finally, write an encouraging note or an email letting them know why you give to them and how you have just prayed. Consider including a gift that goes above and beyond your regular donation with this note. If you do not currently practice giving in this way, ask God how he is inviting you to seek first the Kingdom. Maybe the invitation is to give away some of your money. Or maybe it is to give something else—like friendship, compassion or time. All of us are invited to participate in Jesus' Kingdom. Come prepared to share about this experience of "Seeking first the Kingdom" with the group next week.

Prayer



WEEK FIVE: BLESSING

Catching Up: How did your 'Seek first the Kingdom' practice go last week?

Video: *Blessing*

Study Texts: Revelation 19:1-9; 21:1-4, 22-27, 22:1-5 and 2 Corinthians 8:1-7

Introduction:

In order to show everyone that there truly is enough God continues to offer himself to the world through his people. That's us! As we enter into a deeper relationship of trust with God, as we practice gratitude and as we allow our worldview to be shaped by Jesus we collectively show the world what a good and generous host God is. The Spirit empowers us to live such whole, abundant and generous lives that everyone in the world will be clamouring to get in on this Kingdom party. Through us, the church, this will continue until absolutely everyone is around the table.

Of course, it doesn't always look like this is happening. Even if we follow Jesus with counter-cultural surrender our lives don't always appear attractive to the world.

Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God often looks unremarkable. It looks like a tiny mustard seed, or like some yeast in a batch of dough. It tends to flip the way we think about things upside-down. To the world it looks like absolute foolishness, but to those hungry for life who get a little taste, it all begins to make sense. The church is not the Kingdom of God, but we offer glimpses and tastes of the in-breaking Kingdom as we are drawn closer to God and partner with the Spirit. Though it may not always look like it, a revolution of blessing is quietly growing as we await Christ's return - and nothing can stop it from overtaking the whole world.

Group Discussion:

THE PARTY WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO

Read Revelation 19:1-9

This scene describes the beginning of a great party - the greatest party the universe has ever experienced. Describe one of the best celebrations you've ever experienced. It doesn't have to be a party - it could be a sports event, or a concert or something else. What made it so amazing?

What seems to be making the party in Revelation 19 so amazing?

Read Revelation 21:1-4, 22-27 and 22:1-5.

- Remember God's promise to Abraham (Gen 12:2-3)? The Bible presents the realization of that blessing in these verses we just read. Describe some of the aspects of blessing that you see in this passage. Who is being blessed? How are they being blessed?
- Revelation 22:1-5 describes the restoration of Eden and the place where we will all eventually live. What is similar about this renewed Eden? What is different?
- After reading these passages, how would you describe the Christian hope for the future in a nutshell? What are we looking forward to?

THE PARTY HAS ALREADY STARTED

Jesus taught his followers that with his arrival, the great party at the end of time was already getting started and they were invited to co-host it with him. Co-hosting this party looked like being a servant (hosts serve their guests!) and being willing to give their lives with joy and generosity for the benefit of the world. After all, this is a global party. Read 2 Cor. 8:1-7 (the apostle Paul's letter to his Corinthian friends) with this idea in mind.

- In what ways are the Macedonians being an example of generous party co-hosts?
- We learn in 8:2 that the Macedonians are facing some hard times. What enables the Macedonians to act so generously?
- What would it look like if all the Christians in your neighbourhood saw themselves as co-hosts invited, along with Jesus, to get the Revelation 19 party started? Or, what would it look like if all the Christians in your neighbourhood prioritized demonstrating the generosity of God to their community? What kinds of things might you see?

Wrapping up

- What is your one take-away from this discussion? Or, what do you sense God saying to you?
- What is one question you will continue to ponder or idea you will continue to wrestle with?
- How do you sense God calling you to respond this week?

Generosity practice for the week ahead:

Brainstorm a way you might serve your community, together with your small group, next week during this time. Together with your group leader, make a plan. Be sure to debrief after you gather to discuss what you experienced and what you've learned about whole life generosity over the past five weeks.

Prayer





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