

Five Practices – Extravagant Generosity  
a guide for group leaders

Robert Schnase

Abingdon Press

Nashville

FIVE PRACTICES – EXTRAVAGANT GENEROSITY:  
A GUIDE FOR GROUP LEADERS

*Copyright © 2008 by Robert Schnase*

All rights reserved.

While you may use and format this content within the program, Focus on the Five Practices Congregation-Wide Initiative, the material is not to be further distributed or sold without permission from the publisher. Requests for permission can be addressed to Abingdon Press, P.O. Box 801, 201 Eighth Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37202-0801, or e-mailed to [permissions@abingdonpress.com](mailto:permissions@abingdonpress.com).

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

## **Contents**

Welcome

Before You Begin

Session 1: What Does the Bible Say?

Session 2: What Is Extravagant Generosity?

Session 3: What Can We Do?

Session 4: Creating a Plan

## Welcome

Dear Leader,

Thank you for your commitment to provide leadership in this time of conversation and planning. What you are doing is extraordinarily important to the life of your congregation. Vibrant, fruitful, growing congregations practice Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Faith Development, Risk-Taking Mission and Service, and Extravagant Generosity. These fundamental activities are so critical to fulfilling the mission of the church that failure to practice them in an exemplary way leads to congregational decline. These Five Practices are interconnected, and all are essential. By repeating, improving, and deepening these practices, congregations fulfill their mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Your group will be focusing specifically on the practice of Extravagant Generosity in your congregation. Throughout the next few weeks, you will ask, “How are we doing in inspiring, teaching, and modeling joyous and consistent giving? And how could we do better?” Perhaps your congregation already does many things well, and some things very well. Even so, let me invite you to strive for excellence and greater fruitfulness and to open yourself to exploring and learning how to do better. If you will encourage the group to have an attitude of openness and expectancy, your in-depth conversations will stimulate new ideas, plans, strategies, and actions that will lead to long-term congregational change and growth.

During the next few weeks, pray for the members of your group, asking God to open your hearts and minds to new learnings and possibilities for your church. Model and encourage a willingness to share honestly, listen carefully, think creatively, and plan courageously with the other members of the group. Encourage participants to attend every gathering, listen to others, learn from examples, and boldly offer new ideas. Commit yourself and your church to offering your utmost and highest for the purposes of ministry in Christ’s name. Enjoy doing ministry in the Spirit of Christ, and do all things to the glory of God.

Yours in Christ,

Robert Schnase  
Author, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*

## Before You Begin

During the Focus on the Five Practices initiative, it is suggested that you meet with your Planning Group for a total of four group sessions. By design, the Planning Workbook includes material for three of these four sessions. The last session is recommended as a working session in which you can review your brainstorming lists and work together to write a summary of your 3-5 best ideas—or prepare a more formal plan, if desired. You will want to allow 1 ½ - 2 hours for each session. Leader helps for all four sessions are included in this teaching guide.

Your role as leader is to facilitate the group sessions using this teaching guide and the accompanying leader DVD. Sessions 1-3 follow the same basic format (with the inclusion of video in Session 1 only):

### Suggested Format

Opening Prayer and Scripture (3-5 minutes)

Video (*Session 1 only*; 7 minutes)

Group Discussion (30 minutes)

Group Activity (15 minutes, or longer as indicated)

Brainstorming Session (30 minutes)

Closing Prayer (5-10 minutes)

Because no two groups are alike, feel free to make adjustments to this format as necessary to meet the needs of your particular group. (Note: The times indicated within parentheses are merely estimates. You may move at a faster or slower pace, making adjustments as necessary to fit your schedule.) You are strongly encouraged, however, to make prayer and the reading of God's Word a part of *every* group session. Use the opening prayers provided or say your own. Or, to encourage participation, you might invite different group members to open the session in prayer. After the opening prayer, read aloud the printed Scripture verses to center and focus everyone's attention and remind participants of the biblical foundation for your conversation and planning. A time of prayer is also recommended for the close of each session, with participants breaking into small groups of 3-4 to pray specifically about the ideas discussed during the session.

To prepare for the group sessions, you will want to...

