
FALL LEADERSHIP
CONFERENCE
GREATER MILWAUKEE
SYNOD-2026



Tim.brown@elca.org

HUSBAND AND DAD

ACCIDENTAL FUNDRAISER

DIRECTOR OF CONGREGATIONAL STEWARDSHIP FOR THE ELCA

COFFEE DRINKER

CURIOUS ABOUT GENEROSITY



"A very old man went out one day on the land beside his house, and began planting fruit trees.

A young man walked by. "What are you doing?" the young man asked.

"Planting fruit trees," the old man replied.

"But you will not see fruit in your lifetime," the youth said.

"The fruit that I have enjoyed in my lifetime," the old man answered, "has been from trees that people before me have planted. So to express my gratitude of them, I am planting trees to give fruit to those who come after me.“

-Celtic Proverb

Kinds of Stewardship



FINANCIAL

How we use our pocketbooks



VOICE

How we advocate for our neighbors



RELATIONSHIP

How we interact with our neighbors



LAND

How we use property



MISSION WELLSPRING

How we utilize our space

Kinds of Stewardship



BODY

How we steward our health



CREATION

How we care for our world



COLLECTIVE BODY

How we care for our and connect with our community



PRAISE

How we connect with God



TIME

How we use our hours.

Kinds of Stewardship



SOCIAL MEDIA

How we steward our online presence



CALL

How we care for our purpose



AI

How we steward our tech tools



MESSAGE

How do we steward God's message?

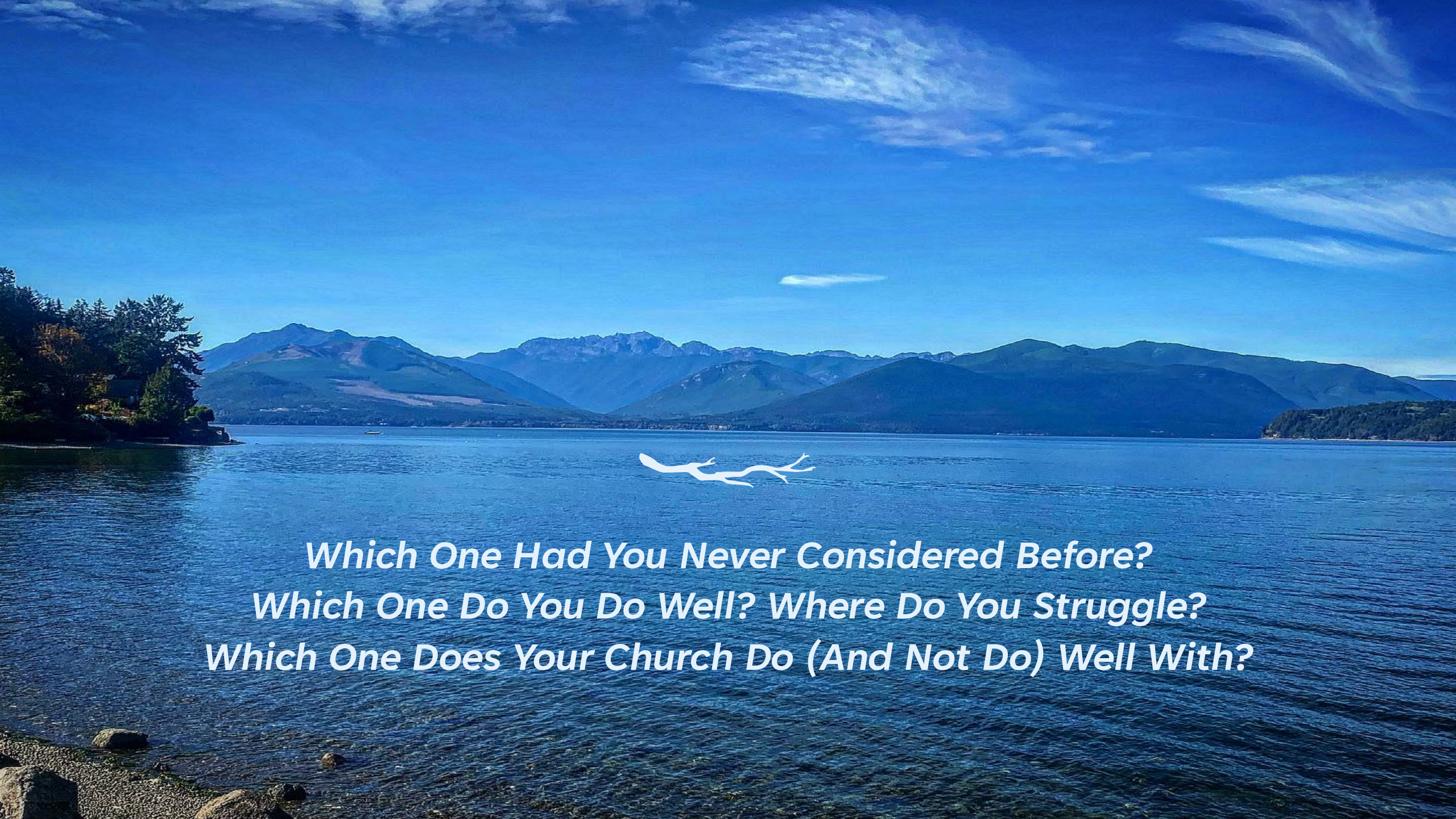
Listening to the Billionaire Tell Us AI Is Just the Newest Tool That Everyone Will Benefit From

Joseph Fasano

When men
broke open
the miraculous power
of the atom,

the first thing they did
with it
was deliver it
into the hands
of the schoolchildren

of Hiroshima.


Which One Had You Never Considered Before?
Which One Do You Do Well? Where Do You Struggle?
Which One Does Your Church Do (And Not Do) Well With?

Stewardship is all that follows **“I BELIEVE”**

-CLARENCE STOUGHTON



Steward: “Sty ward.”

Generosity is “of noble birth.”

-Up until the 1500’s, “generosity” was known in relatively circumspect ways-mostly denoting, “of noble lineage.”

-by the 1600’s, though, the idea became not so much associated with blood line as associated with a sense of ***spirit.***

-by the 1700’s the word evolution continued to mean a sense of open-handedness and liberality.

-generosity came to mean “living by a higher standard” than the average human yet achievable by any human

-old mindsets can reemerge if we aren’t careful, though

-Generosity is not altruism…and that’s OK





GENEROSITY IS A POWERFUL FORCE IN THE WORLD.

