

GENEROUS LIVING

MYSTERIOUS JOY

Small Group AID

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Generous Living: Mysterious Joy

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ABOUT THE

AUTHOR

In September 2008, Edwin and Rhoda began their ministry at the Family Christian Centre (FCC), and under their guidance, the church flourished and expanded significantly. They have both been the driving force behind visionary initiatives such as the Legacy Counselling Centre, the Wheaton-Penney Childcare Centre, and the Single Parent Mercy Ministry. These new ventures exemplify their commitment to nurturing strong and healthy families within the community.

Known for his boundless energy and unwavering passion, Edwin is a vibrant presence within the congregation and the broader community. His preaching and teaching style are characterized by directness and relatability, echoing the heartfelt desire for people to encounter Christ and embark on a transformative journey of discipleship.

Edwin's educational journey is a testament to his commitment to the ministry. He earned a Bachelor of Theology from Masters College and Seminary in Toronto, Ontario, a Master of Divinity from Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and a Master of Arts from Acadia University in Kentville, Nova Scotia. His scholarly background underscores his dedication to spiritual growth and leadership.

He hosts a weekly podcast, *Encountering the Divine*, on Holy Spirit Broadcasting Network HSBN is currently aired in 190 nations. He is consistently in the top ten most viewed. He has spoken nationally across Canada at various churches and camps. He has also spoken internationally in the USA, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Malawi, Kyrgyzstan, the Dominican Republic, Siberia, and Sri Lanka.

Edwin and his wife, Rhoda, live in Fort McMurray, Alberta. They have three adult children and four grandchildren.

Table of Content

Introduction

1. Fearful to Fearless

2. Scrap Your Plans. God Has Bigger Ones

3. Uncomfortably Obedient

4. The Storm Which Released a Blessing

5. Generosity: A Mode of Spiritual Warfare

6. The Fruit of Generosity

7. Our Capacity for Significance

8. Tithing: A Gateway to Generous Living

9. Cultivating Authentic Relationships

10. Holy Actions

Introduction

Holy Actions are redemptive deeds proclaiming the present nature of God's Kingdom.

Discover the Joy of Generosity

In a world often consumed by self-interest and material gain, Edwin R. Rideout invites you on a transformative journey toward a more meaningful and generous way of life. "Generous Living—Incredible Joy" delves into the profound rewards of selfless giving and the enduring happiness it brings.

Drawing from personal experiences and timeless wisdom, Edwin explores the essence of holy actions and how they proclaim the nature of God's Kingdom. He reminds us of the words of Jesus, challenging us to love our enemies, do good deeds for those who hate us, and give without expecting anything in return.

Through captivating storytelling and insightful reflections, he unveils the obstacles that often hinder a generous heart—whether it's the hoarding culture, doubts about the recipients, or the fear of inadequacy. He skillfully guides us toward a mindset shift, showing how even modest contributions can significantly impact those in need.

With real-life examples, including the inspiring generosity of historical figures like John Wesley and David Green, "Generous Living—Incredible Joy" demonstrates the power of selfless giving and its ability to enrich our faith and lives. It calls us to embrace the Christian ethic of loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Join Edwin on this extraordinary journey from fear to fearlessness and experience the joy of living generously. "Generous Living—Incredible Joy" will inspire you to make your life count for time and eternity.

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil people. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:32–36 NASV).

FORMAT...

An ideal small group Bible study experience incorporates several vital elements to nurture spiritual growth and community among its members. Furthermore, an ideal small group teaching experience imparts knowledge and inspires curiosity, critical thinking, and a lifelong love of learning.

I encourage you to create a small-group experience characterized by:

- **Prayerful Foundation:** Begin and conclude with prayer, inviting God's presence and guidance into the group's study and discussions, setting a tone of reverence, and seeking divine wisdom.
- **Engaging Scripture-based Study:** Focus on reading and discussing the study material emphasizing the scriptural element. Encourage members to explore the depths of Scripture, share insights, and apply biblical truths to their lives. Aim to be interactive and encourage questions and reflections.
- **Worship and Praise:** Includes a time for worship, whether through music, shared testimonials, or reading psalms, to uplift the group's spirit and foster a deeper connection with God.
- **Fellowship and Community Building:** Provides opportunities for members to share personal experiences, support one another in prayer, and build meaningful relationships, strengthening community and belonging.
- **Service and Outreach:** Encourage the practical application of the study through acts of service within the group or broader community, embodying the teachings of Jesus through compassion and action.
- **Relaxed and Welcoming Atmosphere:** Maintain a casual, inviting environment where members feel comfortable and valued. Promote open dialogue and genuine connections, regardless of one's stage in their faith journey.

