

REIMAGINE GENEROSITY



LOVING GENEROUSLY™

PARTICIPANT GUIDE



A **5 WEEK** CINEMATIC JOURNEY FROM  REIMAGINE

 **LOVING**
GENEROUSLY™
REIMAGINE GENEROSITY

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A LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER

Thank you for continuing on the Generosity Journey!

In our first series, *Living Generously*, the family of Frank Donovan learned to surrender not only their tithe but all they possessed, including their time and talents, as a gift to God. In Matthew 5:24, Jesus describes a person who is preparing to lay his offering on the altar, but remembers that his "brother" has something against him. "Leave your gift there before the altar and go," Jesus says. "First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (all citations ESV).

Loving God and loving one another are inseparable. When we offer our lives to God, He directs us to give them to one another. In other words: if we wish to live generously, then we must love generously.

The scriptures are replete with references to "the poor." James 2:5 says that God has "chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom." Jesus taught us that serving "the least of these" is equivalent to serving him (Matthew 25:40). Many of the lessons in *Loving Generously*™ concern the ways in which we show generosity toward one another and especially toward those who are poor and needy.

A funny thing happens, however, when you learn to practice not only *transactional* generosity with the things you possess but also *relational* generosity toward the people God has placed in your life. You begin to see that you too, in your own way, are poor and needy. Serving the least of these is humbling. It shifts our perspectives on what is truly necessary and who is truly great in the kingdom of God. In serving the "poor," we become "poor in spirit" and marvel at God's grace and redemption.

We pray that this message will awaken extraordinary generosity, one to another, in your church or group. If congregations can become communities of generosity, we believe it will change the world.

Contact me at jack@thereimaginegroup.com with questions or comments. Blessings in Christ,

Jack Alexander
Chairman

The Reimagine Group
TheReimagineGroup.com

AN INTRODUCTION TO **LOVING GENEROUSLY**

Reimagine Generosity is a kingdom movement that seeks to recover and reignite Jesus' extraordinary call to sacrificial giving. As Christ gave himself away for us, even to the point of giving his life, the followers of Christ are called to give themselves away for others — especially the poor and the needy. Where the church ceases to be radically generous, where it ceases to know, love and serve the least and the lost, it loses its vitality, its witness and its power to bring forth the kingdom of God.

Our first series, *Living Generously*, challenged comfortable Christian notions of stewardship and generosity. Generosity is not only, or even primarily, about finances. Jesus did not give a tithe for our salvation. He humbled himself and took on the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7). So in the first series, Frank Donovan, a wealthy businessman who befriends his gardener Re (pronounced "Ray"), is challenged on whether he gives God the "good sheep" (the first and finest he has to offer) or the "stinky sheep" (what's left over after he's taken what he wants).

This challenge begins a process of reflection and transformation, as Frank and his family learn to be generous not only out of their financial abundance but in all of their lives, even when this whole-life generosity requires risk and sacrifice.

In this series, *Loving Generously*, the Donovan family moves from *transactional* generosity to *relational* generosity. Their eagerness to give to the needy begins to break down the walls that separate the haves from the have-nots. Much as the "good sheep" was the primary metaphor for *Living Generously*, a torn name card in the first film represents the message of the series: that the followers of Jesus are called to reject social divisions and to invite the poor and the rejected into their lives, their homes and their communities.

As the Donovans welcome a struggling young couple into their care, they pay a price in worldly opposition. But they also find great joy and beauty in the community that forms as a result of their generous hospitality.

God wants us to give our time, talents and treasure for his kingdom. He also wants us to give ourselves to one another in love. True generosity compels us to reconciliation, and as we form friendships and community with the needy, we learn how to be generous in wiser and truer ways. In all these things, the overflowing generosity of God in Christ forms our model, as the invitation of Christ goes out to all: young and old, rich and poor, the "in" crowd and the outcast.

Give your life. Gain his. That's the essential message of *Reimagine Generosity*.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The *Reimagine Generosity* program is designed to allow you to customize the experience for your congregation and its specific situation. If you have watched *Living Generously* as a congregation or a group, you may wish to review the fundamentals of the story and its message. If your congregation watches the narrative films in your Sunday morning services, then you may choose to watch the films and the vignettes, or just the films, or just the vignettes, in your adult education classes or small group meetings. The vignettes are designed to help you transition from the films into conversation about what they mean.

In essence, we've provided an abundance of content for you to pick and choose. The specifics are up to you, but we have found this to be a solid approach for class or small group studies:

- Open in Prayer.
- Review everyone's plan from the following week.
- Recap the memory verse for the week.
- Recap the previous lessons.
- Watch the film, the vignette or both.
- Work through the study guide questions in discussion.
- Have everyone identify one thing they can do in the next week.
- Allow time for reflection and closing prayer.

At the end of each lesson, memory verses are suggested for the week ahead. Utilize the memory verses in the manner most suitable for your group. If possible, you can assign the verse for the first lesson (Luke 14:13-14) in advance of your first meeting.

You can learn more about the films and the *Loving Generously* series at TheReimagineGroup.com.

GOSPEL CONNECTION

We realize that we are tackling a big topic. What does it mean to love fully and generously? Story telling has its advantages but also limitations. We want you to understand the approach we have taken.

We are able to love because Christ first loved us. We can be generous relationally, through forgiveness, reconciliation and authentic community, because Christ was generous to us. We can love the unlovable because He showed us how. We can invite the least to our dinners and banquets because He invited us to His table. This is the essence of gospel living!

