

The Fun of Generosity

Restoring My Giving Self

Version 1.0

Life Model Works

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Cover and design

We love being the source of good things

Being a generous source of life, good things, feasts, fun, enjoyment, health, nurture and delight to others is about as good as life can get. Still, many of us react in unjoyful ways when someone asks us to give. Rather than feeling like a child with a quarter in a candy shop we often feel more like targets of an armed robbery. Perhaps the way we connect giving with meeting the huge needs of the world creates a feeling of inadequacy. Rather than giving like a child and wondering what part of the world we will change with our quarter we think about problems. This booklet aims to help us remember that the fun of giving is about being the generous people we love to be when we can find that part of ourselves.

When Jesus said it was more of a blessing to give than to receive, he was speaking of what it is like to be full of good things. (Acts 20:35) The mother of a newborn can hardly wait to nurse when the hour arrives because she is full of the milk of life. Most of us have experienced the opposite at some point. We were in a group that wanted to do something we could not afford to do. "I'll go if you pay my way," can be hard to say. Feeling like "a penny waiting for change" does not feel as blessed as when we can be generous.

God's giving nature is the source of our generosity. We are most alive when we reflect God's nature in ourselves. Before we continue with the discussion of the fun of generosity let us remember what we know about generous good fun and joy already.

Exercise one – special times of receiving in our lives

1. Write down five of God's best gifts to you
2. Spend 30 seconds appreciating each one
3. Thank God for being generous

Exercise two – special times of giving in our lives

1. Write down five gifts, experiences or occasions you have really enjoyed giving to someone
2. Spend 30 seconds appreciating each one
3. Thank God for making you generous at heart

If you have done these two exercises you have now spent a total of five minutes feeling the fun of generosity. You have remembered that you love God's generosity. You remembered how deeply you like being generous. Giving times are some of the best times in life! So why is it that so many of us have lost the fun of generosity? More importantly, how can we get the fun back? Let us have a look.

What the Bible says about joyful giving

God is a generous giver and delights in giving. Since we are created in God's image we will also delight in giving. Jesus recommends generosity so, "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:45) Jesus makes the point that God's children cannot resist giving even when others do not deserve our gifts. God's children are so generous even our enemies cannot stop us. Whether we are treated roughly or sweetly we need only be squeezed and generosity comes out. We want to giggle and say, "I just can't help it!"

Being generous is not simply a "nice" thing to do. For Jesus generosity was so central to our character that his first recorded sermon in Luke centers on generosity. (Luke 4:22-30) The crowd became hostile and almost killed him for telling them to start with generosity. While the whole story is too long to be considered here, Jesus was nearly pushed over a cliff after telling his home town that they should give others a Jubilee. Jubilee was an event every 50 years where debts were forgiven but Jubilee was never practiced. After Jesus read the text on forgiving debts he says in effect, "You want me to start by giving to you but God's people start by giving to others." Asking others to give before receiving almost got Jesus killed. (All of this was told in parables so it is sometimes difficult for modern readers to follow the action.)

Biblical economics has its roots in the Old Testament law. The Books of Moses instruct God's people to always have something to share. The borders of fields were not to be harvested, oxen were to share in the grain and some olives were left in the trees for those in need. God's people had enough and some to share. God's people had something to share with friends and strangers. Jesus goes an additional step by saying that not even abusive enemies should stop our generous nature.

"So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7) Most of us know St. Paul's instruction on cheerful giving. If we read this passage as a command it sounds like, "Decide, give and you had better like it!" We may even think, "Isn't hard enough to give without requiring me to like it too?" The secret to understanding this passage comes from understanding that God does not need our gifts any more than we need a child's hug. We love it when a child runs to hug us but something is lacking when the parents must nearly force the child to give us a hug. When our minister must nearly force us to give to God none of the three of us is having fun.

Giving is not a "God tax" we must pay to improve God's roads and support God's projects. Needs are not the main reason for our giving. There are always needs and others are blessed by our giving but the reason for giving is expressing our generosity. We do not laugh because there is a need for more laughter in the world – although laughter is needed. We laugh because we have a sense of humor and our laughter wants to come out or we are going to pop.

“Sacrificial giving” is another phrase that does not fully make sense. What we really mean is that someone is so generous that even having very little to give will not stop them. The two coins worth less than a penny that the widow gave showed her generosity to Jesus. (Mark 12:42-3) When we become acquainted with generous givers we discover that they are eagerly looking for a place to give their small gift in much the same way a child with a quarter goes into a candy store.

Most of us have learned to ask in Jesus’ name knowing that we can ask God because, thanks to Jesus, we are family. As a result we can, in essence, sign Jesus’ name on any check that he would authorize. Saying “in Jesus’ name” means I can sign this request with his name because this is what Jesus would ask. The family inheritance comes with the name as well. God watches what we do with our allowance before giving us more. As signers on the divine checking account, what are we going to do in this sad world with all that resource? Does this sound fun? In the last section of this booklet we will look at all the ways we can be generous.

What took away our joy?

Have you noticed how fast generosity disappears when someone tries to take something from us? Consider the difference between kissing freely and a kiss at knife point. A lesson counselors took away from helping sexual abuse victims was that any force or coercion greatly endangers our capacity for later enjoyment. When people try to force giving it immediately becomes taking instead of giving. Taking spoils giving whether we do the taking or someone is taking from us. Damage happens to both parties with the use of force. Taking and having something taken can drain the joy from our generosity.

Giving too much too young is another way to lose the joy of giving. Children are learning to receive. Children like it when others receive. Children like sharing the fun of *receiving* good things. I receive then you receive and then I receive make happy children. Can you remember liking to receive as a child? Can you remember enjoying watching others receive?

Too much focus on giving while children are still learning about receiving results in children thinking something that sounds like, "Others can receive but I cannot." To a child who is still learning to understand receiving this ruins the fun. When we lose the fun of receiving we also lose the joy of generosity.

By the time most people reach adulthood the thrill of generosity is fading but not gone. What are the things you really enjoyed giving when you became an adult? Surprise parties? Compliments? Money? Gifts? Job offers? Prizes? What took away the joy of generosity?

As adults, reciprocity is a very large value. Do you care about my concerns and needs the way I care about yours? Reciprocity is different than equality. Generous people don't care about equality (what I gave you was worth exactly what your gift cost) as much as mutuality (our gifts reflect equal amounts of care.) Having our needs and value discounted takes the joy out of generosity for adults.

Deception and manipulation can take the fun out of generosity. Fake care is often used to manipulate giving. A salesperson arrives at our door selling magazines we do not want in order to earn prize money for college.

"What magazine would you like?" the salesperson says pretending to be interested in our desires. When told we don't want any magazines the salesperson's smile grows bigger.

"That is great! You don't have to buy them for yourself. Here is a list of causes where we will donate your magazine subscription. Which one would you chose?" Now our generosity is being manipulated directly. What is the effect? Do we feel generous when someone is trying to take from us?

Suppose we reply that we only have \$18 dollars in the bank until payday for taking care of our family.

"That is OK. I can take cash or a postdated check!" comes the reply.

What is clear by now is that this pretended interest in us is a sham. There is no real interest in our family or wellbeing. This is a manipulation of our desire to be seen as generous. It will cost us money now to maintain a generous image but the joy and fun of generosity is gone.

Controlling what others will do with our gifts is another huge way to lose the fun of generosity. Not only do all people dislike being controlled but attaching strings to a gift turns generosity into a bridle to control others. Trying to control how people will use gifts ruins many people's old age and family relationships. Trying to manage what happens to our gifts results in charities catering to trends and ignoring complex problems or the unglamorous infrastructure needs. The irony is that people try to manage how gifts are used so the giver can be happy about the gift and the result is often misery instead.

Loss of trust greatly reduces the fun of generosity for most of us but it does not need to. As you recall, God makes rain fall on the good and evil alike. Some of God's generosity is going to people God does not trust in the least. Rain falls and God still smiles. If our generosity is about what kind of people we are, then we can enjoy being generous without needing the world to be trustworthy. There is a hidden fairness in open generosity. Receiving the fruits of generosity will bring blessings for righteous people and judgement for unrighteous ones.

Anxiety takes the fun out of generosity. When people do not enjoy being generous with us we quickly wonder if we will have enough. Anxiety develops when our needs are not important to people around us. Anxiety can make us want to keep our things from being taken, hide our valuables and then give as little as possible. Anxiety creates other patterns that destroy generosity but we cannot list them all here.

Giving to a cause is now the main way we think about generosity in Western culture. We give to: church needs, find a cure for cancer, help tsunami victims, support public broadcasting or help a fourth grade class buy art supplies. The government allows tax credit for giving to a cause that would otherwise cost taxpayer money to support. How much better to have people happily making donations to help drug addicts than to have to tax people to take care of drug addicts! The government provides a tax exempt status and many precautions so that greedy individuals cannot easily exploit our generosity. So, instead of giving to an individual we give to a cause and therefore to meet a need.

Causes inevitably come down to needs and with it the idea that we should give because of the need. Because the need will almost always be bigger than our capacity to give, the organizations that address causes will break down the need into small parts. "Your gift of \$9 a month will provide water for 417 children." Distracted by meeting needs we can easily forget about the fun of generosity. Generosity is much bigger than effectively addressing the needs of the world. In fact, the point of this booklet is that the needs of the world will be fun to meet when we regain our generous nature. Restoring the fun of giving is as essential to a good world as effective management of the gifts we give.

Greed is the final cause we will consider here. Greed is cruel and cruelty takes the fun out of generosity. Greed (often called being stingy, miserly, cheap, a hoarder, selfish and self-centered) is the absence of joyful generosity. The more we are exposed to greed the more injured our generosity will become. These injuries cannot be avoided but they can be healed.

Is my personality damaged?

It would be fair to say that the loss of fun as part of giving is a sign of trauma. Trauma is the loss of use (or enjoyment) in some part of us due to a harmful impact. We try to shield an injured arm instead of using it and worry about the arm instead of having fun or using it. If we hide our generosity or react to a chance to give with more of a wince than a smile then we have some damage.

Ideally we enjoy our generosity more as we mature. As our lives fill up with good things we have more to give, we know more people and see more opportunities. Earned maturity can be measured by the number of people we are able to nurture and protect. With maturity comes an appreciation for the more subtle, extensive and enduring effects we can have on the world. To someone who is full of good things, generosity is a river of life flowing out of their inner being. As Jesus said of his followers, "rivers of living water will flow from within them." (John 7:38 NIV) It is fun to be a river. In fact, the saddest things when we are a river come from those who will not accept, try to control or hoard good things.

If we grow up without increasing levels of fun in our giving we actually develop a deformity in our personality. The Bible calls these deformities an "iniquity" (an ancient word for deformity) when speaking of parts of us that did not grow correctly. Scripture points out that one generation readily passes personality deformities to the next generation as if the deformities were normal. When God says that he wants a joyful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7) it gives us a glimpse of how we would look without a deformity. We would all be joyful givers because God gives joyfully and we are God's children.

How do we heal our identities so we are normal once again? We will devote the rest of this booklet to healing our generosity after we consider just a few effects that are caused by deformities in our generosity. Let us briefly consider the effects next.

Effects of our damaged personalities

Tanya is a young mother. While waiting for children after preschool she meets another young mother who has not been to church in 15 years. Tanya invites her to church only to discover that that it is Stewardship Sunday. Tanya's heart sinks. Her new friend rolls her eyes. The pastor is slightly apologetic saying he must preach this every year for our own good and to meet the needs of the church and their mission. Joy is low in the sanctuary and Tanya whispers, "Come back again next week. It will be much better. I am sorry I invited you today."

How many people, both young and old, with a sense of calling to serve God have their stomachs turn, their hands get cold, their minds go blank and throats get tight at the thought of asking others to support them? Leaders of not-for-profit groups know that it is very hard to find anyone who wants to make calls and raise money. The chances that anyone is going to smile and be glad they received a call seem very low.

If we think about our own sense of eagerness when we receive a letter asking for a donation it is not generally a rising sense of joy and opportunity. But the problem with giving is not limited to donation letters, sermons about stewardship or raising support. Consider how often family bitterness and conflicts follow receiving and giving an inheritance. Parents often go through great stress trying to decide how to leave their estate, family fights over who gets what are common. Even end-of-life care is complicated by who shows up to be in line for the money. Families who had good relationships often descend into bitter conflicts that can last for generations over inheritance.

The loss of fun in giving can be small or large. Consider how easily giving gifts for holidays, birthdays and every day becomes complicated and even no fun at all. We start calculating how everyone is going to react if we give something to someone. Rarely do we calculate how much joy and fun everyone would have if we gave a gift. Consider how many people you know who carry into their adulthood some sense of unfairness over a gift their brother or sister received. Joseph's colorful coat is just one Bible story that shows us that giving can be hazardous. Giving can even lose its joy in a business setting. Giving raises, promotions or recognition are all potential hazards in an environment where people have lost the joy of giving.

Money is one of the leading causes of marital discord. Fights over money are not brought on by mutual generosity. Conflicts over money (and our difficulty in talking about finances) show us how rare joyful giving has become for most adults.

Looking at possibilities it becomes clear that most of the fun of giving and generosity has been lost and that our fear, guilt and apprehension makes us more controlling than generous. Giving has become about getting results and meeting needs rather than an expression of our identities. It is time to restore the fun.

Restoring my joyful generosity

There are many ways to restore our souls and we have chosen to present the path in this booklet because it is simple and joyful. The method we will use has been called the Immanuel process because it builds on the reality that God is with us. We will not lean on our own understanding but will discern God's mind for guidance. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Here are the steps we will take along with a simple description of each. Read through the descriptions first then come back and follow the steps.

Recalling God's gifts that touched me begins restoring the fun of giving. Remembering how much we like God's generosity is the start of treasuring our own generosity. Make a list of God's best gifts to you.

Giving thanks is my natural response to generosity. Take time to thank God for gifts you have received and for what those gifts mean to you. Thank God a second time as you consider what those gifts mean about God.

Asking God the questions, "What takes away my fun in giving?" and "What do you want me to know?" opens a grateful mind to notice God's thoughts. When we try to answer these questions ourselves our thinking and our own understanding can bring up ideas but will rarely restore our generous identities. Asking God what we need to know while we focus on gratitude for God's gifts lets us follow God's lead.

Looking for thoughts that come into our mind (generally in less than 15 seconds after we ask the question) begins a dialogue with God. Sometimes the thought is obvious. Sometimes we understand why we have the thought. With a surprising frequency, the thought we notice seems both irrelevant and distracting. The challenge is to ask the next question whether our thought seems important or not. It would sound like this, "Lord here is what has come to mind for me." (Give a brief description.) "What do you want me to know about that?" Asking questions aloud can be surprisingly helpful. Write down what comes to mind.

What do I need to know about that? Is the main question we ask God about whatever thought comes into our mind. We continue our focus on gratitude for God's good gifts while alternately asking God what we need to know and then noticing what comes to mind until we feel deeply peaceful.

Checking for peace lets us look for a quiet sense that something is true and makes sense. Peace is an important sign that we are in agreement with God's thoughts. When we are peaceful we are also restored in a way that brings back the joy and fun to whatever we were thinking through with God. We realize that our perspective now matches what God wants for us, what God has said about himself in scripture and revealed to God's people over the years. When you feel peaceful go on to the next step. If you are not yet peaceful return to the previous step.

Expressing gratitude to God with a story completes this cycle of restoration for our generosity. If we think about how our generosity was damaged we find that damage happened in the past. When we

reach the point of being peaceful about the past in our interaction with God, the past no longer damages us but how we view the future is still unchanged. Since our view of the future thus far has always been clouded by the damage in the past we must take another look at the future.

The part of our minds that tells stories is the same part that looks at the future. The simple solution to changing how we see ourselves in the future is to tell the story of how our interaction with God has changed us. We pay special attention to what is different now. In other words, we thank God for what has changed and for this latest gift to us! By telling God or others our story of gratitude we also begin giving on the spot! Giving thanks is one thing God loves to receive from us. We also give God credit for our family resemblance as a joyful giver.

In the section after next we will show you how you can guide someone else through these healing steps. First, we will consider the likely possibility that our giving has been damaged in more than one way. Let's continue restoring our joyful generosity.

If you would like to have additional guidance, go to www.lifemodelworks.org, click on giving link and you be guided through a healing prayer like the one above.

Ongoing restoration

The fun level in our generosity can be tested by giving a test gift. Give something you would like to give. Give a gift that is likely not necessary at all. Give something one is expecting of you. See what your response is like inside. Do you want to smile and dance a bit?

Watching for the inner “cringe” when giving and money are mentioned is a sign that our generosity may not yet be fully restored. This is not to say that there are no reasons to cringe, only that we should make sure God does not have something we should know every time we cringe at a giving opportunity.

Discussing money and giving opens a “can of worms” for most of us. It is unlikely that only one factor has taken away our fun in giving. Therefore, restoring our generosity is likely to require a series of interactions with God. While each interaction brings more freedom, people frequently discover that feeling better is not the same as being totally free. Sometimes we clearly know that God wants to continue improving our generosity and other times that we see our own need for change. Either way we begin interactions with God through gratitude and follow the steps for *Restoring my joyful generosity* in the preceding section. Even when we feel finished it is good to ask God if there is anything else God wants us to know. We may even experience a boost in our joy we did not anticipate.

Letting God lead our restoration is important if we are to experience deep restoration. When Jesus spoke about God’s generosity he inevitably mentioned giving to those who consider us their enemies – people we tend to dislike. God’s desire to make us generous will bring us face-to-face with any desire we might have to control others and get what we want. It is inevitable that our interests will come in conflict with God’s generosity through us. These are times when we really need a good “talk” with God about our lack of peace.

Restoring our generosity can be expanded over time to include other aspects of life using the easily followed little book called *Joyful Journey* that does more than restore giving. *Joyful Journey* guides us toward a complete restoration of our identities through exchanging thoughts with God and building peace inside.

For more on this Immanuel process and its many uses please see *Joyful Journey* by Wilder, Kang, Loppnow and Loppnow; *Share Immanuel* by Wilder and Coursey; *Outsmarting Yourself* and *Immanuel Approach* by Dr. Karl Lehman and visit the www.lifemodelworks.org website.

Helping others have fun giving

Fun is contagious. Helping others discover and enjoy their generosity flows easily when we love giving life to others. Helping others give is really hard when we are still unhappy givers. In fact, once we are feeling the fun of giving, it is the easiest thing in the world to ask someone, "Do you have fun giving? Would you like to?" Three minutes of telling what God has done for us (a story we have already been telling God) and our invitation becomes clear to our listener.

Unlike a therapy session, leading an individual (or group) back to the fun of generosity is not about hearing all their bad experiences. We rediscover our generous nature through grateful attention to God's thoughts not by talking about how we came to hate giving. Helping someone become generous is done by taking them through the steps and questions we ourselves used. (See *Restoring my joyful generosity*) We do not need anyone to tell us what comes to mind in their exchange with God. We do want to help people put into words their gratitude for what changed while discovering God's thoughts. Here are the steps once again. We help others:

- Remember God's good gifts
- Ask what God wants them to know
- Focus on gratitude instead of trying to figure things out
- Ask God what else they need to know if they don't yet feel peaceful
- Push the "pause button" and continue the conversation with God later
- Tell their story of what changed that they want to thank God about

For most people this process takes about 15 minutes. It is also very common that people learn these steps one at a time. The first try may simply involve remembering God's good gifts. Let us consider a few items that need a little more explanation.

Asking God what else I need to know – When guiding people to restore their joy, about the only question we need to answer or problem we need to solve is, "Do you have a bathroom here I can use?" Almost everything else can be directed back to God.

- I keep getting distracted – *Let's ask God what you need to know about that*
- I keep thinking about where I grew up – *Let's ask God what you need to know about that*
- I keep getting a blank – *Let's ask God what you need to know about that*
- This is not working – *Let's ask God what you need to know about that*
- I keep trying to figure out why this upsets me – *Let's ask God what you need to know about that*
- I get a picture of my ex-wife laughing – *Let's ask God what you need to know about that*
- This makes my head feel tight – *Let's ask God what you need to know about that*

Using the pause button – at any point in prayer with God we can stop and ask God to hold things for us until we can come back and finish. Our generosity has likely been damaged repeatedly over years and may require many conversations. Rather than go on looking for a final resolution, consider the process

of restoring generosity to be like cleaning out a garage. Let God pick a spot to work and clear one section at a time.

Telling my grateful change story – telling a story is not so much about “how I felt before” as it is about thanking God for what has changed. We are thanking God for making it fun to give once again. Take some time finding words for how much better each person feels. We remember that restoration is very rarely completed the first round so encourage people to thank God for what God has done so far.

A medley of ways to give

How we feel when giving money and time are often the best indicators of how deeply the fun of generosity has been restored in our lives. However, there are many fun ways to give. Here is a short list.

- Encouragement – giving help with motivation and hope can really bring a smile
- Honor – seeing the worth in others can bring a good feeling for us when we go to bed
- Grace – letting someone know they are really special makes us feel special too
- Mercy – people do not deserve this gift and by giving we know God's character is growing in us
- Wisdom – worth more than gold but very satisfying to give
- Help – one of the most practical ways to get a smile from God
- Money – here is a good test of how much our sense of fun has been restored
- Fundraising for a worthy cause – this is giving in two or three ways at the same time.

Resources

Would you like a version of this booklet for your organization or cause? Contact Life Model Works for custom printing. Make this page about your organization's resources and put your company name and logo on the cover.

Life Model Works (LMW) offers a well-coordinated set of materials and training to help existing networks thrive. Our goal is to provide tools to the Christian community that restore our God-given identity and make that change contagious. Our goal is to provide simple solutions based on the deepest understanding we can provide of God, creation and redemption. We have developed the Life Model as a carefully designed framework for individual and community restoration. We offer the following resources for those who would like to help donors, supporters and giving partners restore and build joy:

Resources for pastors

Ad copy - I am not looking for a list of products to sell so much as what does LMW offer to pastors who want to Thrive.

Resources for NPOs

Ad copy - I am not looking for a list of products to sell so much as what does LMW offer to organizations that raise funds who want to Thrive.

Resources for schools, classes and clubs

Ad copy - I am not looking for a list of products to sell so much as what does LMW offer to social groups who want to Thrive.

Resources for business?