Chapter 1 Fearful to Fearless

*I was a reluctant giver until I met the one who generously gave me eternal life,
Jesus Christ.*

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:33-36 ESV).

ICEBREAKERS

A Truth and a Fear: Each person shares a true statement about themselves and one fear they've overcome or are working to overcome. This breaks the ice and immediately opens up a dialogue about fears in a personal and relatable way (2 minutes each).

Biblical Courage Quotes: Prepare cards with different Bible verses about courage and fearlessness (e.g., Joshua 1:9, Isaiah 41:10). Each member draws a card, reads the verse aloud, and briefly shares what it means to them or how it could apply to their life.

"Would You Rather" - Courage Edition: Pose a series of "Would you rather" questions that involve choosing between a comfortable action and one that requires courage. This light-hearted approach can lead to deeper discussions about the nature of fear and courage.

Pass the Fear Parcel: Wrap a small, light-hearted gift many times in different layers of wrapping paper. Between each layer, place a prompt related to overcoming fear or encouraging courage. As the parcel is passed around (with music playing in the background, if possible), when the music stops, the person holding the parcel unwraps a layer and answers the prompt. Continue until the gift is revealed.

VIDEO INTRODUCTION

Edwin has prepared a video to help you launch your discussion. Go to his website, www.edwinrideout.com, and follow the links through 'Generous Living: Mysterious Joy' to access the video for Lesson 1.

GO DEEPER ...

Key Text: Malachi 3:8–12 ESV

A. We were born into a world tainted by sin and death, resulting in our understanding of God and true life being inherently imperfect. In Matthew 18:3, Jesus emphasizes the necessity of adopting a child-like attitude to uncover the life within God’s Kingdom. In Colossians 3:10 (NASV), Paul used present continuing Greek verbiage to describe the redeeming process, “and have put on the new self, which is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created it.”

Read Colossians 3:1–17. Identify steps necessary to live authentically.

Example: Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth.

B. People sometimes think of giving and generosity as relating only to money.” Luke 6:45–47 (VOICE) reads, “*It’s the same with people. A person full of goodness in his heart produces good things; a person with an evil reservoir in his heart pours out evil things. The heart overflows in the words a person speaks; your words reveal what’s within your heart. What good is it to mouth the words, “Lord! Lord!” if you don’t live by My teachings? What matters is that you come to Me, hear My words, and actually live by them.*”

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed various indulgences and actions people engage in to find peace and significance. The widow from the 1 Kings 17 narrative was no different. In her eyes, her life depended on the small amount of oil and wheat in her cupboard. However, she found real life upon

Elijah’s request to relinquish her vital supplies. Can you identify two other similar examples of this outlook in the Bible?

Illustration to Ponder:

For vampire bats, the mark of true friendship is breaking bread—er, blood—together. These animals require their liquid blood meals to survive, and they need them often. If one misses a feeding just three nights in a row, it could starve to death. They have developed a friendly way to cope; well-fed bats regurgitate blood directly into the mouths of hungry companions. That blood may not be enough for a full meal, but it provides enough substance for the recipient to live and hunt another day.¹

A Practical Action:

Together with a significant other and the Holy Spirit, make a careful inventory of your life priorities. The goal is to evaluate where serving others fits in the grand scheme of your life.

Additional Observations:

¹ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/blood-ties-vampire-bats-build-trust-to-become-food-sharing-pals/>.

Chapter 2 Scrap Your Plans. God Has Bigger Ones

When the plans of God are hitched to pain, we are sustained by His grace.

So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him (1 Kings 19:19–21 ESV).

ICEBREAKERS

Dream Sharing Circle: Invite participants to share a dream or plan they once had for their life that didn't come to fruition. Then, if applicable, they can share how something unexpected God brought into their life was better than their original plan. This encourages openness and reflection on God's providence (2 minutes each).

God's Bigger Plans Charades: Prepare slips of paper with Bible stories that exemplify God's bigger plans surpassing individual plans (e.g., Joseph becoming governor of Egypt, Moses leading the Israelites, Esther becoming queen). Participants act out the stories without speaking, and the rest of the group guesses the story. This activity is fun and a powerful reminder of God's sovereignty.