There is a good deal of focus on the poor in this series. We believe that an important key to our faith is to see ourselves as poor people. In Psalm 40:17 and 86:1, David says "for I am poor and needy"... imagine a king seeing himself that way! We think of the tax collector beating his breast in Luke 18:13 and saying "have mercy on me, a sinner." Jesus said this was the person who was justified.

So, the progression in this series is as follows:

Week 1 – Assess who you are inviting into your life

Week 2 – Assess what you own

Week 3 – Assess what walls may be in your life relationally

Week 4 – Realize the resistance you might receive expressing
Christ's love to the world

Week 5 – Enter fully into the joy of Christian love and unity

Thank you for going on this adventure with us!



SESSION 1

BANQUET

SESSION 1

BANQUET

OPENING QUESTIONS

1. The kinds of people we invite into where we live, work and play may tell us a lot about the kinds of people we value. Let's each make a sober assessment. Over the last three months, whom have you invited into your home and into your life?
2. What *kinds* of people have you invited — and not invited — into your life in recent months? Why?

FOCUS

Most of us, if we're honest, have to acknowledge that the people we invite into our lives are the people who make us feel comfortable — people a lot like ourselves. They may have different jobs and different personalities; but they tend to be similar to us in many other ways, like class and race and cultural background.

A clique is not a community. Jesus modeled a redemptive community that reached across social barriers that tend to divide us. His own disciples were an odd collection of mismatched people; it's unlikely that some of them would have chosen to spend time with one another if Jesus had not invited each one by name to follow him. He ministered to people in power like Nicodemus (John 3:1-17) and a Roman centurion (Matthew 8:5-13). But he also spent lots of time with the ostracized and the powerless — people like Zaccheus the tax collector (Luke 19:1-10), who would have been wealthy but was despised as a traitor. He spent time also with the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), and with the disabled and the demon-possessed (Matthew 9:27-31 and 12:22).

The first step toward relational generosity is recognizing that we have a problem. Our relationships do not look much like Jesus' relationships. And our community, at least for most of us, does not look much like his community, where cultural and social and economic barriers were far less important than our common human needs. But the gospel shows amazing generosity by inviting every sinner into fellowship with God. Gospel living shows the same generosity to others.



WATCH THE "BANQUET" FILM/VIGNETTE

READ: LUKE 14:12-14

CONSIDER

The Pharisees of Jesus' day were not merely religious teachers but also highly influential leaders of the Jewish people. When Jesus said that we should "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind," he was attending a feast in the home of a particularly prominent Pharisee. The other guests were competing for signs of respect and honor.

James warns the early church about giving preference in this same way: "Show no partiality...You pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, 'You sit here in a good place,' while you say to the poor man, 'You stand over there,' or, 'Sit down at my feet,'...Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?...But if you show partiality, you are committing sin..." (James 2:1-9).

It's not hard to imagine parallels in our own culture. Public gatherings, and meals in particular, have always been places where social hierarchies become visible. Even when we were children, school cafeterias made excruciatingly clear who was popular and who was not. As adults, we see that galas and benefits often have a "head" table on stage and VIPs near the front. At business parties, employees often angle to sit near the chief executive or want to be seen talking with the company's most important clients.

Jesus' vision is very different. The kingdom of God overturns our worldly social order. Those who look upon themselves with a sense of pride and entitlement will be humbled, while those who look upon themselves

with humility and repentance will be exalted. So Jesus tells the prominent Pharisee in verses 12-14 that he should not invite his relatives and "rich neighbors" but "the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind." We know (see John 9:2) that many in Jesus' time would have assumed that the crippled, the lame and the blind were suffering the punishment of God for their sins or those of their parents. So Jesus is encouraging his host to invite not only the poor and the needy but even those whom the culture despises and condemns.

In the questions below, it's important to feel the pinch. Why *don't* we do what Jesus encourages his host to do?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 3.** The story told in Luke 14:1-14 is full of what we might call social hierarchy — the relative rankings of who is more important and who is less important, who deserves honor and attention and who does not. One way in which the people of Jesus' day marked social rank was by where you were placed at a table. Do we still seat people according to their importance today? What are other ways we display social ranking?
- 4.** Why do you think Jesus said that we should invite "the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind" instead of "your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors"? What reasons does he give?
- 5.** If we actually did what Jesus says, regularly inviting the least of these into our lives, what kind of effect might that have on us?
- 6.** If we're honest, we have to admit that virtually no one does what Jesus encourages his host to do. Why is that? What holds us back from obeying?



READ LUKE 14:15-24

Jesus tells a story about a different kind of banquet host. The host invites “many guests,” but those who were invited do not appreciate the invitation. They make a series of lame excuses, and the owner of the house grows angry. He asks his servant to invite “the poor and crippled and blind and lame.” Eventually he is literally inviting people off the streets. He vows that those who were invited, but who took the gift for granted, will never taste the banquet.

In the film we watched this week, Frank and Cassie are about to host a benefit banquet for the soup kitchen. Hearing Luke 14:12-14, they decide to invite “the people the benefit benefits” — the homeless people who frequent the soup kitchen — to join the well-to-do. When the helpers and the helped were put together in a single room, some of the helpers felt uncomfortable.

One of the usual donors, Victoria, pledges a donation but says “some” of the guests feel “ambushed.” Once upon a time, Frank himself might have responded similarly, but God has already brought him on a journey. He went from making a comfortable financial sacrifice to picking up a ladle and serving. Now he’s ready to go even further and invite the poor and the needy into his world and life.