- Watch the video segments on the Extravagant Generosity DVD including the introduction and conclusion summary videos.
- Look over the session outlines in this teaching guide.
- Read the material and answer the questions for each session in the Planning Workbook prior to the group session—*and remind participants to do the same.* (Your group sessions will be much more productive if participants complete the sessions in the Planning Workbook in advance.)
- Choose a meeting space that will comfortably accommodate the size of your group.
- Secure a TV and DVD player (needed only for Session 1) and a board/chart and markers.
- Pray for your group!

The importance of prayer to the fruitfulness of your Planning Group cannot be overemphasized. Before and during each group session, ask God to guide your conversation and planning time and to open your hearts and minds to new ideas and possibilities. Remember, the group will follow your lead, so be sure to demonstrate openness, honesty, and creativity as you share with the group.

Here are a few helpful hints for facilitating group discussion:

- Communicate the importance of group discussion and encourage participation of all group members.
- Don't be afraid of a little silence. If no one responds at first, venture an answer yourself. Then ask for comments and other responses.
- Encourage multiple answers or responses before moving on.
- Ask "Why?" or "Why do you believe that?" to help continue a discussion and give it greater depth.
- Affirm others' responses with comments such as, "Great" or "Thanks" or "Good insight"—especially if this is the first time someone has spoken during the group session.
- Give everyone a chance to talk, but keep the conversation moving. Moderate to prevent a few individuals from doing all of the talking.
- Remember that you do not have to have all the answers. Your job is to keep the discussion going and encourage participation.
- Stay positive. Don't let honest sharing turn into a gripe session. Celebrate "what's right" and focus on future possibilities.

Now, you're ready to begin!

## Session 1: What Does the Bible Say?

### Opening Prayer and Scripture (3-5 minutes)

*O God, we have received your extravagant generosity through the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to show generosity to others remembering that we have received through your grace, this amazing gift. Teach us to be a giving church that practices Extravagant Generosity so that we may reach more and more people into the body of Christ—not for our own selfish pride, Lord, but for your glory alone. Amen.*

Read the following Scriptures aloud:

*“Honor the LORD with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce.” (Proverbs 3:9)*

*“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)*

*“You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us.” (2 Corinthians 9:11)*

*“. . . they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.” (Acts 2:45)*

(Post the Scriptures on a board or chart for all to see throughout the session.)

### Video (7 minutes)

Play the introductory video on Extravagant Generosity. After the video, remind participants of your purpose over the next few weeks: to think strategically about how to improve, expand, and deepen your congregation’s practice of Extravagant Generosity through real action, changes in existing ministries, and initiatives into new ministries.

### Group Discussion (30 minutes)

Select from the following questions those you would like your group to discuss. Depending on your style of leadership, you may wish to record helpful responses on a board or chart.

- ∞ Review the focus Scriptures for this session. What do these verses teach us about giving and generosity? Which verse is most significant to you—“speaks” most loudly to you? Why?
- ∞ In your own words, how would you define or explain *generosity*? What is the difference you see between the act of giving and the characteristic of generosity?
- ∞ Why do you think we sometimes are reluctant in giving? Are some situations or circumstances more problematic than others?
- ∞ As Christians, what should be our motivation for showing generosity?
- ∞ What is the connection between grace and generosity? Servanthood and generosity?
- ∞ What happens—to us and to others—when we give freely and joyfully?
- ∞ Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-12 aloud. How would behavior change in our congregation if everyone took these words seriously? How would “sowing bountifully” affect us?

- ∞ In the early church, extravagance was described as selling all the possessions of the community and giving to the widows, orphans, sick, and poor. What might Extravagant Generosity look like today—in our church, our community, and beyond?

### **Group Activity (15 minutes)**

Divide the group into small groups of 2-3. Ask the groups to think about how each person has experienced God's extravagant generosity in his or her own life. List specific and tangible ways each person has seen this generosity. Using that list, think of specific ways that we could respond to our gifts by giving to others.

### **Brainstorming Session (30 minutes)**

Remind participants of the "rules" of brainstorming:

- There are no right or wrong responses; every response is valid.
- Do not discuss or critique ideas at this time.
- Write all ideas on a chart (to be kept for future reference).

Brainstorm ideas in response to the following questions. Some of the questions appear in some form in the Planning Workbook (see session Planning Sheets). Invite participants to share the ideas they have recorded in their Planning Workbooks, as well as any new ideas they may have.