The "If I Were" Game: Ask participants to finish the sentence, "If I were in charge of the world, I would..." This can lead to humorous responses but should transition into a discussion on why God's sovereignty and His plans are perfect compared to our limited understanding.

VIDEO INTRODUCTION

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GO DEEPER ...

Key Text: 1 Kings 19:19–21 NASB

A. Elisha’s self-abandonment mirrors Jesus, who temporarily forsook heavenly glories to serve humanity, living solely for total obedience to God’s will, even unto death. In Luke 14:12–14, while dining at a Pharisee’s house, Jesus advises inviting not those who can reciprocate, but those society neglects, assuring blessings will be returned at the resurrection. He warns against forming self-serving connections, urging us to give generously without expecting repayment. This way, by practicing self-abandonment, we emulate Christ, securing eternal rewards. Find two more examples of similar teachings.

B. Nearly 400 years ago, a group of Puritan leaders produced *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, a summary device designed to teach the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. It is laid out as a series of questions and answers. The first question: *What is the chief end of man?* In other words, *what is the great purpose of our individual lives?* The answer provided—“**Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.**” Can you identify two characters in the Bible who set such an example for us?

Illustration to Ponder:

Beavers build dams to sustain their lives. Those same dams create deep pools and channels, creating unique worlds for fish and millions of water creatures. The deep pools and channels create drought-proof landscapes and wetlands to refresh moose, deer, elk, and birds. The open spaces they create in the woodland canopy allow sunlight to penetrate, creating a warm and shallow aquatic habitat around the edges of ponds for wildlife and insects.

A Practical Action:

Ask God to help you become more conscious of others' needs. Also, inquire how you may appropriately respond to those needs. Create a journal to document your identified needs and your response to those needs.

Additional Observations:

Chapter 3 Uncomfortably Obedient

Obedience is the sustaining agency of Holiness.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
(Proverbs 3:5–6 ESV)*

ICEBREAKERS

Uncomfortable Commands Sorting Hat: Write down various burdensome commands or teachings from the Bible on slips of paper (e.g., love your enemies, give without expecting return, forgive repeatedly). Let participants draw a slip and briefly discuss their feelings about that command and its challenges (2 minutes each).

Obedience in Action Stories: Ask group members to think of a time when they witnessed someone's obedience to God that initially seemed uncomfortable or challenging but resulted in something positive. Sharing these stories can inspire and remind everyone of the power of obedience (2 minutes each).

Blindfold Trust Walk: In a safe, open space, pair up participants for a blindfolded walk where one guides the blindfolded partner using only their voice. This physical representation of trust and obedience can open conversations about the discomfort and faith involved in being spiritually obedient.

The Jonah Run: Jonah's initial refusal to follow God's command offers a relatable story of resistance before obedience. Have participants share a brief "Jonah moment" from their lives—when they tried to run from what God called them to do—and what happened (2 minutes each).

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GO DEEPER ...

Key Text: Proverbs 3:5–6 (ESV)

A. King Solomon challenged his subjects to trust the Lord and never make decisions based on their observations. He promised that God would care for their future if they lived life from that perspective. How does such a perspective affect the way you live your life?

B. Abraham responded obediently to God’s request. Can you identify at least two actions you’ve sensed God asking of you?

C. Write the results of your obedience or disobedience in these actions.

Illustration to Ponder:

Motivation in dog training falls into three basic categories: Pleasure, Paycheck, and Penalty

Pleasure: All living things naturally move towards comfort and away from discomfort. Your dog is no exception and will engage in each behavior simply for pleasure.

Paycheck: Dogs are motivated by a paycheck. Rover may love you, but he may also love chasing squirrels. A paycheck, such as a ball or doggy biscuits, leverages the likelihood that he will choose to engage with you when he'd rather do something else.

Penalty: Negative consequences are also powerful motivators. By introducing an unpleasant stimulus, like a verbal reprimand, your dog will avoid some behaviors because it does not enjoy the outcome.

A Practical Action:

Ask God what next step(s) you can take to grow your dependency on Him. Journal the process.

Additional Observations:

Chapter 4 The Storm Which Released a Blessing

Our crisis is God's springboard. He is exceedingly resourceful.

