

Your Family and Generosity

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How does one become a generous person? Are people born generous? Or is it learned? A Barna Group study of generosity among Christians found two types of people: givers, those who are generous and give freely; and keepers, people who guard and keep their time, talents and money for themselves.

For many of us, generosity is a way of life. How we give to God and to others was modeled for us by parents, extended family members and mentors in the faith.

One way to be more reflective about our giving is to look at the emotional processes within our own families. Money can easily become a focus for anxiety — a chronic, ongoing preoccupation with survival and security. Research shows that financial hardships produce added anxiety and fear in families and can have negative effects on children and interparental relationships. Who in your family of origin expressed generosity to you? What was the general attitude towards philanthropy and stewardship? How was gift-giving expressed in your family? Was generosity reciprocated,

or was it one-sided, leading to animosity? Perhaps giving became strictly a duty and obligation with little joy.

How did the faith of your parents play out in your understanding of generosity?

Another area to look at in our families is the overfunctioning of those who take on too much of the responsibility of giving and those who underfunction by not taking on enough responsibility. You see this play out in many congregations — there are people who give more, worry more and spend more time thinking about money than others. If you find yourself staying awake at night about money matters, you are overfunctioning.* **Remember, the financial stability of every congregation is every member's responsibility, not solely that of the pastors or the leadership.**

Pastors often underfunction in the area of generosity and giving. Many don't like to deal with money matters and often feel inadequate when preaching about giving and or reading financials and spreadsheets. But underfunctioning, like overfunctioning, is a result of

anxiety, and both can cause problems that affect stability.

A well-functioning family helps its members develop into financially independent adults — not codependents. Likewise, an effective church leader enables the financial team to develop autonomy and provide meaningful, objective information for clear decision making.

In more than half of Jesus' 38 parables, he addressed money and our relationship with money. You see, **we all have a unique money backstory, and our families greatly influence how we relate emotionally and spiritually to giving.**

But God wants us to find our true self and understand and be increasingly aware of our weaknesses, strengths and motivations. God urges us to take a deeper and longer look at how, through the generations, we have been influenced and shaped in our response to money and material things. God calls us to question our giving patterns and our behaviors so we will be set free from the fears, worries and anxieties that keep us away from living a life that is fully free, fully alive and fully dependent on His boundless and inexhaustible love for us!

* For more learning: "Money and Your Ministry" by Margaret Marcuson