- ∞ When do you first remember learning about giving to others? Who first modeled generosity for you?
- ∞ What did you learn from that experience about giving? What were the benefits for the people or person receiving your gift? What were the benefits you felt as the giver?
- ∞ Based on the group's experience, list three or four things that you know are important in generous giving.
- ∞ Now, how are these are part of our congregation's giving?
- ∞ In our congregation, where are people taught about giving and generosity? Are children, youth, and adults taught, inspired, and encouraged to give in multiple settings? How could we do better?
- ∞ How are stories about giving shared in worship, announcements, bulletins, or other places? How could we do better?
- ∞ Think about the coming weeks. Is there one thing we could do right away to raise awareness of giving opportunities in our congregation?

Allow a few minutes at the end of your Brainstorming Session to identify those ideas you would like to discuss and explore in your final planning session. Put a star beside each one.

### **Closing Prayer (5-10 minutes)**

Divide into groups of 3-4 people and pray together about improving the practice of Extravagant Generosity in your congregation. Pray for individuals and families within the church; classes, groups, and ministry teams; and the congregation as a whole. Suggest that

those who are uncomfortable praying spontaneously in a group may pray the focus Scripture verses, personalizing the verses as they choose. For example:

*Remind us, LORD, to honor you always with our gifts and the many fruits of our lives.*

*Thank you, God, for the extravagant gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, you came to offer us new life.*

*We give you thanks, O God, for enriching us through our giving. May we practice generosity to glorify you.*

*Teach us, Lord, to take what we have and give to those who are in need.*

Tell the groups they may adjourn at the conclusion of their prayer time together.

## Session 2: What Is Extravagant Generosity?

### Opening Prayer and Scripture (3-5 minutes)

*Gracious and Loving God, you call us to joyful giving and a freedom from too much attention to possessions. Strengthen us for the hard work of being honest and open with ourselves and each other as we seek to practice Christ-centered generosity. Help us learn to give from our hearts. It is in your name we pray. Amen.*

Read the following Scriptures aloud:

*“For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints.” (2 Corinthians 8:3-4)*

*“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” (Luke 12:15)*

*“And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (Luke 12:20b)*

(Post the Scriptures on a board or chart for all to see throughout the session.)

### Group Discussion (30 minutes)

Select from the following questions those you would like your group to discuss. Depending on your style of leadership, you may wish to record helpful responses on a board or chart.

- ∞ Review the focus Scriptures for this session. What do these verses teach us about generosity? Which verse is most significant to you—“speaks” most loudly to you this week? Why?
- ∞ What is *Extravagant Generosity*? How is it different from ordinary generosity?
- ∞ In the Planning Workbook, the practice of *Extravagant Generosity* is described as “the Christian’s unselfish willingness to give in order to make a positive difference for the purposes of Christ.” Unpack this definition word by word together. (unselfish, willingness, to make a difference, a positive difference, for the purposes of Christ)
- ∞ How are churches characterized by Extravagant Generosity different from other churches? How you seen examples?
- ∞ In the Planning Workbook, we read, “Happiness based on possessions causes people to pursue a receding goal, leaving them dissatisfied, wanting more, and never able to satiate their desires.” What do you think about this? Do you see this in your own life or the people around you?
- ∞ How well are we doing at teaching the importance of stewardship and the Christian’s need to give? What are our strengths? Where do we need to improve?
- ∞ Does our church tend to do things the way they’ve always been done? How willing are we to embrace change and new ideas?
- ∞ What does it mean for a congregation to strive without ceasing to exceed expectations in the area of generosity?

### Group Activity (15 minutes)

Divide into two groups. Ask each group to list as many ways as they can that your congregation shows generosity to the community. Come back together and combine the

lists. Look for categories of giving or an activity that the congregation excels in and areas where more could be done.

### **Brainstorming Session (30 minutes)**

Remind participants of the “rules” of brainstorming:

- There are no right or wrong responses; every response is valid.
- Do not discuss or critique ideas at this time.
- Write all ideas on a chart (to be kept for future reference).

Brainstorm ideas in response to the following questions. Some of the questions appear in some form in the Planning Workbook (see session Planning Sheets). Invite participants to share the ideas they have recorded in their Planning Workbooks, as well as any new ideas they may have.