Some thoughts:

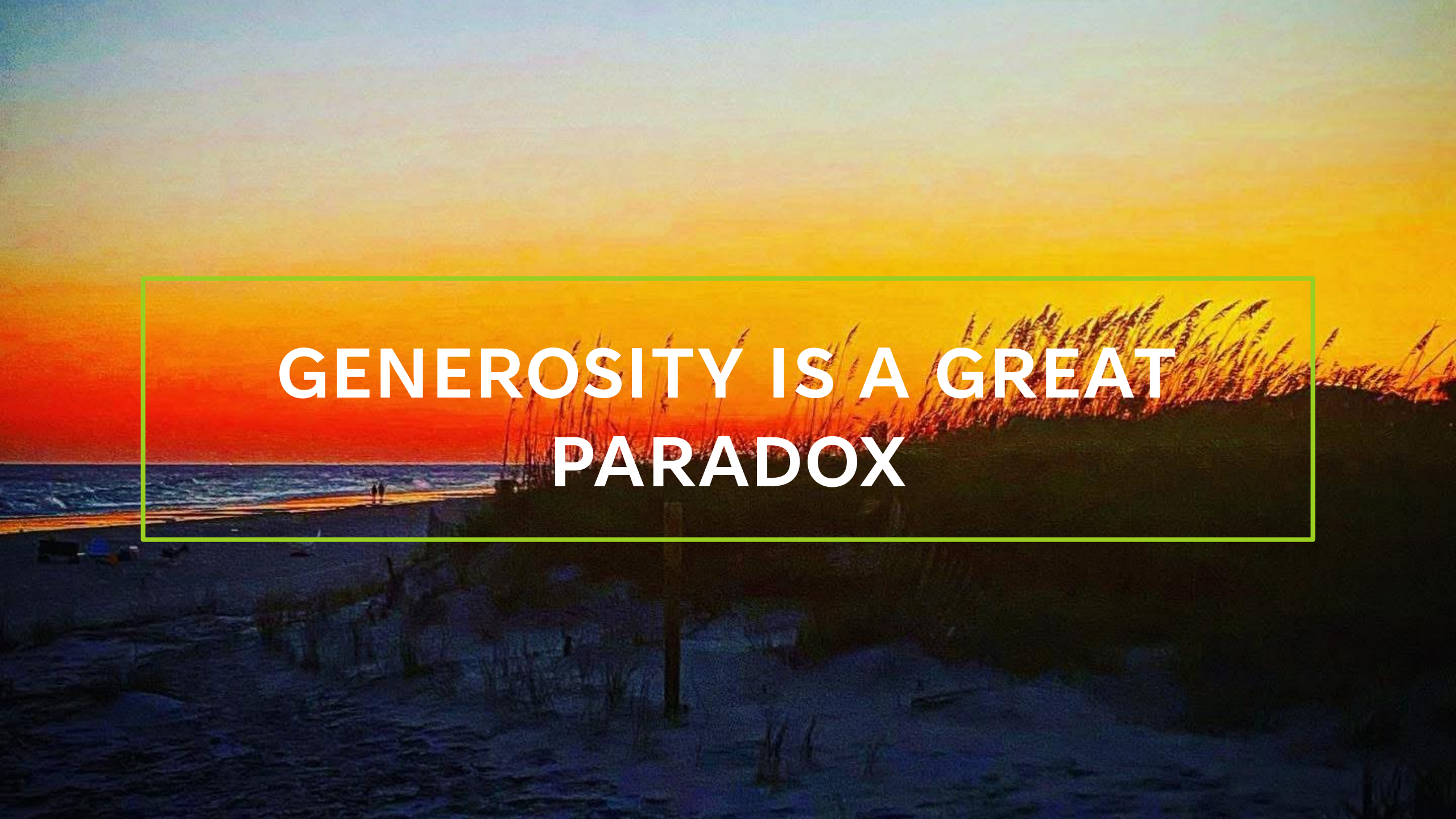
-Americans are giving more than one-half trillion dollars to charity annually. (Glen Galaich, _Control_)

-The ELCA is extremely generous. 1.6 billion given in to congregations and worshiping communities in 2026 as generosity through the church to support ministry across the world.

-Generosity is one of the great paradoxes

-Generosity is one of the great discipleship practices

-Generosity is influenced by theological frameworks


GENEROSITY IS A GREAT PARADOX

MATTHEW 13:31-32

Jesus put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 32 it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.





THE SCIENCE OF GENEROSITY SURVEY (2010)

"GENEROSITY DOES NOT USUALLY WORK IN SIMPLE, ZERO-SUM, WIN-LOSE WAYS. THE RESULTS OF GENEROSITY ARE OFTEN INSTEAD UNEXPECTED, COUNTERINTUITIVE, WIN-WIN...IN CLEAR, CONSISTENT, AND STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT (WAYS) STRONG ENOUGH TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN PEOPLE'S LIVES."

-_THE PARADOX OF GENEROSITY_, SMITH AND DAVIDSON



HEDONIC AND EUDAIMONIC HAPPINESS

IN THE BEST LUTHERAN WAY…WE'RE LOOKING AT A BOTH/AND SITUATION

GENEROSITY AND HAPPINESS

(_PARADOX OF GENEROSITY, PG 15_)