When one of the men arrives, a sanitation worker named Chuck, he finds tables filled with name cards but cannot find his name. As Frank begins to tear up the name cards, he is tearing down the walls that had excluded people like Chuck.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

7. This parable tells us that the kinds of people Jesus wants us to invite into our lives do not come to us as servants or projects, but as honored guests. Have you ever been invited into someone's life as a servant — or become their project? What was the experience like for you?

8. In the film we saw this week, Frank and Cassie Donovan literally invited men and women off the streets, men and women served by the soup kitchen, to join the wealthy donors who attend the annual fundraising banquet for the soup kitchen. What would it look like for you to become this kind of welcoming person in your own sphere of influence?

9. There's an image here of the kind of character Jesus calls us to have. "It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice" (Psalm 112:5). What does it say about a person's character when he invites all people, regardless of class or wealth or social standing, into his home and his life?

10. In the film we watched this week, when soup kitchen guest Chuck considers leaving the fundraiser because he doesn't see a name tag for himself on the table, Frank rips up several other tags there. He then says, "I don't see a card with anyone else's name on it, either." How does Frank's action mirror the story of the parable?

11. Later in the evening, Re notes, "Some people only want to sit at tables where every seat is reserved for people like themselves. You want real community? You gotta rip up the name cards." How does it help to form genuine community when we invite people from all walks of life to an open table?



CLOSING THOUGHTS

In a world where we tend to divide and subdivide into little tribes, Jesus offers us a radically different way to live. We cannot manufacture the kind of welcoming, hospitable, extravagantly generous life to which he calls us. But as we respond to his invitation, as we fellowship with him, we will discover that there is always an open seat at his banquet table. That open seat is waiting for us to invite someone new to sit next to us. That person might seem to have it all together — or might seem to have a mountain of issues and challenges — but he or she is out there, waiting for your invitation to the feast.

Jesus showed extraordinary generosity in inviting all of us to *his* table. The proper response begins with gratefully receiving the grace of God — but that very gratitude should express itself in showing the same extraordinary generosity to others.

DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT

Things to do this week as you apply this lesson to your life:

- *We end each night (before the closing prayer) with MAKE A PLAN:*
Give people 60-90 seconds of silence to reflect on all that you've discussed tonight. As they listen to God, what is one thing they can commit to doing in the next 7 days and have them write it down.
Then have everyone share the one thing they are planning to do as a result of what the Holy Spirit is stirring in their heart.
- *In the closing prayer, we pray specifically for the plans, praying that God would give us faith to follow through on what he's inviting us into.*
- *In preparation for next week, commit to memorize this week's **Memory Verse** "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).*

NOTES

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SESSION 2

FOR SALE

SESSION 2

FOR SALE

REVIEW YOUR PLANS

Each of you made a plan last week of one thing you felt like God was inviting you to step into. How did each of your plans go? Let's tell some stories. What did you feel like God was asking you to do? What did you do? And what happened as a result? This is not spiritual policing but spiritual partnership!

OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever had an experience — perhaps an experience of deep personal loss, or a confrontation with grinding poverty — that radically changed your perspective on worldly possessions? Did it make you rethink your definition of "necessity"?
2. How long did that new perspective last? Why?

FOCUS

It's easy to lose sight of which possessions are truly necessities and which are just luxuries. But perhaps you have had a clarifying experience: You travel overseas and see impoverished areas, or you spend time with a homeless ministry near your home, and suddenly your perspective changes. You realize, on the one hand, how fortunate you are to enjoy all the material blessings and comforts you do. Yet you also realize that you have so much more than you need, that many of your possessions are burdens more than blessings. You may even wonder at the fact that sometimes (sometimes!) the less fortunate in material terms seem to be more healthy in spiritual terms.

For many of us, when we emerge from an encounter with extraordinary poverty, we marvel for a little while at the abundance of our supermarkets — but then our new perspectives fade. We fall back into the same patterns. Job describes those who "thrust the poor off the road; the poor of the earth all hide themselves" (Job 24:4). We may not physically push the needy away, but in our ruts and routines we find it easy to drive them from our thoughts.

In the first week, we talked about building meaningful relationships with the poor. What we find very quickly is that these relationships call into question our own attitudes toward money and possessions.

Of course, material possessions are not evil. Often they're blessings God means for us to enjoy. It's wonderful that many of our societies have flourished and brought forth a great abundance of resources. But it's important that we should not hold our possessions too tightly, that we should not lose perspective on the one thing needful, and that we should make sure our love never stops at the gifts but always flows to the Giver.

WATCH THE "FOR SALE" FILM/VIGNETTE

READ MATTHEW 19:16-22

CONSIDER

The word "perfect" in this passage (Matthew 19:21, "If you would be perfect, go...") is the Greek word *teleios*, which connotes maturity or completion. Jesus is telling his hearers that the way to spiritual maturity is through giving, serving and following. The rich young ruler is encouraged to sell all he has, give the money to the poor, and follow Jesus.

Jesus promises that the person who sells his possessions and gives to the poor will have "treasure in heaven." He never defines what that treasure will look like. Perhaps he did not want his followers giving up worldly attachments as if in a financial exchange, giving up one thing now in order to get a better thing later. Instead, he frames the act of giving as the way his followers should respond to him in the here and now. Giving away, and serving the poor, is one way of following him.