- ∞ What are our church’s best resources? (facility, finances, talent, location?) How are these resources shared with others? How could we do better?
- ∞ What do people in our community know about our congregation and how we interact with the community and world? What messages of generosity do you see?
- ∞ What are three simple ways that we could raise awareness in our congregation about the importance and joy of giving? What steps would be necessary to accomplish these?
- ∞ What are three ways you can think of now to increase giving and the level of gifts? How could we encourage more people to pledge and tithe?
- ∞ What benefits would tithing bring for the congregation and individuals? How could you describe those for others?

Allow a few minutes at the end of your Brainstorming Session to identify those ideas you would like to discuss and explore in your final planning session. Put a star beside each one.

### **Closing Prayer (5-10 minutes)**

Divide into groups of 3-4 people and pray together about how your congregation may reach out to strangers—those outside the community of faith—to share God’s grace and love. Pray about changes in attitudes, practices, and values that need to take place. Suggest that those who are uncomfortable praying spontaneously in a group may pray the focus Scripture verses, personalizing the verses as they choose. For example:

*Gracious God, teach us to give according to our means, and beyond, in the joy of sharing in ministry to others.*

*Remind us, O Lord, to be on our guard against greed and too much care for what we own and control.*

*Help us, Loving God, to not dwell on what is not eternal.*

Tell the groups they may adjourn at the conclusion of their prayer time together.

## Session 3: What Can We Do?

### Opening Prayer and Scripture (3-5 minutes)

*Dear God, you call us give of ourselves, our resources, and our time to others. Help us to overcome our fears and our uncertainties and give with joy and confidence. Today as we evaluate how we are doing in the practice of generosity, help us to be honest and yet optimistic and hopeful, remembering that all things are possible with Christ. It is in his name that we pray. Amen.*

Read the following Scriptures aloud:

*“Take from among you an offering to the LORD; let whoever is of a generous heart bring the LORD’s offering: gold, silver, and bronze.” (Exodus 35:5)*

*“They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.” (1 Timothy 6:18-19)*

(Post the Scriptures on a board or chart for all to see throughout the session.)

### Group Discussion (30 minutes)

Select from the following questions those you would like your group to discuss:

- ∞ Review the focus Scriptures for this session. What do these verses teach us about generosity today? Which verse is most significant to you—“speaks” most loudly to you? Why?
- ∞ If a church changes its culture one person at a time, what can we do as individuals and as a team to encourage and model the kinds of changes necessary for us to become a church that practices Extravagant Generosity?
- ∞ What can we do to make joyful giving a vital part of the culture of our church—and an expectation of every member and group?
- ∞ Review the list of efforts a congregation practicing generosity makes. How many of these efforts do we excel at in our church?
- ∞ How can we be more intentional, strategic, and frequent in the way we interact in the community and the world as a generous organization?
- ∞ To what other churches might we look to learn about how to do better with generosity, stewardship education, tithing, and financial management for members? What can we learn from them?
- ∞ How do we solicit feedback from our members about the way our church presents giving and stewardship? How might we improve in soliciting feedback?
- ∞ Do we need to launch any new ministries and/or classes aimed at including those who are new to our church? What might they “look like”?

### Group Activity (15 minutes)

Divide into groups of 3-4 participants each. Ask each group to think of at least three ways to teach, model, and inspire generous giving in programming for children, teens, young adults, adults, in women’s and men’s groups, and in small-group settings. Come back together and combine the lists. Look for ways to expand and bolster the impact of the ideas.

### Brainstorming Session (30 minutes)

Remind participants of the “rules” of brainstorming:

There are no right or wrong responses; every response is valid.  
Do not discuss or critique ideas at this time.  
Write all ideas on a chart (to be kept for future reference).

Brainstorm ideas in response to the following questions. Some of the questions appear in some form in the Planning Workbook (see session Planning Sheets). Invite participants to share the ideas they have recorded in their Planning Workbooks, as well as any new ideas they may have.