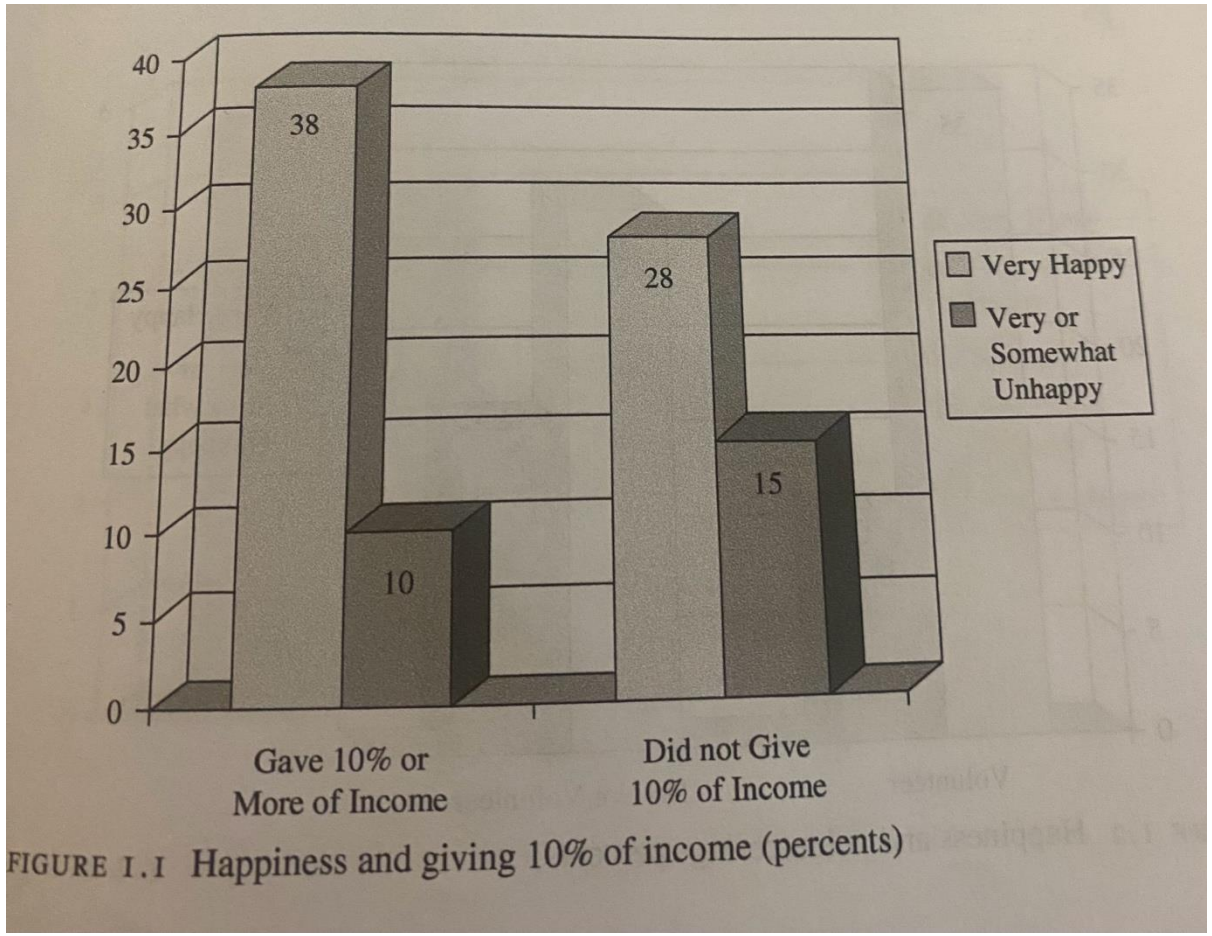


FIGURE 1.1 Happiness and giving 10% of income (percents)

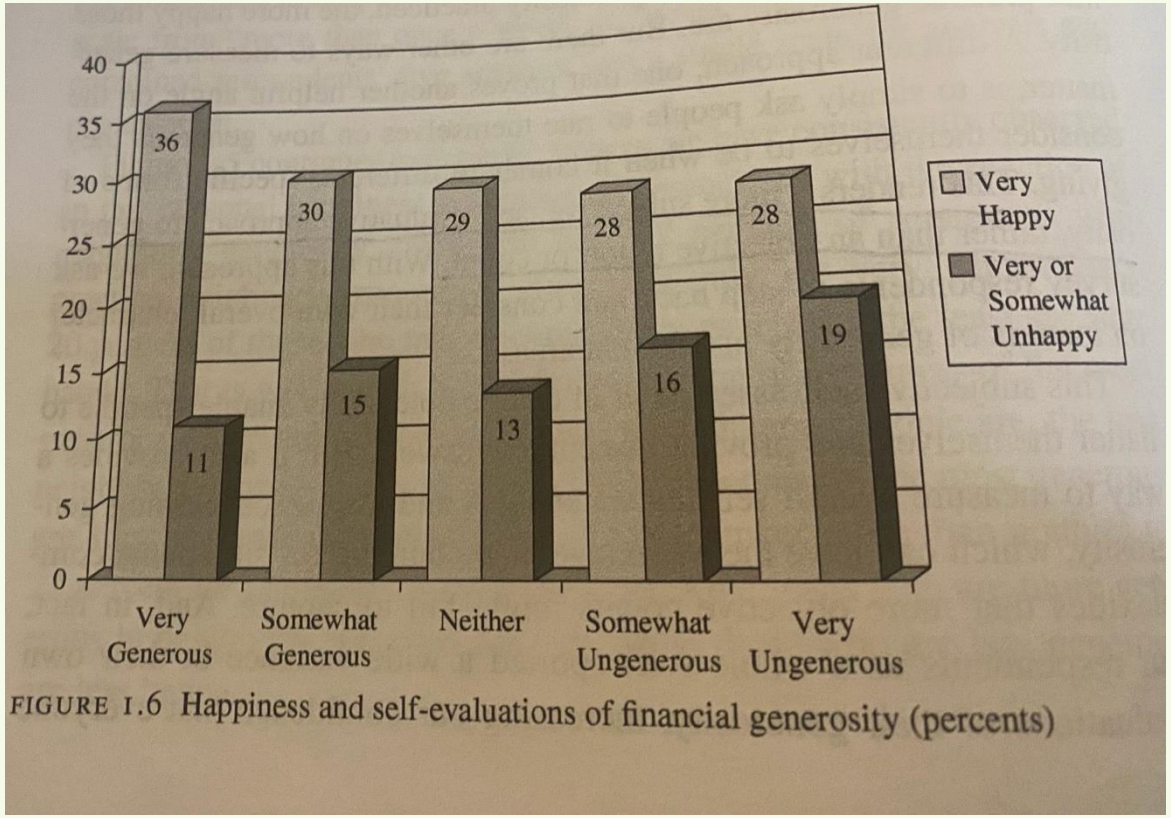


FIGURE 1.6 Happiness and self-evaluations of financial generosity (percents)

SELF-PERCEPTION ON MONETARY GENEROSITY

"OVERALL, WHEN IT COMES TO GIVING AWAY MONEY, WHAT KIND OF PERSON DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO BE?"

-_THE PARADOX OF GENEROSITY_ PG 22

NOT JUST MONEY!