When a moderate south wind came up, thinking that they had attained their purpose, they weighed anchor and began sailing along Crete, closer to shore. But before very long a violent wind, called Euraquilo, rushed down from the land; and when the ship was caught in it and could not head up into the wind, we gave up and let ourselves be driven by the wind. Running under the shelter of a small island called Cauda, we were able to get the ship's boat under control only with difficulty. After they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor and let themselves be driven along in this way. The next day as we were being violently tossed by the storm, they began to jettison the cargo; and on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. Since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on all hope of our being saved was slowly abandoned (Acts 27:13–20 NASB).

ICEBREAKERS

Blessing Raindrops: On pieces of paper cut into raindrop shapes, ask group members to write down blessings in their lives that came from difficult situations. Hang these raindrops on a string or board as a visual reminder of storms' blessings, fostering a positive outlook on trials.

Storm Stories: Invite members to share a brief personal story about a difficult "storm" that eventually led to an unexpected blessing or lesson learned. This can help create a bond of shared experience and set the tone for the study's theme (2 minutes each).

Guess the Storm: Prepare brief descriptions of biblical stories where a character goes through a metaphorical or literal storm and comes out with a blessing (e.g., Jonah and the whale, Paul's shipwreck on Malta). Have participants guess the story or character based on the description. This activity can highlight the theme's biblical roots.

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GO DEEPER ...

Key Text: Acts 27:13–20 (NASB)

A. Genesis 26:12–14 informs us, “Isaac sowed seed in the land in the time of famine.” Trusting God for a 100-fold return on our investments—mercy, forgiveness, finances—during spiritual famine requires steadfast faith in God.

In Matthew 13:23 and Mark 4:20, Jesus said, those who hear the Word, understand it, receive, accept, and welcome it, will bear fruit—some yielding 30-fold, some 60-fold, and some 100-fold. Identify two similar examples of teachings by Jesus.

A. Living generously in seasons of lack requires unwavering faith in God. When it appears we are in over our heads, we must seize hold of hope. Even those with an extensive faith reservoir may waver when adversities never let up. The Bible presents methods for increasing our faith. Luke 17:5 is an example. On that occasion, Jesus’ followers asked Him to increase their faith. Can you identify at least two more?

Illustration to Ponder:

Bison and cows face storms differently. Storms in North America almost always brew from the west and roll out toward the east. When cows sense the storm coming from the west, they run toward the east. The problem is that cows aren't fast.

The storm catches up with them rather quickly. They attempt to outrun the storm. Instead, they run along with it, maximizing the energy required.

Bison react differently. They wait for the storm to cross over the crest of the mountaintop. As the storm rolls over the ridge, they turn and charge directly into it. By running at the storm, they run straight through it, minimizing the energy they expend during the storm.

A Practical Action:

Start a Prayer and Praise Journal. When spiritual obstacles confront us and we feel overwhelmed by our problems, we can forget what God has done for us.

A practical way to help us stay focused during such seasons is to document our prayer journey. Write prayer requests in a journal, including the date we entrusted them to God. When God answers our prayer, enter a praise report. Keep the journal for future reference. It will be a device to encourage our families and friends.

Additional Observations:

Chapter 5 Generosity—A Mode of Spiritual Warfare

Spiritual warfare is not a covert operation assigned to a few super-spiritual Christians. It occurs naturally as we respond obediently to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do (Galatians 5:17 ESV).

ICEBREAKERS

Generosity Brainstorm: Ask each member to quickly list as many acts of generosity as possible in one minute. Afterward, share and discuss how each act can positively impact and potentially counteract negativity or spiritual darkness.

The Generosity Challenge: Propose a hypothetical scenario in which each person has an abundance of a specific resource (time, money, skills). Ask, "How would you use this resource to wage spiritual warfare through generosity?" This thought exercise encourages creative thinking about using what we have for spiritual good (2 minutes each).

Scriptural Treasure Hunt: Prepare cards with Bible verses about generosity, giving, and spiritual warfare. Have participants draw cards, find and read the verse to the group, and discuss how each verse connects generosity with spiritual strength and warfare.

Personal Testimonies of Generosity: Invite group members to share a brief story about a time when someone's generosity toward them significantly impacted their lives, especially during difficult times. This personal sharing can highlight the transformative power of generosity (2 minutes each).

VIDEO INTRODUCTION

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GO DEEPER ...