In the film for this week, Julia comes to stay at the home of Frank and Cassie Donovan. This visit has the unintended consequence of causing Frank and Cassie to view their possessions through Julia's eyes. Cassie said, "I could make a pile 10 times this size with stuff we haven't used in years." And responding to Cassie's needs mobilizes and repurposes some of those items for kingdom purposes.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 3.** Why do you think Jesus asked this wealthy young man to sell his possessions and give to the poor? Does he ask the same of every person?
- 4.** Jesus tells the young man to sell what he possesses and give the money to the poor, but ultimately Jesus invites him to follow him. Is this the kind of commandment the young man was looking for — or does Jesus offer an unexpected answer?
- 5.** Is there anything meaningful in the sequence of actions described here: Sell all you possess, give to the poor...then come, follow me? Is this a natural order of events?
- 6.** In the film we watched this week, Frank and Cassie made a decision to clear out the clutter in their lives. So they found everything superfluous, everything extraneous, and put it up for sale. What are the “watch winders” in your life — the things that serve no purpose anymore but to sit on a shelf and collect dust? Why do you think we acquire these things in the first place?

We don't clear out the clutter in our lives because things in themselves are bad, or because excess is gross. We clear them out because the things we possess quickly start to possess us. Our priorities and desires get warped. We end up structuring our lives around the pursuit of more stuff. And we clear them out because we find in simplicity a greater capacity to love others.

As “Re” said in the vignette, everything in your life is either a tool or an idol. It's either subservient to your love for God, a means by which you can love and worship and serve him better — or else it has started to rival God in our affections, an alternate god that you have begun to serve and worship.

When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he offered him earthly kingdoms, all the stuff of this world. But Jesus wisely identified the offer to get more as a temptation to idolatry, and he responded with Scripture: “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve” (Matthew 4:10).

Even here, we see the Donovans' radical generosity has a cost. Their friendship with Mark and Marianne grows strained. But Frank and Cassie's sale of their excess belongings gave them an opportunity to deepen relationships with the people in their lives, and the means to serve them more. Simplifying our lives — our time, our commitments, and so on — creates more space for our relationships to grow. And simplifying our lives increases our capacity to give to others, as we are weighed down by fewer worldly attachments.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 7.** Cassie said, “The stuff we own ends up owning us.” What do you think she meant? Have you experienced this yourself?
- 8.** Frank's friend at the golf club, Mark, makes some insensitive comments to Frank and Re near the beginning of the video. Have you ever been involved in a conversation like this? How did you respond? Why do you think Mark is responding in the way that he is?
- 9.** The garage sale is one good example of how non-essentials in our lives can be transformed into something holy. Many of the silly things in the Donovans' lives were changed into resources that they decided to use to free a young woman from bondage. What are other ways that you can transform a non-essential into something sacred, something that serves others and God?
- 10.** The watch winder signifies conspicuous consumption. However, at the time it was purchased, Frank may have thought it was a necessity. In our society, one person's luxury may be another person's necessity. What grid do you use to decide what's a necessity and what's a luxury? How can you guard against the temptation to point at the “watch winders” in someone else's life, but ignore the frivolous items on your own shelves?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

We may enter into relationships with the least and the lost believing that God means for us to benefit *them*. We often find, however, that we are just as blessed in return. One way in which we can learn from those less fortunate than ourselves — whether that means the person down the street or the orphan on the other side of the world — is to learn to see the world through their eyes. And through the eyes of the poor, “necessity” looks very different.

Sometimes we surround ourselves with possessions because they make us feel happy or secure or distracted from our hardships. Sometimes we get the stuff for its own sake, because there’s something about owning lots of stuff that makes us feel important. Or we might just fall prey to the siren song of consumer advertising, which tells us how much we need one thing after another.

But the truth is, very little of what we possess is truly necessary. When we recognize that we don’t really own anything, but instead keep all things as stewards for God’s purposes, then we may find that there are many “watch winders” in our lives that we can afford to sell. And when we do clear the clutter, we may also find that it gives us a greater capacity to worship God and serve his children. Mark 4:19 warns that “the deceitfulness of wealth” and the desire for still more wealth can “choke” the Word of God and “make it unfruitful.” When we soberly assess the “watch winders” in our lives, we gain perspective; but we also prune back the weeds and pick out the thorns so that God’s goodness and grace can bear fruit in our lives again.





DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT

- We end each night (before the closing prayer) with **MAKE A PLAN**:
Give people 60-90 seconds of silence to reflect on all that you've discussed tonight. As they listen to God, what is one thing they can commit to doing in the next 7 days and have them write it down.
Then have everyone share the one thing they are planning to do as a result of what the Holy Spirit is stirring in their heart.
- In the closing prayer, we pray specifically for the plans, praying that God would give us faith to follow through on what he's inviting us into.
- The **Memory Verse** for this week (in preparation for next week):
"Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed" (Proverbs 19:17).

NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



SESSION 3

KIND

SESSION 3

KIND

REVIEW YOUR PLANS

Each of you made a plan last week of one thing you felt like God was inviting you to step into. How did each of your plans go? Let's tell some stories. What did you feel like God was asking you to do? What did you do? And what happened as a result? This is not spiritual policing but spiritual partnership!

OPENING QUESTIONS

- 1.** Is there a time in your life when someone went the extra mile for you and took a risk to do something very generous on your behalf? Tell the group about it. How did it make you feel?
- 2.** Do you think you have a metaphorical "Get Out of Jail Free" card — a safety net of friends, colleagues and connections that would help you out if you really fell on hard times?