Self-evaluation on volunteering generosity

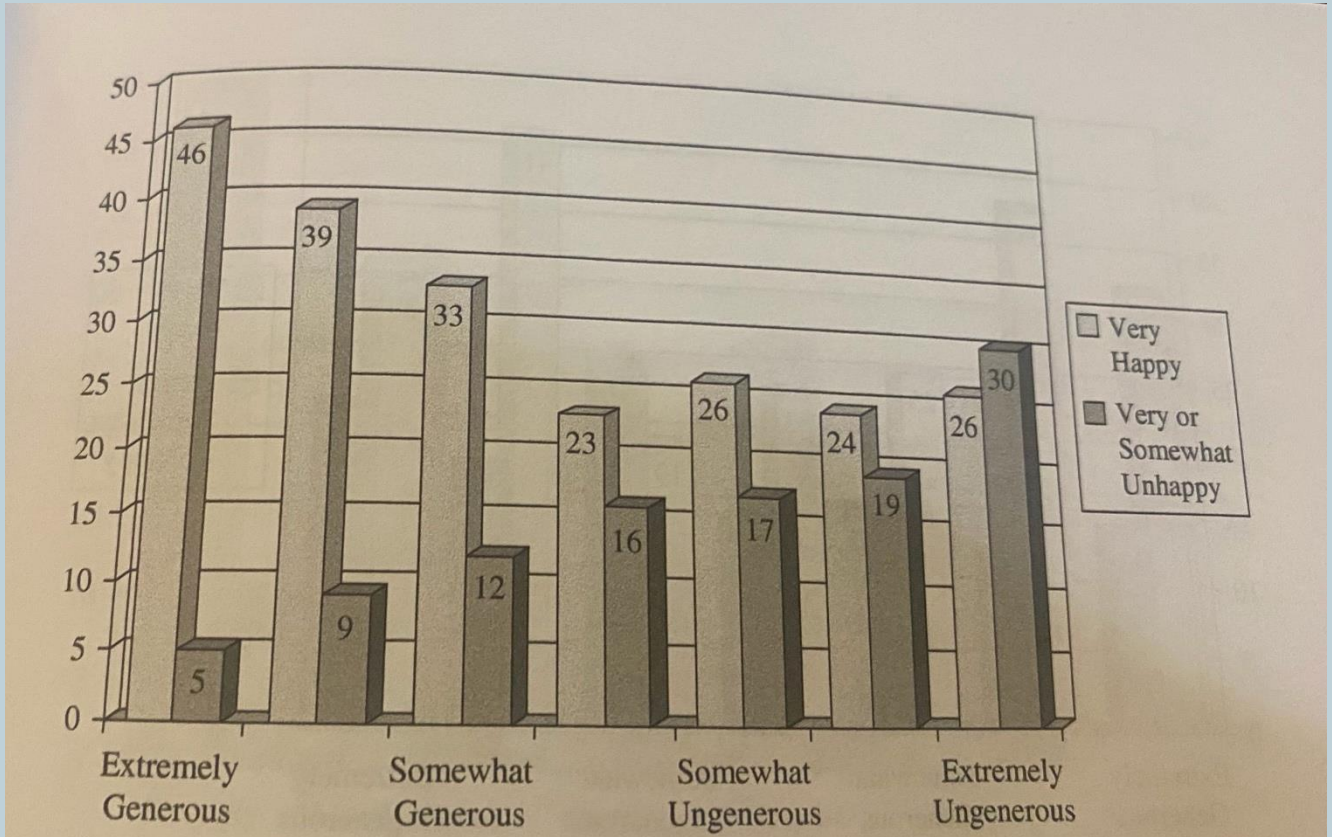


FIGURE 1.7 Happiness and self-evaluations of volunteering generosity (percents)

Tell About a Time...

When did generosity may you more joyful?

What's a memory of happiness associated with giving yourself away for another?

What about generosity brings you satisfaction?

the cure for apathy is memory.



JOHN 12:24

“VERY TRULY I TELL YOU, UNLESS A KERNEL OF WHEAT FALLS TO THE GROUND AND DIES, IT REMAINS ONLY A SINGLE SEED. BUT IF IT DIES, IT PRODUCES MANY SEEDS”


GENEROSITY IS A
DISCIPLESHIP PRACTICE

The world is both burning & blooming.



You get the bad news
and the sunrise in the same day.
You cry over the headlines,
then you laugh at a baby
wearing a hat shaped like a bear.
This is the dual citizenship
of being alive.
Rage and reverence,
Grief and grace.
You are allowed to feel both.
You are allowed to scream,
& still notice how good the soup is.
You don't have to choose.
Let it all in.

Karen Salmansohn + yourtodieforlife.com

On Discipleship in a Fracturing World

GALATIANS 5:22-23

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control"

(***Χρηστότης [chréstotés]…goodness of service***)



THE SQUASH AND THE FICUS

A short story.



WHY PEOPLE GIVE

Lake Institute on Faith and Giving

Adapted from Herzog, P. and Price, H. (2016). American Generosity: Who Gives and Why. Oxford Univ. Press. p. 121.





REFLECTION: WHERE ARE YOU ON THE CHART?

WHAT YEAR YOU WERE BORN MAY BE A KEY FACTOR.

YOUR DEBT LOAD MAY BE A KEY FACTOR.