Key Text: Galatians 5:17 (ESV)

A. In Galatians 5, Paul highlights the internal struggle believers experience between their sinful nature, often referred to as the flesh and the transformative work of the Holy Spirit. The flesh represents the fallen human nature, prone to selfishness, sinful desires, and actions that are contrary to God's will. On the other hand, the Spirit represents God's indwelling presence in believers' lives, leading them toward righteousness, holiness, and obedience to God's commands. How is this conflict expressed in generous living?

B. Paul's reminder to the Galatian believers encourages us to be mindful of the ongoing battle and to rely on the Holy Spirit's power and guidance. Find two scriptures that inform us how to do this.

Illustration to Ponder:

A caterpillar transforms into a butterfly through metamorphosis. Such a transformation is like spiritual warfare. The caterpillar represents a person undergoing spiritual struggle and transformation, while the emergence of a beautiful butterfly symbolizes victory and spiritual rebirth.

A Practical Action:

1. Prayerfully evaluate your current financial contributions to the work of Christ's Church. Inspect your income, expenses, and savings, then establish clear and measurable goals for your increased financial generosity.

2. Consider consulting with a Christian financial advisor or leaders within your faith community for guidance on financial stewardship and generosity. They can provide insights, wisdom, and support as you endeavor to increase your giving.

Additional Observations:

Chapter 6 The Fruit of Generosity

Generosity profoundly affects both the giver and the recipient. It kindles joy in the giver's soul and nourishes the receiver.

Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered (Proverbs 11:25 ESV).

ICEBREAKERS

Generosity Circle: Start by passing around a basket of fruit, with each type of fruit representing a different aspect of generosity (e.g., an apple for giving time, a banana for sharing resources, etc.). Participants pick fruit and share a personal experience or hope related to the aspect of generosity it represents (2 minutes each).

Acts of Generosity Bingo: Create bingo cards filled with various acts of generosity (e.g., complimenting someone, making a donation, volunteering). Participants mark off what they've done recently. The first to get a line shares one of their experiences. This game highlights the many ways to practice generosity.

The Generosity Web: Stand in a circle and hold a ball of yarn. Start by sharing an act of generosity you've experienced or done, then hold onto the end of the yarn and toss the ball to another person. Continue until everyone is connected by the web of yarn, illustrating how generosity connects and supports a community.

Generosity Quotes: Prepare and distribute slips of paper with quotes about generosity from various sources, including Scripture. Each participant reads their quote aloud and briefly reflects on its meaning or how it resonates with them. This can provide diverse perspectives on generosity.

The Generosity Challenge: As an icebreaker, challenge each group member to devise one act of generosity they can commit to performing before the next meeting. Share these commitments with the group. Participants can share their experiences and reflections on the challenge at the next meeting.

VIDEO INTRODUCTION

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GO DEEPER ...

Key Text: Proverbs 11:25 (ESV)

A. Proverbs 11:25 says, “Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.” Jesus taught the same principle in Luke 6:38. Can you think of two examples in the Bible where this principle is demonstrated?

B. Job’s friends sat in silence with him for seven days. In some ancient cultures, there was a tradition of observing a period of mourning or silent contemplation when encountering great suffering or tragedy. Share some examples of related best practices from your culture.

Illustration to Ponder:

Oxpeckers perch on the backs or bodies of large mammals and consume external parasites, such as ticks, fleas, and lice, as well as dead skin and wounds. By feeding on these parasites, the oxpeckers help keep the mammal’s skin free from harmful organisms and assist in wound healing. In return, the mammals provide the oxpeckers with a steady food source and a

convenient perch from which to feed. This symbiotic relationship benefits both the oxpeckers and the large mammals. The oxpeckers receive a source of nutrition and gain protection from predators while feeding on parasites. The large mammals, in turn, benefit from removing bothersome parasites and potential assistance in wound care, leading to improved hygiene and possibly reduced disease transmission.

A Practical Action:

Provide simple acts of kindness for several people this week. It can have a significant impact. Hold the door open for someone, offer to help carry groceries, mow someone’s lawn, or cook a meal for an older person or a student. Consider performing random acts of kindness, like leaving uplifting notes for others to find.

Additional Observations:

Chapter 7 Our Capacity for Significance

Words have the capability to uplift others and create a more compassionate and empathetic world—one where individuals are inspired to succeed.

We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10 ESV).