- ∞ Read aloud the quotation: “We buy things we don’t even need with money we don’t even have to impress people we don’t even know.” In our community and in our congregation, what signs do you see that there are people caught in a cycle of spending and debt?
- ∞ What can the church do to help people succeed managing their financial resources?
- ∞ List as many ways as you can recall of how your congregation encourages giving. Looking at this list, what are ways to creatively and passionately promote giving? Consider children, youth, adults, small groups, visitors, the community around the church.
- ∞ What kinds of activities could we do that, if done with excellence and consistency, would have a tremendous impact on making us a congregation that shows Extravagant Generosity? *(Tell participants they may repeat previously suggested ideas or suggest entirely new ideas. Participants identified one such activity on the session Planning Sheets in the Planning Workbook.)*
- ∞ What are some basic, reasonable changes or actions that our group, with the help of the congregation, could take on?
- ∞ What are some big, life-changing, seriously scary ideas that our group, with the help of the congregation, could take on? *(A list of possible ideas is provided in the session Planning Sheets in the Planning Workbook.)*

Allow a few minutes at the end of your Brainstorming Session to identify those ideas you would like to discuss and explore in your final planning session. Put a star beside each one.

### **Closing Prayer (5-10 minutes)**

Divide into groups of 3-4 people and pray together about how your congregation may find creative new ways to offer the welcome of Christ. Pray about specific changes or actions that your team might implement with the help of the congregation. Suggest that those who are uncomfortable praying spontaneously in a group may pray the focus Scripture verses, personalizing the verses as they choose. For example:

*Gracious God, give us generous hearts.*

*Dear Lord, help us daily to do good, to be generous, and always to be ready to share.*

Tell the groups that they may adjourn at the conclusion of their prayer time together.

## Session 4: Creating a Plan

*Note: You will want to allow more time for this final planning session—up to 2 hours.*

### Opening Prayer and Scripture (3-5 minutes)

*Dear God, for the past few weeks we have been considering the practice of Extravagant Generosity. Together we have prayed, talked, brainstormed, dreamed, and planned. We have considered the why's and the how's of sharing our resources, our selves, and the joy of giving; and we are ready now to put together a plan of action. We ask for your direction, guidance, wisdom, and blessing, acknowledging that apart from you we can bear no fruit. May all that we plan today and all that we do in the weeks and months ahead be for your glory—and yours alone. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

Read the following Scriptures from Sessions 1 and 3 aloud:

*“Honor the LORD with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce.” (Proverbs 3:9)*

*“You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us.” (2 Corinthians 9:11)*

*“They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.” (1 Timothy 6:18-19)*

(Post the Scriptures on a board or chart for all to see throughout the session.)

### Review and Prioritize Ideas (40-45 minutes)

Post the brainstorming lists from Sessions 1-3 so that everyone may see them. Read through the ideas you placed a star beside, and ask the group if there are any other ideas they want to add to the list for discussion today. (Have participants refer to the ideas on the final pages in the Planning Workbook.) Then begin to discuss and prioritize the ideas, identifying three to five of your best or most promising ideas. The following questions also may be helpful to the process:

- ∞ What ideas are based on personal response from every member?
- ∞ Which ideas are within the ministry parameters of specific small groups and teams *now*? (What advance permission can these groups be given to begin work without hesitation?)
- ∞ Which ideas are strategic, require decisions and significant funding, and should be part of a structured planning process?

### Break (10-15 minutes)

Allow participants to take a stretch break.

### Prepare a Summary/Plan (40-45 minutes)

Now it is time to commit your ideas to paper. Summarize the group's best three to five ideas and set a few specific goals. Or, if you want to coordinate planning across a number of groups and create a more complex church-wide plan, write up a plan of action that includes next steps as well as short- and long-term goals. Whether you choose to create a more detailed plan or follow a less structured approach, you will want to be sure to...

- ∞ prioritize what you want to do,
- ∞ assign some specific tasks,
- ∞ decide when you'd like to do it,
- ∞ and determine how to share the results.

Just as in journalism, the “who, what, when, and where” are the basic steps.

**Closing Prayer (5-10 minutes)**

Divide into groups of 3-4 people and pray together about the ideas/plan you have put together today. Pray for support and participation from leadership and the entire church in implementing the ideas/plan. Pray for needed resources that may be beyond the scope of your current capabilities. Suggest that those who are uncomfortable praying spontaneously in a group may pray the focus Scripture verses, personalizing the verses as they choose. For example:

*Lead us, LORD, to honor you with our substance and the fruits of our labors.*

*Dear God, help us to be thankful and produce thanksgiving to God in the world around us.*

Tell the groups that they may adjourn at the conclusion of their prayer time together.