Traditional Paradigm vs. Emerging Paradigm

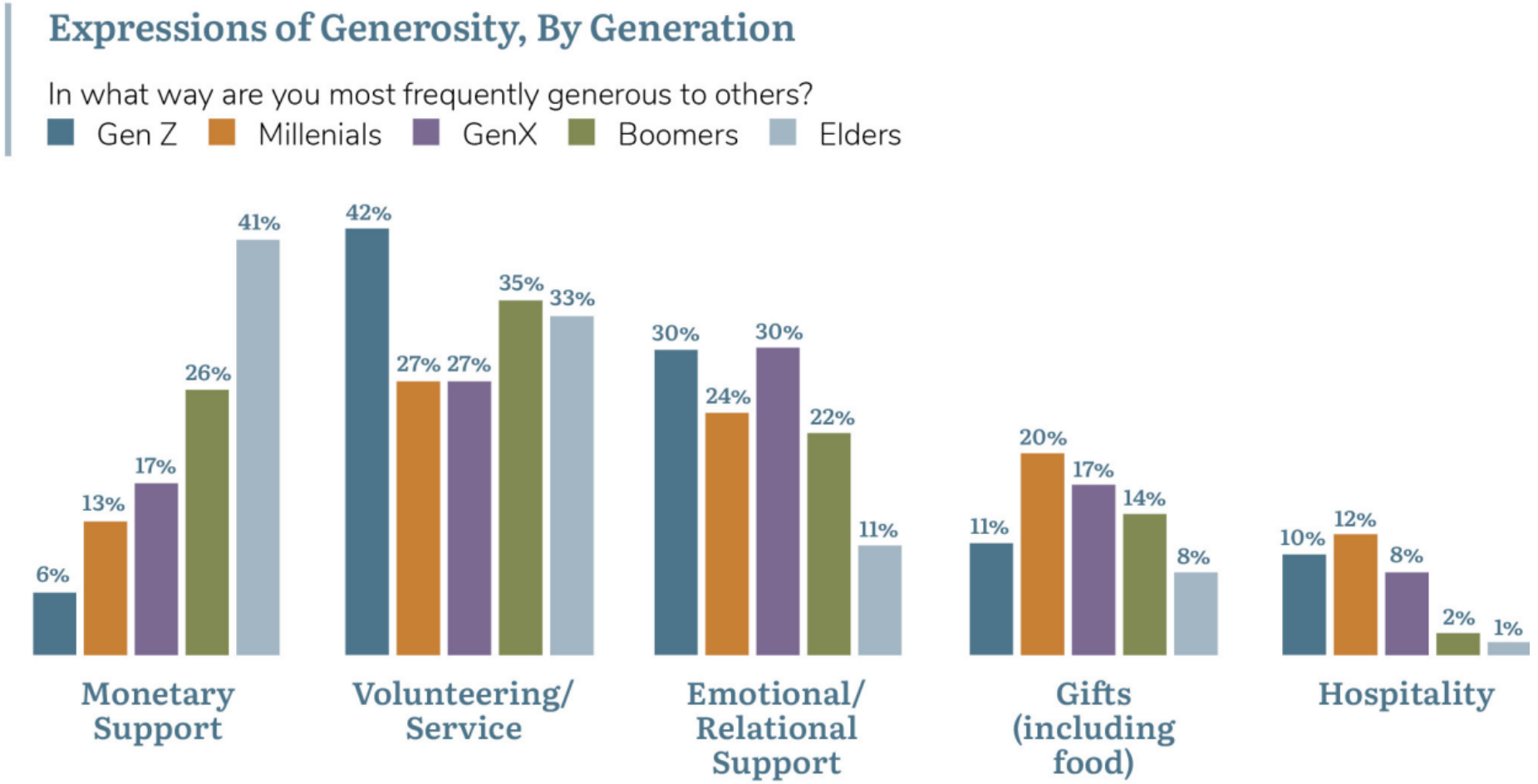
Traditional

- Moral Obligation
- Theology of Duty
- Institution Centered
- Institutions are to be Trusted
- Institutions are Autonomous .

Emerging

- Donor Cultivation
- Theology of Grace
- Donor Centered
- Institutional Trust must be Earned
- Donors are Collaborative Partners

Definitions of Giving Have Changed for Some

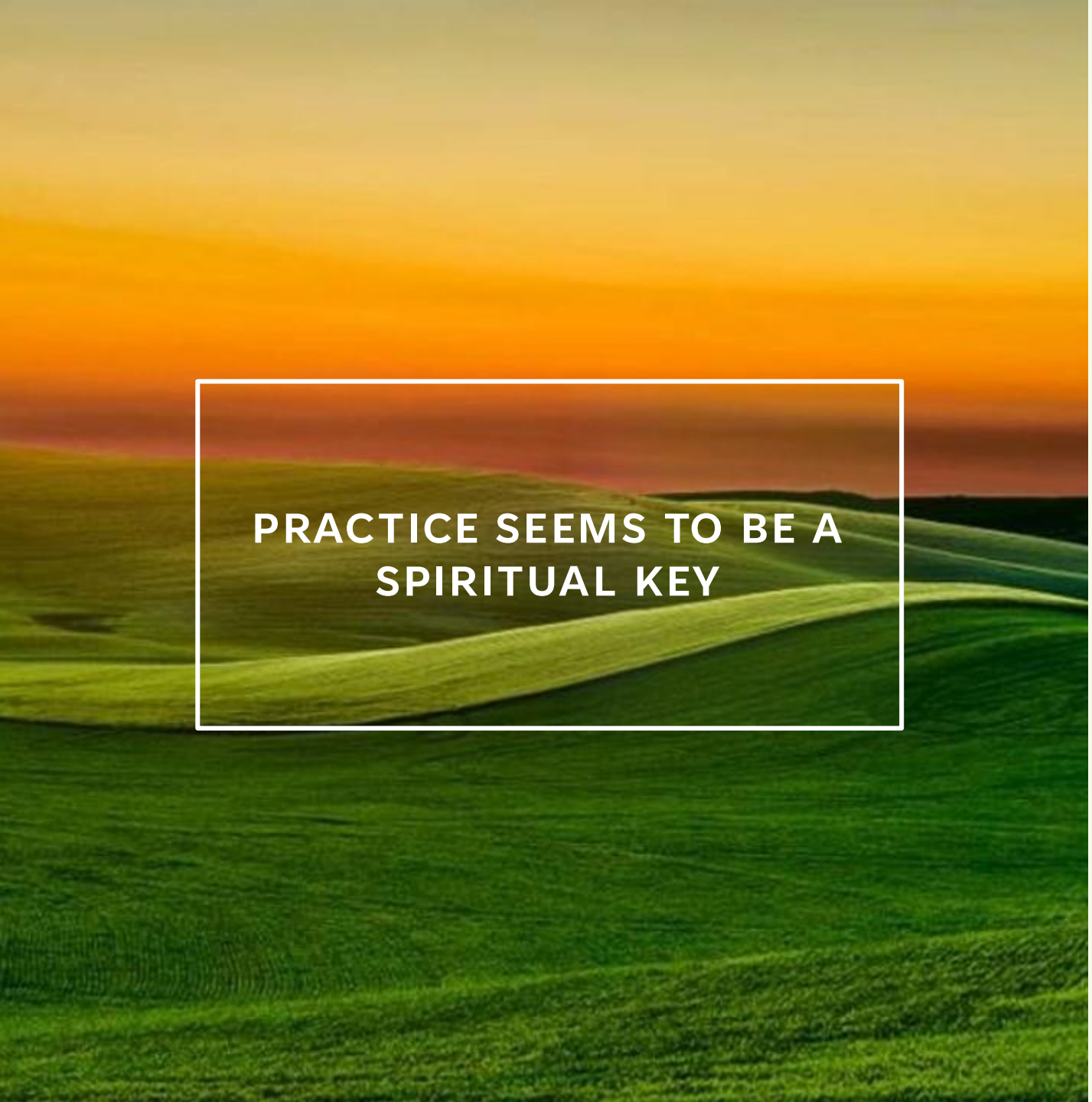


ODD NON-FINDINGS

- “Curiously…four other measures of generosity prove to have no statistically significant association with happiness: giving blood once a year, being an organ donor, lending personal possessions, and giving money through estate planning in a legal will to a nonprofit not involving one’s own family.”