FOCUS

In this week's study, we deal specifically with generosity to the poor. In order to appreciate what such generosity looks like, we want all participants to confront in some small measure the inequities that the poor experience every day. As Chuck the sanitation worker puts it, being poor "ain't about the money" much of the time. Just as often, the challenge of being poor and outcast is that you're shown less kindness and consideration, you receive less justice, and you live on the edge of financial disaster because you don't have a safety net. As the Proverbs say, "Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend" (Proverbs 19:4).

In the Bible passage examined this week, God makes an extraordinary promise. We know how much he cares when we serve the least of these. In this passage, God goes even further, saying that he will take upon himself any debt that the poor owe to those who serve them. The ultimate connection, the ultimate "get out of jail free" card, is to have God indebted to you for the kindness you have shown to his lowliest children. While the unsavory character shown in the film this week is seeking to put others in debt to him, through abundant generosity he might have found God indebted to him instead.



WATCH THE "KIND" FILM/VIGNETTE

READ PROVERBS 19:17

CONSIDER

Proverbs 19:17 says, "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done." God puts himself in the role of a debtor. The One who owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10) does not need anything from us, but this verse in Proverbs expresses the unique value God places on the needs of the poor.

We see this same commandment and promise of God's blessing given to the people of Israel after God had delivered them from bondage of their own. "Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart... and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and you be guilty of sin. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake" (Deuteronomy 15:7-12).

Frank and his friends put themselves at risk by going to see G-5. In fact, the police didn't believe they were there for the reasons they claimed, instead suspecting they were some of G-5's "customers." Jesus was often suspected of wrong motives on his mission to set captives free. His friends included women like Julia — women who had found themselves making one bad choice after another (see Luke 7:36-50 or John 4). Although the religious leaders of his day accused him of hanging around with sinners (Matthew 11:19), Jesus was unfazed. Their gossip didn't deter him from his mission.

The Bible tells us that the body of Christ is supposed to function as a safety net, but that safety net is not limited to those within the church: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10). Because Christ has rescued us, we carry on his saving ministry as we seek to do good to all people — especially, but not limited to, those in the church. He's called each one of us to be a part of the safety net in some way for those he's placed in our lives.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

3. Proverbs 19:17 says, "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed." What does it mean to lend to the Lord?
4. What do the words "and he will repay him for his deed" tell you about the character of God?
5. The parable of the sheep and the goats is in Matthew 25:31-46. In it, Jesus tells his followers that when they cared for the "least of these" among them, he viewed it as though they were caring for him. The converse was true as well. How does this parable further illustrate Proverbs 19:17?

In the film for this week, Chuck described being poor as being on one side of a wall, and the people and resources he needed were on the other side. If we follow the call of Jesus, then we will be the kind of people who break down these walls and show kindness to people very different from ourselves.

Chuck told G-5, "Your problem is that you want a 'Get Out of Jail Free' card for yourself. It doesn't work that way." Even if we feel that we live on the wrong side of the "wall," when we show kindness to others we are building a "safety net" of sorts because God himself will become our advocate, willing to repay us for our kindness.



Imagine this circle representing your life. Now, think of people that may be in your life but are on the "other side of a wall." Prayerfully, consider who this might be – it could be a sanitation worker or someone in your home. Pray for them right now.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 6.** Chuck said, "When you have nothing, it's like you're on one side of the wall, and everyone and everything you need is on the other side, and you can't do nothing about it." What do you think he means by a "wall" here? What kind of feeling is he describing?
- 7.** Are there people in your life, people on the other side of the "wall," toward whom you've never really thought to show generosity?
- 8.** If you've begun to build a relationship with someone in need, you may find yourself overwhelmed by the magnitude of the issues they face. Remember, you are not the only "door in the wall" for that person. In the video, a group of people went to confront G-5. So as you think about the people you want to help, how can you work together with friends to serve them, or how can you make sure that you're not their only "Get Out of Jail Free" card?
- 9.** When Chuck spoke about his invisible job as a garbage man, he noted that the same people who ignored him gave tips to the person delivering their mail. He then added, "But it's not about what people can do for you. It's what you can do for them." How do these words challenge you today?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

One of the greatest struggles faced by the poor and the disenfranchised is that they have no social capital. For many of us, when we need to find a job, or a place to stay, or if we need help getting out of a tough spot, we have many people who would be willing and capable of helping us. For many of the poor, however, that's simply not the case. They don't have the kind of social capital that could really serve them in an hour of need, so they remain more vulnerable to all kinds of misfortunes. A single twist of bad luck, from a medical emergency to a car problem to a layoff, could lead to life on the streets.

One way in which we can love others generously is by tearing down the walls and showing generosity where it's least expected. According to the Psalmist, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (Psalms 34:18). All too often, we're not near enough to the needy to notice. When we are near enough, and we do notice, then we can be a "get out of jail free card" for others in their hour of need. We can be truly kind to those who are in peril, just as God has been so extraordinarily kind to us. And just as God's kindness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4), perhaps our kindness to others can bring about healing.

God says he will repay the debt. When we give to those who have the power to repay us, then the debt is settled. But when we serve those who can never repay us, God shows his care for the poor and the suffering in the way he commits to repay the debt himself — and it's an enormously powerful thing to have the Creator of the universe metaphorically in your debt!





DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT

- We end each night (before the closing prayer) with **MAKE A PLAN**:
Give people 60-90 seconds of silence to reflect on all that you've discussed tonight. As they listen to God, what is one thing they can commit to doing in the next 7 days and have them write it down.
Then have everyone share the one thing they are planning to do as a result of what the Holy Spirit is stirring in their heart.
- In the closing prayer, we pray specifically for the plans, praying that God would give us faith to follow through on what he's inviting us into.
- The **Memory Verse** for the week ahead comes from the Prodigal Son Story: "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him" (Luke 15:20).