ICEBREAKERS

Inspirational Figures: Ask individuals to briefly talk about someone they admire for their significant contributions to the world or their community. Share what qualities make their actions significant and how those attributes can inspire personal paths to impact (1-2 minutes each).

Vision Board Snippets: Provide magazines, scissors, glue, and paper. Have each participant create a small 'snippet' of a vision board that represents what significance looks like to them. Share and discuss the collages, exploring the various interpretations and visions of significance.

Impactful Moments Reflection: Hand out index cards and ask each person to write down a moment in their life when they felt genuinely significant or realized the importance of their actions. Share these anonymously by mixing them up and reading them aloud. Reflect on the common themes and the diverse ways significance is experienced.

Unique Contributions Circle: Go around the group and have each person share one unique skill or quality they possess and how they believe it can significantly impact their orbit of influence or the world. This activity helps highlight the diverse ways significance can be achieved.

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GO DEEPER...

Key Text: Ephesians 2:10 (NASB)

A. The Old Testament narrative is loaded with dynamic relationships. Identify two individuals' lives (other than those discussed in this chapter) dramatically affected by the power of words.

B. Recall incidents when words dramatically impacted your action or reaction.

If it was a negative experience, have you processed it healthily? If not, what steps should you take next?

If it was a positive experience, how have you paid it forward?

Illustration to Ponder:

African wild dogs live and hunt in packs. They have a unique approach to ensuring that every pack member gets a share of the food, from the youngest pup to the oldest member. After a successful hunt, instead of gorging on their kill immediately, they will return to their den to regurgitate food for those left behind—the young, the old, or the sick.

This practice isn't limited to parents feeding their offspring, as is common in many animal species. Even non-parent adults will regurgitate food for pups that aren't their own. Their feeding strategy ensures that even those who didn't partake in the hunt directly, or those who might be too old or weak to fend for themselves, are cared for.

It's a remarkable display of social cohesion and generosity, ensuring the survival and well-being of the entire pack rather than just the fittest.

A Practical Action:

Identify two individuals within your orbit who can benefit from encouraging affirming words. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what and when to speak into their lives.

Additional Observations:

Chapter 8 Tithing: A Gateway to Generous Living

Through the art of giving, we discover the virtuosity of living.

Because I am the Eternal One, I never change; as a result, you children of Jacob have not been destroyed though your blessing may have been delayed. From the days when your ancestors served Me, you have turned from and ignored My statutes. Return to Me and I, the Eternal, Commander of heavenly armies, will return to you. But you shameless people ask, “How will we return? Will someone steal from God?” Yet you are always stealing from Me! But you self-centered people still ask, “How have we stolen from You?” In the tithes and the offerings you have not given Me as the law requires! You are cursed with a curse, for as an entire nation you are stealing from Me. To rectify this situation, you must bring the entire tithe into the storage house in the temple so that there may be food for Me and for the Levites in My house. Feel free to test Me now in this. See whether or not I, the Eternal, Commander of heavenly armies, will open the windows of heaven to you and pour a blessing down upon you until all needs are satisfied. I will rebuke the swarm of locusts devouring your crops, and the devourer will not cause the produce you have grown in the earth to decay or the vines in the field to drop their grapes (Malachi 3:6–11 VOICE).

ICEBREAKERS

"The First Time I Tithed" Stories: Invite members to share their first experience with tithing—what motivated them, how they felt, and what they learned. This personal sharing can illustrate the journey of faith and obedience in tithing.

Biblical Treasure Hunt: Assign small groups to find and discuss scriptures related to tithing and generosity (e.g., Malachi 3:10, 2 Corinthians 9:6-7). This encourages engagement with the biblical basis for tithing and its role in fostering generosity.

Generosity Goals Brainstorm: Have participants brainstorm and share one personal goal related to tithing or generosity for the upcoming month. This exercise encourages the practical application of the study's themes and mutual encouragement.

Impact Visualization: Ask group members to visualize and describe the impact they believe their tithing can have on their church and community. Sharing these visualizations can help connect the act of tithing with its broader purpose and potential for blessing.

VIDEO INTRODUCTION

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GO DEEPER ...

Key Text: Malachi 3:6–11 (The Voice)

A. Malachi challenges the people by saying they are robbing God. How do you view tithing and giving offerings in your life? As an obligation, an act of worship, or something else?