- -_The Paradox of Generosity_, Smith and Davidson, pg 26





PRACTICE SEEMS TO BE A SPIRITUAL KEY

Regularly giving yourself away for others seems to develop the spiritual muscle in a way that no other practice can do.

"As a form of ministry, (practiced generosity) is as spiritual as giving a sermon, entering a time of prayer, visiting the sick, or feeding the hungry"

-Henri Nouwen, _Spirituality of Fundraising_, pg 21



Stewardship and Generosity is Rooted in Baptism for the Disciple

- **First Birth –**

live for fame -live for fortune - live for prestige -live for power

- **Second birth –**

live for wisdom and understanding -live for self-giving love -live for peace -live for justice

Practices can stink

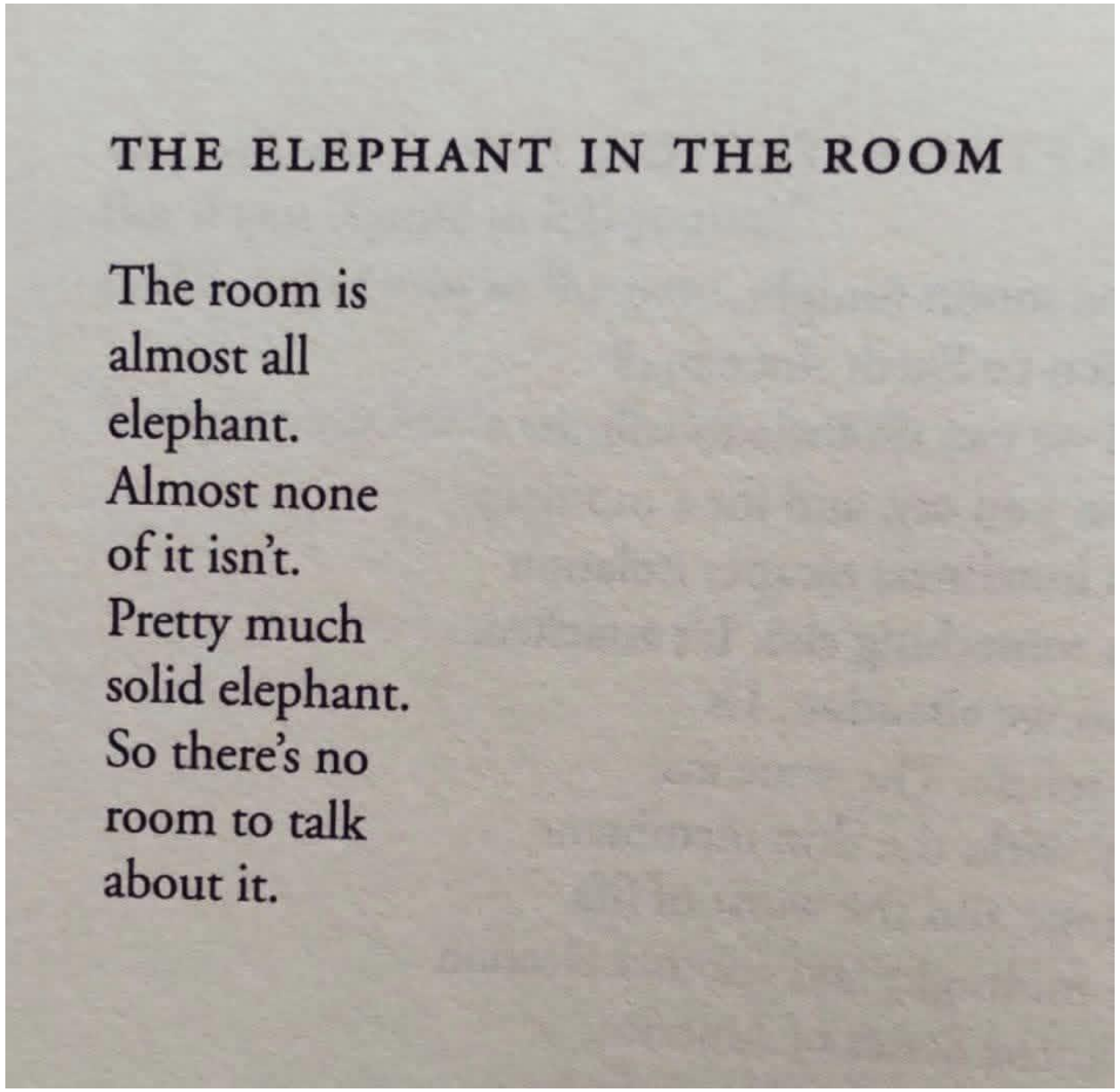
Practices require discipline (no wonder it’s related to discipleship)

Practices require learning and adjustment (we can all learn something, all the time)

Practices require analysis and check-ins to determine if they’re doing what you need them to do (self-reflection is the key to a lived life, Beloved)

Practices can lead to a new way of living…be careful! You could change your life!





THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

The room is
almost all
elephant.
Almost none
of it isn't.
Pretty much
solid elephant.
So there's no
room to talk
about it.

By Kay Ryan

Pastors Sometimes Struggle to Talk about Finances Because They Struggle with Finances

Lilly study cites “shame and blame” culture for clergy around finances and debt

We haven’t “hugged the cactus” of our own money issues adequately

Money can feel so not spiritual…

“(Practicing stewardship) is as spiritual as giving a sermon, entering a time of prayer, visiting the sick, or feeding the hungry!”

“(Stewardship) is always a call to conversion”

(from “A Spirituality of Fundraising,” by Henri J. M. Nouwen)



What makes talking about money difficult (if it is) for you?

If it's not difficult, how did you wrap your arms around the practice?

Money autobiography?

What is your first memory of money? Happiest memory of money?

What messages did you get about generosity, saving, and spending?

What role did money play in your life as a teenager, young adult, parent, and now?

Who are your current financial role models?

What role does faith play in your generosity, and what priorities and goals for your spiritual-financial life do you want to set?



JOHN 12:24

“VERY TRULY I TELL YOU, UNLESS A KERNEL OF WHEAT FALLS TO THE GROUND AND DIES, IT REMAINS ONLY A SINGLE SEED. BUT IF IT DIES, IT PRODUCES MANY SEEDS”

INTRODUCING ALISTAIR BROWN

- Son
- Soccer Player
- Eco-Lover
- Frog-Leg Eater
- One of my generosity examples



Who Practices Generosity in a Way that Inspires You?

If we can share our generosity stories we can tap into the generative nature, the "learned characteristic" that we can both emulate and exemplify in our lives.

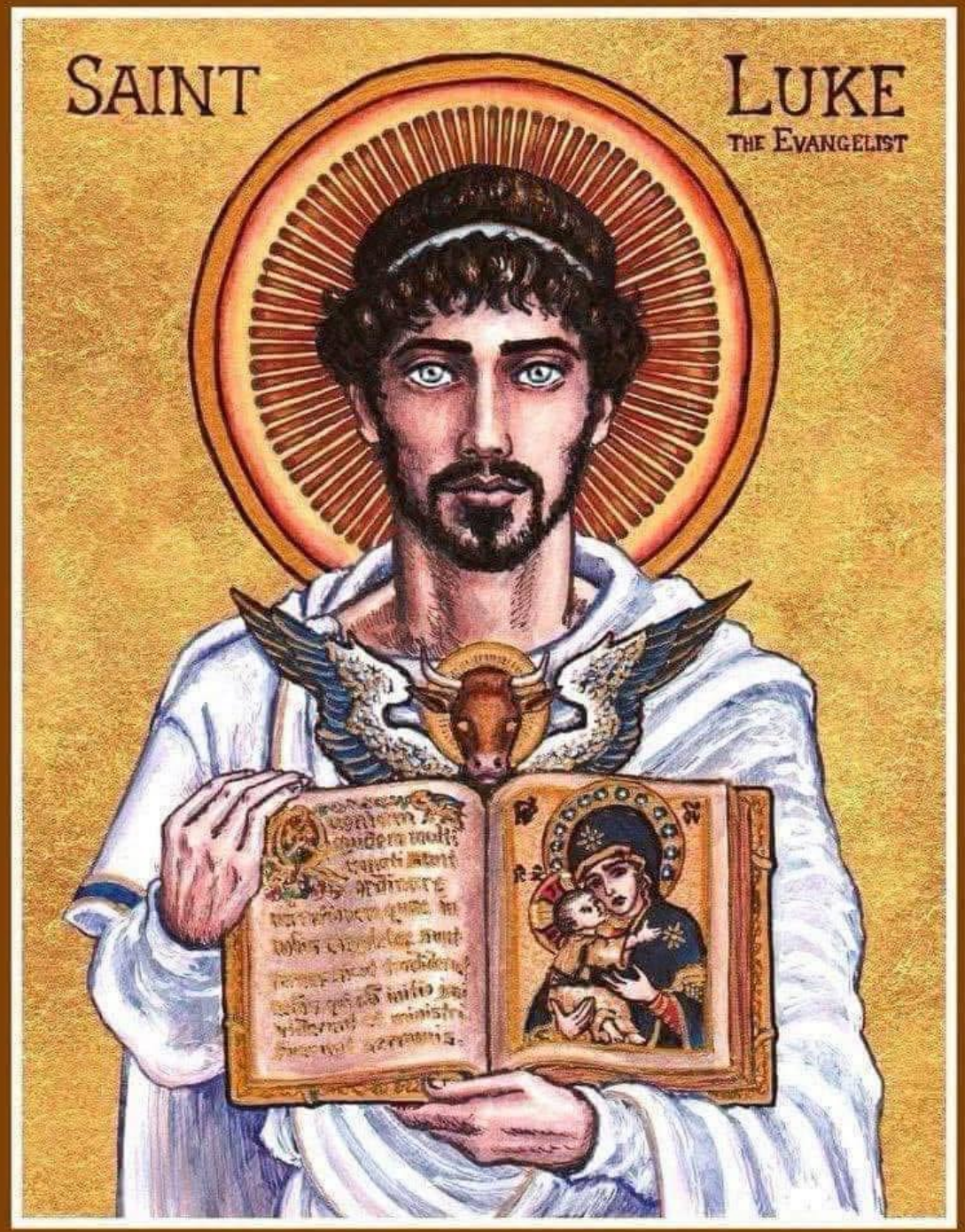
Send them a message and thank them (or someone else that comes to mind) for their generosity?

Loaves and Fishes

This is not
the age of information.
This is *not*
the age of information.
Forget the news,
and the radio,
and the blurred screen.
This is the time
of loaves
and fishes.
People are hungry
and one good word is bread
for a thousand.
by David Whyte
from *The House of Belonging*




SOME THEOLOGICAL
FRAMEWORK



THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

JESUS IN LUKE'S GOSPEL SEEMS TO HAVE A PARABOLIC VIEW ON WEALTH

Three Rich-Guy stories in Luke all in a cascade…

(Miguel Escobar and Richard Dormandy)

Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

Praising prodigal generosity
Criticizes scrupulous love
(notice the First-Born's opinion of his father!)
How do we measure "lost" and "found?"

Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13)

Super Puzzling-defying logic
The Landowner Learns something about Generosity…and takes it to heart!
Re-imagines what "Waste" and "right judgment" look like
"Cannot Serve God and Wealth" and even unjust wealth must be used for God's purposes

Dives and Lazarus (16:19-31)

Truth learned too late
"Great Chasm"

What does it mean to be economically shrewd when it comes to God's economy?



Scripture and Stewardship

- Luke 19:1-10

The Zacchaeus story is an interesting story when seen through the lens of stewardship.

- Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. [2] A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. [3] He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. [4] So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

- [5] When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." [6] So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

- [7] All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

- [8] But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, **"Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."**

- [9] Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. [10] For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

- -icon by Maxim Sheshakov





Scripture and Stewardship

- What was he doing?
- Why was he doing it?
- What words come to mind when reading this story?
- What assumptions do we make when it comes to folks and their stories?
- What does conversion look like in your life?



Scripture and Stewardship

- In the ancient texts, we knew the names of the poor (Mary, Martha, Lazarus, John, Barnabus, etc). But as the church changed and Constantine came to power, the texts also changed. We have “Dives” now, and we hear of “the poor” as a construct, as from afar. (Miguel Escobar)

- Gustavo Gutierrez: a marker of liberation is when “the poor” are no longer merely acted upon, but have names, identities, stories, and agency in history.

- The contrast between this story, and how “the poor” are often seen from the balcony of the church steeple…Christianity was formed through relationships that included the names of the Beloved…how can we get back to this?

- -icon by Kelly Latimor, Nativity


FINAL THOUGHTS

UNEXPECTED RESULTS

"The more generous Americans are through different practices, the less likely and frequently do they suffer depressive symptoms...and show a greater sense of life-purpose."

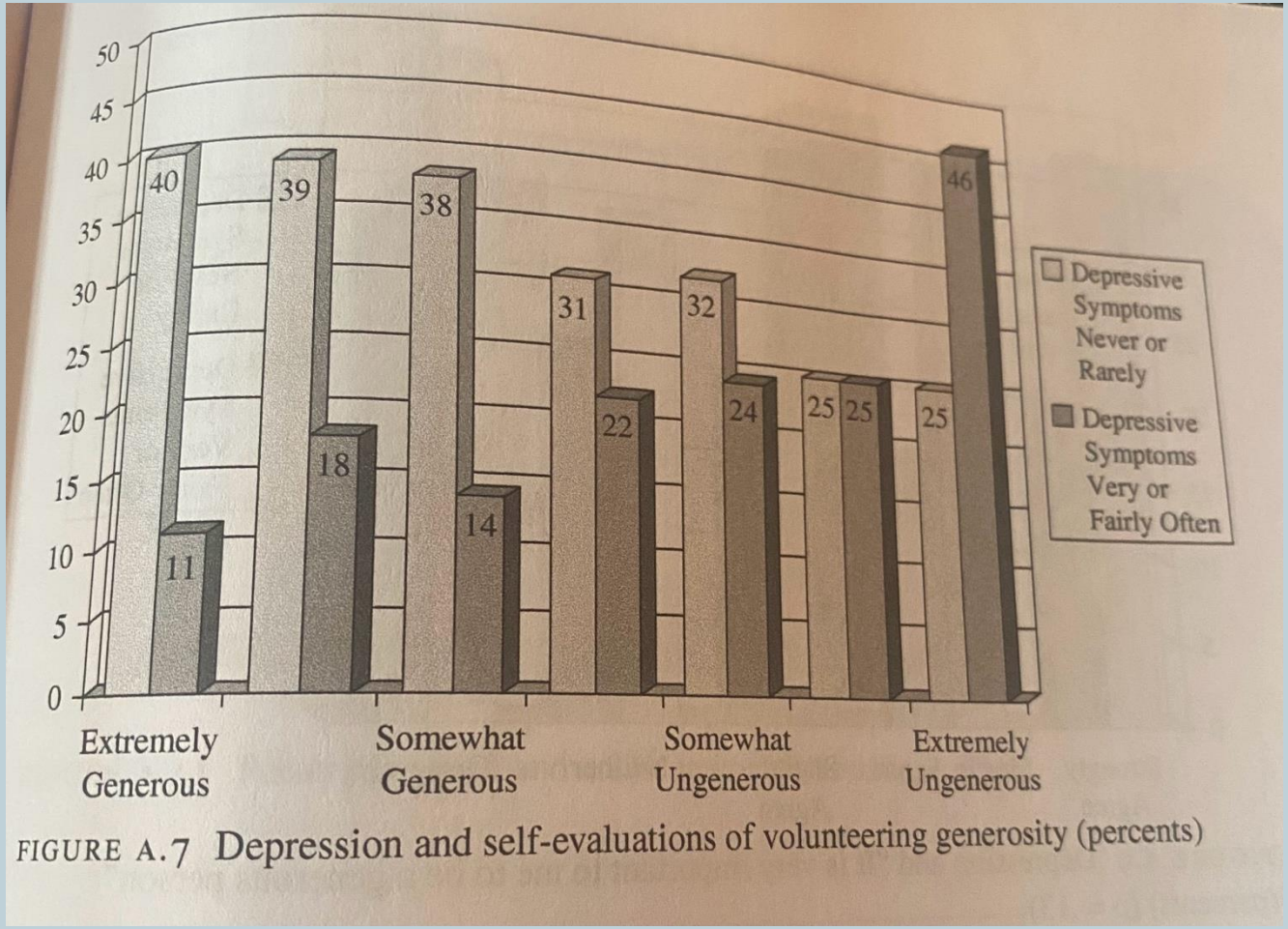


FIGURE A.7 Depression and self-evaluations of volunteering generosity (percents)

Our Bodies Tell the Story

Neuroscience studies have used fMRI tech to examine real-time operation of brains as people have engaged in generosity...and it lights up the same system as the reward system (food, sex, drugs, or money)





INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, THOUGH, DURESS IS A NEGATIVE FACTOR WHEN IT COMES TO GENEROSITY...

...RESENTMENT IS THE OPPOSITE OF JOY...


The sum-total story is about lives changed: those by generosity given, and those by generosity received.
How are we telling both stories?

How Has Generosity Impacted Your Life?

Who was generous with you in a way that made a real difference?

How do you want to be remembered when it comes to generosity?

OR AS “JAMES CARUSO” FROM NEW YORK PUT IT.

“Well, I don’t feel as if I’m losing something. I mean, obviously, you know, you give a check for a little, just say, $150 to a charitable organization and you can see in the checkbook that there’s $150 less, but that’s not the way I view it. I view it as doing something positive, and I think that **people should accept the challenge to try to make the world better than what it has been.”** _Paradox of Generosity_, pg 61



“LIFE IS SHORT, THOUGH I KEEP THIS FROM MY CHILDREN.
LIFE IS SHORT, AND I’VE SHORTENED MINE
IN A THOUSAND DELICIOUS, ILL-ADVISED WAYS,
A THOUSAND DELICIOUSLY ILL-ADVISED WAYS
I’LL KEEP FROM MY CHILDREN. THE WORLD IS AT LEAST
FIFTY PERCENT TERRIBLE, AND THAT’S A CONSERVATIVE
ESTIMATE, THOUGH I KEEP THIS FROM MY CHILDREN.
FOR EVERY BIRD THERE IS A STONE THROWN AT A BIRD.
FOR EVERY LOVED CHILD, A CHILD BROKEN, BAGGED,
SUNK IN A LAKE. LIFE IS SHORT AND THE WORLD
IS AT LEAST HALF TERRIBLE, AND FOR EVERY KIND
STRANGER, THERE IS ONE WHO WOULD BREAK YOU,
THOUGH I KEEP THIS FROM MY CHILDREN. I AM TRYING
TO SELL THEM THE WORLD. ANY DECENT REALTOR,
WALKING YOU THROUGH A REAL SHITHOLE, CHIRPS ON
ABOUT GOOD BONES: THIS PLACE COULD BE BEAUTIFUL,
RIGHT? YOU COULD MAKE THIS PLACE BEAUTIFUL.”

–MAGGIE SMITH





WHAT ARE YOU WALKING AWAY WITH HERE?



WHAT DO YOU WISH THERE WAS MORE OF?



WHAT IS MISSING ALTOGETHER?

Aha!? Take Away? Note?

There is a Japanese legend that says,

If you get on the wrong train,
get off at the nearest station.
The longer it takes you to get off,
the more expensive the return trip
will be.

(it’s not just about trains, beloved)