NOTES

This image shows a full page of a document template designed for writing. It features a series of evenly spaced, horizontal grey lines that run across the width of the page. The lines are thin and light in color, providing a guide for letter height without being distracting. There are no margins, headers, footers, or other markings present on the page.



SESSION 4
CALLED

SESSION 4

CALLED

REVIEW YOUR PLANS

Each of you made a plan last week of one thing you felt like God was inviting you to step into. How did each of your plans go? Let's tell some stories. What did you feel like God was asking you to do? What did you do? And what happened as a result? This is not spiritual policing but spiritual partnership!

OPENING QUESTIONS

- 1.** Jesus suffered persecution, and ultimately he was put to death by people who wanted to silence him and destroy his ministry. If Christianity had never before appeared, but Jesus were born and had his ministry today, do you think he would still be persecuted and martyred? Explain your answer.
- 2.** Have you experienced any form of persecution yourself? If so, what caused the persecution? If not, why do you think that is?

FOCUS

Jesus clearly warns that there will be a cost for those who follow him; those who walk the path he walked should expect to encounter the opposition he encountered. It was directly after Jesus praised a woman for pouring out an expensive ointment as an act of generosity, that Judas made his fateful choice: "And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him" (Matthew 26:16).

Are we willing to pay the price if following Jesus in loving generously leads us into persecution? And if we discover that the world finds us perfectly unobjectionable, is it possible that we're not following Jesus as fully as we should?

We rightly associate the words "compassion" and "sympathy" with love, but the root meaning of these words (in Latin and Greek respectively) means to "suffer with." When we show sympathy or compassion for

someone, we are experiencing their hardship with them. The memory verse in preparation for this week came from the Prodigal Son story. It showed the father, even before his son had confessed his sin, feeling "compassion" for all that his wayward son had endured. It was his love for his son that caused him to suffer with him.

In the same way, we do not enter into suffering or persecution for their own sake. They are not good in themselves. We simply love God and love our neighbor, and that sometimes will cause suffering. One of the costs of loving generously is that we may have to suffer with those we love.

Regrettably, when we live lives of radical generosity, even some of our friends within the church may challenge us. They do not want our example to challenge them to leave their comfort and complacency. In the film for this week, we see Frank and Cassie losing their friendship with another couple. Even their daughter Megan finds her relationship fraying. When a family gives itself to a more holistic and relational generosity, there may be a price for the children as well. This possibility calls for wise and gracious conversation among parents and children. It provides parents an opportunity to model a faith that practices what it preaches and pursues Christ even in tough times.



WATCH THE "CALLED" FILM/VIGNETTE

READ JOHN 15:18-19

CONSIDER

Jesus warns his followers to expect persecution. This is not because his followers are to be rude and stir up anger, but because confessing and living our faith will place us at odds with the world. Even those who desire to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9) will often find that they suffer persecution (Matthew 5:10) because the world does not want to be challenged to live in the way of Jesus Christ. When we abandon ourselves to Christ-like generosity, we show that we worship God more than we worship ourselves or the things of the world. Those who persecute us may find their own "gods" insulted by our example; they may rightly feel convicted yet not want to feel convicted.

Persecution may look different, however, in different times and places. In the early church, it was physical and often fatal. Studies show even today that Christianity is the world's most persecuted religion. Although we in western cultures rarely see it, there is violence and imprisonment, intimidation and death awaiting many who practice their faith in Jesus Christ around the world.

We may expect less opposition for our faith in a society where many people are Christian, and where the culture has been seeded with Christian teachings and values. Even in cultures shaped by Christianity, however, non-Christians — and even some who call themselves Christians — would not like to see faith in Jesus fully practiced. We may not be tortured or martyred physically, but we may well face mockery, criticism and rejection.

We press on through suffering in pursuit of Christ-like self-giving if we would know, as Paul said in Philippians 3:8-10, "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death..." We're often quick to want his power but slow to embrace his sufferings.

Persecution, of course, does not necessarily mean we are being faithful. We can be "persecuted" for all the wrong reasons. If we are being self-righteous and hypocritical, we should not misinterpret legitimate criticism as persecution. But the absence of persecution might give us pause. It ought to make us ask, at least, whether we are truly standing up for the things that matter to God, and truly standing against the evils of the world.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 3.** Is Jesus using exaggerated language here? Did the world really "hate" him?
- 4.** Ever since Jesus lived on Earth, Christians in many times and places have been persecuted for their faith. Why do you think that is? What has the world found so threatening about the Christian message?

5. What might Jesus have meant when he said, "I chose you out of the world"? Why would that lead the world to hate those who follow him? Do people find the example of your life challenging? Does your life summon them to lives of more extraordinary self-giving?

6. In the film for this week, Frank and Cassie Donovan find their relationship with Mark and Marianne strained by the transformations in their lives. Are there Marks and Mariannes in your life, people who are quite content to stay in a comfortable "Christian" life that's not much different from the lives non-Christians lead?

7. Frank and Cassie's daughter Megan also paid a relational cost for her family's commitment to know, love and serve the poor. If you're a parent contemplating a change in the way your family lives its faith together, how could you communicate with your children about it?