B. God challenged the people to test Him by bringing the full tithe into the storehouse. How do you feel about “testing” God in this manner?

C. Do you believe that everything you possess ultimately belongs to God? How does this belief shape your attitude toward giving?

Illustration to Ponder:

The harvester ant species are known for their diligent foraging and food storage behaviors. When they discover a food source, they don't consume it all at once. They carry a significant portion back to their nest. This food is stored in granaries, ensuring the colony sustains when food is scarce, like during the rainy season or when conditions aren't optimal for foraging. In a way, these ants *tithe* by not consuming all they find immediately. They set aside a portion for the future, ensuring the survival and well-being of the entire colony.

In a tithing context, the ants' behavior can illustrate the principle of not consuming everything we have now but setting a portion aside for the communal or greater good, ensuring that needs are met in the future or in times of scarcity.

Practical Actions:

1. Examine your current financial expenditures. If you don't have a budget, now might be a good time to create one. Understand where your money is going and how it is being used.
2. Aim to reach the 10% tithe and beyond. Consider increasing your giving incrementally. For instance, aim to increase your charitable giving by 2% in the next year and gradually increase as you become more comfortable trusting God's provision.

Additional Observations:

Chapter 9 Cultivating Authentic Relationships

Generosity generates passion in relationships.

Whoever brings blessing will be enriched and one who waters will himself be watered (Proverbs 11:25 ESV).

ICEBREAKERS

The "One Thing" Share: Ask each group member to share one thing most people don't know about them. This can reveal unique aspects of each person's life, leading to deeper connections and breaking down barriers to authentic relationships.

Common Ground Search: Divide the group into smaller teams and give them a few minutes to find three to five things they all have in common (beyond surface-level similarities, like being human or living in the same city). This will promote unity and show how even diverse groups have shared experiences or feelings.

Emotion Charades: Write down various emotions on paper and have participants draw and act them out without speaking. Others guess the emotion. This light-hearted game can open discussions about expressing and identifying feelings, a key component of authentic relationships.

Trust Circles: In a safe space, have one person stand in the center of a small circle formed by their peers. The peers gently support the person as they lean back, trusting the group to keep them upright. Rotate so each person has a turn. Debrief about the experience of trust and vulnerability in relationships.

Appreciation Round: Each person shares an appreciation or compliment about the person to their right, focusing on character qualities rather than physical attributes. This exercise builds positive feelings and helps people see the good in each other, fostering a supportive environment for authentic relationships.

VIDEO INTRODUCTION

Edwin has prepared a video to help you launch your discussion. Go to his website, www.edwinrideout.com, and follow the links through 'Generous Living: Mysterious Joy' to access the video for Lesson 9.

GO DEEPER ...

Key Text: Proverbs 11:25 (ESV)

A. Solomon said, “Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered (Proverbs 11:25 ESV). Explore what it means to “bring blessing” and “water” others. Discuss examples of generosity in everyday life—helping others, sharing resources, offering emotional support, etc.

B. Delve into the concept of being “enriched” and “watered” ourselves. Discuss how this enrichment is not always material but can be emotional, spiritual, or relational. Look at biblical characters who were blessed because of their generosity, such as the story of the Widow’s Offering (Mark 12:41–44). Share an experience where acts of generosity led to unexpected blessings or growth.

Illustration to Ponder:

Cuckoo birds do not build their own nests. Instead, the female cuckoo lays her eggs in the nests of other bird species, a behavior known as brood parasitism. She is very sneaky about this and waits until the host bird is away from the nest to lay her egg among the host's eggs quickly.

The cuckoo egg is often disguised to resemble the host's eggs to reduce the chances of the host bird noticing the intruder. When the cuckoo chick hatches, it instinctively pushes the other eggs or young birds out of the nest. This ruthless strategy ensures that the cuckoo chick receives all the food and care from the unsuspecting foster parents.

The host birds tirelessly feed and care for the cuckoo chick, often at the expense of their offspring. In some cases, the cuckoo chick grows much larger than its adoptive parents, yet the host birds continue to feed and nurture it, oblivious that it's not their own.

This behavior of the cuckoo bird can be seen as selfish because it benefits at the expense of the host birds. The cuckoo ensures its offspring's survival and success while jeopardizing the host birds' reproductive success. The cuckoo's brood parasitism strategy is a fascinating example of how selfish behavior can be a successful survival tactic in the natural world.