READ ROMANS 12:10

In the film, the group from the soup kitchen group was seated around Frank and Cassie's dining room table. The Donovans were no longer serving "the homeless" at a soup kitchen; they were sharing a meal with them as friends. That friendship was rooted in "one anothering," caring for one another as Christ modeled and commanded. There are more than 90 "one anothers" in the New Testament, including the one Re mentioned at the table ("Outdo one another in showing honor"), which is found in Romans 12:10.

The 12A door plaque for the guesthouse was a reminder to all of them that there was no dividing line between the Donovans' neighborhood and the soup kitchen, no wall to separate them from one another.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

8. What did the "12A" plaque communicate to the entire group?

9. After the confrontation with his neighbors, Frank tells his friends from the soup kitchen, "If they hate us for sharing our lives with you clowns, I'm all right with that." Was there any other way he could have handled the situation with his neighbors?

10. The persecution Frank and Cassie faced was not nearly as severe as the persecution other Christians have faced in other times and places. But they chose to face it so they could more fully love the less fortunate. By facing injustice together, their fellowship with one another deepened. Can you tell a story of how your friendships, or your community, grew tighter and deeper through facing hardship together?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

It's not just coincidence that Jesus was born in a time and place that put him to death. There is an essential clash between the life Jesus models and teaches his followers and the life the world of the flesh wishes to lead.

As you build generous relationships with the poor and disenfranchised, you may lose other relationships that are meaningful to you. You may end up experiencing some form of persecution yourself. You may find yourself a victim of injustice. Yet the choice for Christians is clear: "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin" (James 4:17).

Some of what the poor experience may become your experience as well. But Jesus promises (Matthew 5:10): "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And Paul wrote: "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things" (Philippians 3:8). Paul's faith cost him everything — relationships, status, income, health, security. And yet he could write these words, knowing he had gained much more than he'd lost.

DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT

- *We end each night (before the closing prayer) with MAKE A PLAN: Give people 60-90 seconds of silence to reflect on all that you've discussed tonight. As they listen to God, what is one thing they can commit to doing in the next 7 days and have them write it down. Then have everyone share the one thing they are planning to do as a result of what the Holy Spirit is stirring in their heart.*
- *In the closing prayer, we pray specifically for the plans, praying that God would give us faith to follow through on what he's inviting us into.*
- *The **Memory Verse** for the coming week is Galatians 6:2: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."*

NOTES

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SESSION 5
**ONE TO
ANOTHER**

SESSION 5

ONE TO ANOTHER

REVIEW YOUR PLANS

Each of you made a plan last week of one thing you felt like God was inviting you to step into. How did each of your plans go? Let's tell some stories. What did you feel like God was asking you to do? What did you do? And what happened as a result? This is not spiritual policing but spiritual partnership!

OPENING QUESTIONS

1. If you could describe the ideal community for faith and friendship, what would that community look like? What would be its defining attributes?
2. How would you describe the community or fellowship in your life right now?

FOCUS

One of the most famous television theme songs of all time features yearning lyrics about a place "where everybody knows your name" and "they're always glad you came." We all yearn for a sense of belonging, for a community where we are understood and loved and supported. Yet we may find that the way to such a community is not to build walls around ourselves and only include others who are already like us. If we belong to a "community" where everyone is expected to be a certain way, you're only welcome as long as you measure up to the standard. That's not true welcome, and it's not true community.

This series has emphasized that generosity is not merely a matter of giving *stuff*. It's a matter of giving ourselves into relationships and loving generously the people God puts in our lives. True generosity shows itself in the whole of life, not only in discrete acts like writing a check but in relationships with "the least of these." In other words, generosity is about people. Generosity is about serving everyone God puts in our lives — but we cannot serve them selflessly unless we love them, and we cannot love them truly unless we know them. We must tear down the walls that keep us from building meaningful relationships with "the least of these."

If you remember, the Donovan family's journey began when they learned that God wanted us to give the "Good Sheep" and not the "Stinky Sheep." God calls us to give our first and our finest, not our last and our leftovers. But another way to think about it is this: When you are saved by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, then *you* are God's gift to the world. Like Christ, we are to humble ourselves and give of ourselves. But are *you* the Good Sheep, or the Stinky Sheep? God wants to give you to the world, to love and to serve. When you surrender yourself to love and serve everyone with all your heart, then you are God's good gift.



WATCH THE "ONE TO ANOTHER" FILM/VIGNETTE

READ MATTHEW 7:12

CONSIDER

When we speak of 12A or "one to another," we're describing a community in which all are equals. No matter where you come from, no matter what you've done, no matter how much money or beauty or talent or authority you possess, you are all equal. The great humble themselves and the humble are lifted up.

The film for this week depicts a wedding, which is a picture of the union of Christ with the church, his bride. The image reminds us of Christ's unconditional love toward us in that he "loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). His sacrifice laid the foundation for our communing with him so that we might become like him. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

A wedding is also the ultimate image of human union. It is the ultimate human example of a commitment to forgive and love and support each other, regardless of what life may bring. True, whole-life, relational generosity can serve as the catalyst for an extraordinary kind of community. In the film series, we began to see this community forming when the name cards were torn up and everyone gathered around an open table. All were welcome, and everyone supported one another. As the series went on, those relationships matured and deepened, as everyone came to know and love one another more fully. Now they reach a wedding where two imperfect people, redeemed and restored, commit to be made whole in one another.

The Golden Rule is the essential logic of human relationships, the most helpful guide ever devised to show us what we can do to serve one another. When we learn to love "one to another," then we learn to consider the Golden Rule. If we are all equal, all members of one body, then I should treat others in the way I would have them treat me.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 3.** As the film from this week begins, Frank and Cassie are facing the threat of a police disruption of the wedding. What would you have suggested to them as they tried to figure out what to do?
- 4.** The neighbors express fears of people racially and economically different from themselves, as well as concern about a possible financial impact on their own lives. It's easy to be critical, but we all have our fears and biases. As you've reached out to people unlike yourself, what fears have you had to confront?
- 5.** Thomas, Julia and others from the soup kitchen decide to speak to the neighbors. Why do you think they did this? What might have inspired them?
- 6.** How does Thomas and Julia's invitation to the neighbors reflect Jesus' "one another" command found in Matthew 7:12 ("So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets")?
- 7.** The first video in this series showed a single wealthy couple inviting the poor to join a banquet. Now the series ends with a group of the poor inviting the wealthy to join their wedding celebration. Have you ever seen a reversal like this happen in your own life? If so, what prompted it?
- 8.** Re quotes Galatians 6:2 ("Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ") at the beginning of the wedding ceremony. Both the Golden Rule and Galatians 6:2 speak of fulfilling the law of Christ. Why would the Scriptures say that fulfilling these commandments would fulfill the law?



READ JOHN 12:24

In the film, Victoria (the head of the Homeowners Association) is left alone in the end. She works hard to keep those unlike herself out, and ultimately she drives everyone away. On the other hand, Frank and Cassie made sacrifices for their new friends and found a true community growing around them. Sometimes it takes a “death” on our part — a sacrifice or surrender — before we can see that kind of fruitfulness in our relationships.

The film series ends in a marriage because it's an image of fruitfulness, mutuality and love. Thomas and Julia invite the upset neighbors to join their wedding, much as Frank and Cassie invited Thomas and Julia and the other folks from the soup kitchen to join the banquet. This kind of mutuality shows the ripples of one act of generosity.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 9.** The verse says that the seed that “dies” will “bear much fruit.” What do you think this means? How would you put it into your own words?
- 10.** Thomas and Julia came to their wedding day with brokenness in their lives. He was blind and homeless; she was once a prostitute. What does this relationship communicate about Christ's love?
- 11.** Presumably there is “fruit” you would like to bear in your life. Is it possible that God wants you to “die” before that fruit could be born? What would that “death” look like?

12. Re quotes Galatians 6:2 ("Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ"). The poor have financial burdens, but they also face relational and justice "walls." What are the kinds of burdens you bear? And how might others — even someone unexpected — help you bear them?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In the video vignette at the beginning of this study, Re says to "Love the unloved, the unloving, even the unlovable — for love awakens love and calls forth a community of mutual care and service." This is the essential vision of Loving Generously, the essential vision of 12A. We fall like the seed so we can raise new life. We get low like Jesus in order to lift others up. We make ourselves poor so that we can make others rich. When we do this, a true community forms.

The profound need for community is intrinsic to human nature. God made us to give and receive love "one to another." We hope this series has encouraged you to think deeply about what it means to be generous with your love — to show more love to more people, including the most unlikely of people. The Bible makes it clear that this love is the seed of true community, and that God repays us eternally for the kindness we show now to the poor and the needy.

DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT

- *We end each night (before the closing prayer) with MAKE A PLAN:*
Give people 60-90 seconds of silence to reflect on all that you've discussed tonight. As they listen to God, what is one thing they can commit to doing in the next 7 days and have them write it down.
Then have everyone share the one thing they are planning to do as a result of what the Holy Spirit is stirring in their heart.
- *In the closing prayer, we pray specifically for the plans, praying that God would give us faith to follow through on what he's inviting us into.*

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*How can you show more
love to 'one another'?*



One to Another™

WWW.THEREIMAGINEGROUP.COM

Learn more about Reimagine's generosity film series
and the extraordinary ways it's transforming
congregations and communities.

Download important resources
and bring Loving Generously to your church and
to other churches you want to bless.

Audiences love our other films as well,
available at TheReimagineGroup.com.



LOVING GENEROUSLY™ REIMAGINE GENEROSITY

Frank Donovan thought he knew what living generously looks like. He knew that God wanted his first and his finest, not his leftovers. He understood that his possessions were not a fortress against misfortune, but resources to be stewarded for God. He was willing to make faithful risks for the kingdom, to plant seeds of generosity and watch them grow.

But what happens when your comfortable life is interrupted by people with great need? God calls Frank and his family, along with their friend Re, to show generosity not only with their resources but also with their relationships. Suddenly the sacrifices are deeper, the risks are scarier – but the path is prepared toward a community of generosity that transforms everyone it touches.

This five-week film series is perfect for churches and groups that yearn for deeper fellowship, for members that transform their communities, and for lives of overflowing generosity that benefit the church and its people.

ABOUT REIMAGINE

Since 2010, Reimagine has been producing biblically grounded multimedia content that equips Christian pastors and leaders to engage their congregations and communities in spiritual transformation.

Jesus said in Matthew 13:15 that if people “might see with their eyes, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.” Our products engage people’s eyes, hearts and minds through top quality story telling and production.

Since 2012, our Reimagine Generosity initiative has produced congregational programs and campaigns emphasizing that true generosity is not just about a checkbook but about the whole of life. Three 5-week video series explore how we show generosity in the things we give, the people we serve, and the legacy we leave behind. The phenomenal results in churches throughout the US and Canada have shown that these series present a wonderful solution for churches looking to revive, reinvigorate and reimagine generosity today.

More Loving Generously resources
at TheReimagineGroup.com.



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