A Practical Action

Brainstorm ways to collectively participate in generosity, creating a ripple effect of blessing in your community.

Additional Observations:

Chapter 10 Holy Actions

Holy actions are redemptive deeds proclaiming the present nature of God's Kingdom.

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and sisters. But whoever has worldly goods and sees his brother or sister in need, and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God remain in him? Little children, let's not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth (1 John 3:16–18 NASB).

ICEBREAKERS

"Act It Out" Scenario Challenge: Create scenarios requiring moral or ethical decisions (e.g., finding a wallet or witnessing bullying). In small groups, participants demonstrate holy actions by acting out how they would respond in each scenario. After each skit, discuss alternative actions and their potential impacts.

Holy Actions Bingo: Prepare bingo cards with different holy actions listed in each square (e.g., volunteering, praying for someone, offering forgiveness). Participants mark off actions they've done recently. The first to get a line shares one of their experiences. This game highlights the variety of ways one can live out their faith.

The Saints Among Us: Ask each person to think of someone they know (or know of) who exemplifies living a life of holy actions and briefly describe why. This can include people from the Bible, saints, or individuals from their own lives. Discuss what qualities make their actions holy and how they can inspire our own actions.

Commitment Cards: Provide each participant with a small card. Ask them to prayerfully consider one holy action they feel called to commit to in the coming week (e.g., an act of service, a step towards reconciliation, etc.). Participants can share their commitment with the group or keep it private. Revisit these commitments in a future meeting to share experiences and reflections.

VIDEO INTRODUCTION

Edwin has prepared a video to help you launch your discussion. Go to his website, www.edwinrideout.com, and follow the links through 'Generous Living: Mysterious Joy' to access the video for Lesson 10.

GO DEEPER ...

Key Text: 1 John 3:16–18 (NASB)

A. Ecclesiastes 2:26, *God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to those who please him* (NLT). Hebrews 13:16 teaches us not to neglect do good and to share what we have with others. Such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Identify at least two more scriptures that speak to this matter.

B. The Bible teaches that when we trust the Lord, Joy flows into our lives. Psalm 40:4, “Oh, the joys of those who trust the Lord” (NLT). This Psalm is just one scripture among many which teach this profound truth. God, who is more powerful than we can comprehend, has promised *joy* will be a by-product of *trust*. How does this promise relate to the core theme discussed throughout this chapter?

C. Being anxious about *lack* in life indicates our relationship with God may be lacking, that our trust is linked to something or someone else. This is observable in the life of Lot (Genesis 13). Abraham and his nephew, Lot, had built significant enterprises by working side by side for decades. At a certain point, their family cooperative had reached its limits. The land where their cattle grazed could not support both their herds. Tensions increased among their herdsmen. They needed more space.

Nothing is evil about that situation, but while attempting to resolve their impasse, a nasty *agent* reared its head—greed. Lot demanded what appeared to be the best grazing area. “Lot looked about him and saw that the plain of the Jordan was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord ... So, Lot chose all the plain of the Jordan.” Abraham allowed Lot to choose his preferred grazing territory. Abraham was not anxious regarding Lot’s decision. He knew he could completely trust God. Whether God allowed his herds to thrive or diminish, the result would be good. What were the outcomes of their choices?

Illustration to Ponder:

Conservationist Lawrence Anthony developed a reputation as “the elephant whisperer.” He could calm down African elephants. He worked in the Thula Thula Reserve, where he spent his time trying to soothe elephants that were unhappy about having been relocated there. The elephants wanted to leave, but he kept them in place, knowing they would be killed if they left the protected area. Years later, Anthony died of a heart attack. When it happened, he had not been in the reserve

or seen the elephants for one and a half years. The elephants, sensing that Anthony had passed, left the reserve and traveled for 12 hours to his home to pay their respects. Just as an elephant will mourn the death of its own species, they came out for Anthony. Two entire herds of elephants came in a procession to his home. This massive group of gigantic elephants waited on Anthony's property for two days to mourn his death before they headed back home.

A Practical Action

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal further where you need to develop your generosity. Maybe you need to be more intentional in expressing thankfulness. Perhaps you should practice being merciful to someone you have been reluctant to extend mercy to. Listen for the Holy Spirit's prompting to loosen your grip on your resources. Document the journey. In the future, you will be glad to reflect on how God led you to be generous.

Additional Observations:
