



THE
GENEROSITY
CHALLENGE

28 DAYS OF GRATITUDE, PRAYER, AND FAITH

SCOTT MCKENZIE and KRISTINE MILLER

CONTENTS

Introduction	9
Week 1: Born to Be Generous	13
Daily Challenges	19
Week 2: Grounded in Gratitude	29
Daily Challenges	35
Week 3: Revealed Through Prayer	45
Daily Challenges	51
Week 4: Sealed by Faith	63
Daily Challenges	70
Leader Helps	81
General Instructions for Facilitating a Group	83
Session 1: Born to Be Generous	87
Session 2: Grounded in Gratitude	89
Session 3: Revealed Through Prayer	91
Session 4: Sealed by Faith	93
Notes	95



Week 1
BORN TO BE
GENEROUS



Week 1

BORN TO BE GENEROUS

Do you believe we are born with a spirit of generosity? Have you ever wondered what it means to be born in God's image?

The most frequently quoted scripture is John 3:16. Even if you are not prone to reciting Bible verses at the drop of a hat, you likely know this one:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

(John 3:16)

Familiar to most Christians (and many non-Christians, too), this verse is so well-known that it often shows up at large sporting events or other large public venues on a sign held by a person sporting a rainbow wig. Despite its familiarity, however, we rarely think of this scripture as one pertaining to stewardship or money. When you think about what the Bible says about giving and generosity, does this verse come to mind? Perhaps not, but here is why it should.

John 3:16 reminds us about God's loving and generous character. "For God so *loved* the world that he *gave* his one and only Son..." First God loved... and then God gave. Because of God's love for us, God gave us the greatest gift of all, his Son. And it says something about us too! We know from the first chapter of Genesis that we were created in the image of God:

*So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

(Genesis 1:27)

The Generosity Challenge

Because we were born with the characteristics of God, it follows that we were born to be loving and generous, too. We were created to give from a loving heart. So, John 3:16 lets us know that as humans born in God's image, we are inherently loving and generous. Giving generously out of love is ingrained in us from our birth. We are all born to be generous.

Not quite there yet? Neither was *New York Times* best-selling author A. J. Jacobs.

A. J. Jacobs has written several entertaining (and informative) books after conducting "lifestyle experiments." For example, for one book, he attempted to become the healthiest person in the world by subjecting himself to a grueling regimen of exercise/dieting experiments, all following a 53-page list of things he could do to improve his health.¹

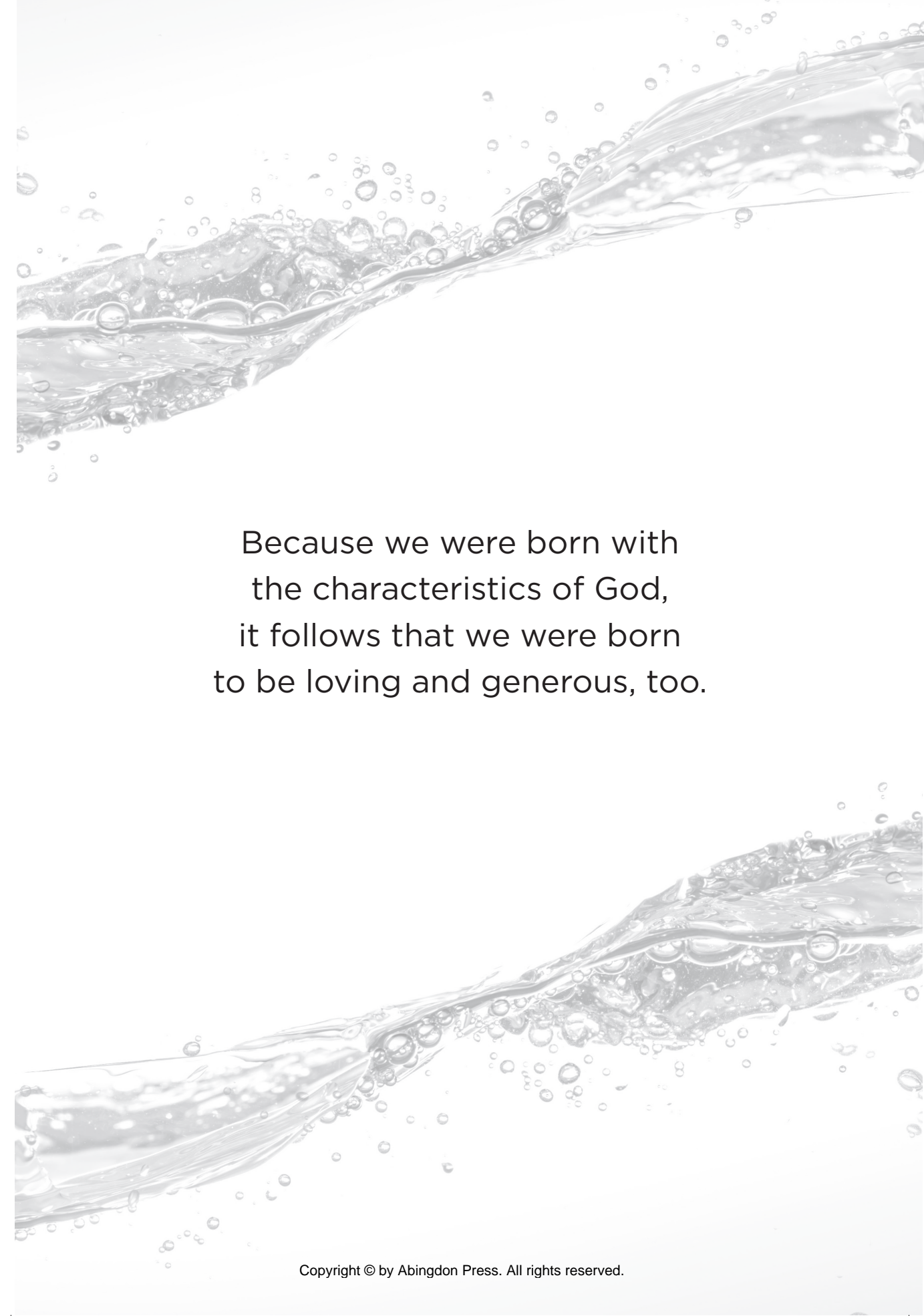
In a more relevant experiment, Jacobs decided to follow the Bible as literally as possible for a year.² It is important to note that Jacobs is Jewish ("in the same way the Olive Garden is an Italian restaurant"³) and agnostic. For one year, Jacobs attempted to follow every biblical "rule" as literally as possible, including the more famous rules like "Love thy neighbor" and the Ten Commandments, as well the more challenging and oft-ignored rules such as stoning adulterers and not wearing clothes of mixed fibers. Jacobs also decided to follow the biblical instruction to tithe and committed to giving away 10 percent of his income.

After convincing his wife to join him in giving away 10 percent, Jacobs chose several charities to which they would donate their tithe. Jacobs gave the donations electronically and describes his experience this way:

The giving was painful. I mean, 10 percent? That would have an impact on our lives. Vacations would need to be scaled back, new furniture would have to wait. It was a huge amount. When I pressed "send" on the donations, my palms got wet, my heart rate spiked.⁴

Jacobs was feeling what we have all felt, at times. The fear of not having enough. The anxiety that comes from wondering if you have made the right choice and knowing you can't turn back. In the article, Jacobs continued:

It was a pain mixed with pleasure. When the confirmation e-mails pinged in, I felt good. There's a haunting line from the movie *Chariots of Fire*. It's spoken by Ian Charleson, who plays a deeply religious sprinter in the 1924 Olympics. He says: "When I run, I feel His pleasure." And as I



Because we were born with
the characteristics of God,
it follows that we were born
to be loving and generous, too.

The Generosity Challenge

gave away money, I think I might have felt God's pleasure. Which is odd. Because I'm agnostic. I don't know if there's a God or not, but still I felt some higher sense of purpose. It was like a cozy ember that started at the back of my neck and slowly spread its warmth through my skull. I felt like I was doing something I should have done all my life.⁵

If A. J. Jacobs, an agnostic, experienced God's pleasure, what does that mean for those of us who already believe in a loving and generous God? How might our relationship with God change as a result of our giving? What would it be like to be as loving and generous as God?

Do you feel that you were born to be generous? Because we are human, we don't always behave in the most loving and generous ways, do we? We often get sidetracked by social pressures and unhealthy behaviors that cause us to lose our way. Our identities as God-like humans can get obscured and even buried by our desire to acquire more stuff, keep up with our neighbors, and fulfill our ever-expanding need for more.

In 1973, Merriam-Webster added *affluenza* to the official American lexicon. The word is defined as "the unhealthy and unwelcome psychological and social effects of affluence regarded especially as a widespread social problem: such as... extreme materialism and consumerism associated with the pursuit of wealth and success and resulting in a life of chronic dissatisfaction, debt, overwork, stress, and impaired relationships."

A 1998 PBS television special, *Affluenza*, told the story of American consumerism and our insatiable desire to acquire more stuff.⁶ PBS defined the phenomenon as "the bloated, sluggish and unfulfilled feeling that results from efforts to keep up with the Joneses" and "an epidemic of stress, overwork, waste and indebtedness caused by dogged pursuit of the American Dream." The chronic condition of affluenza is integral to our American culture, but is not who we were born to be.

Mark 10:17-27 provides an insightful scriptural example of affluenza in the story of Jesus meeting the Rich Young Man. The young man asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him he must obey the commandments, which the young man confirms he has followed since he was a boy. However, Jesus adds one more thing:

A dynamic splash of water with many bubbles, moving from the top left towards the bottom right, set against a plain white background.

Affluenza (noun)

af·flu·en·za | \ ,a-(,)flü-'en-zə \
the unhealthy and unwelcome
psychological and social effects of
affluence regarded especially as a
widespread societal problem:
such as extreme materialism and
consumerism associated with the
pursuit of wealth and success
and resulting in a life of chronic
dissatisfaction, debt, overwork, stress,
and impaired relationships.

The Generosity Challenge

Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

(Mark 10:21)

The young man was crestfallen and simply walked away unable to give up his stuff. His immense wealth kept him from living into the person God had created him to be. His affluenza, it seems, was chronic.

Affluenza does not have to be chronic. Finding your way back to the path you were born to take requires intentionality and courage. The journey home is grounded in gratitude, revealed through prayer, and sealed by faith. Even if you are not afflicted with a severe case of affluenza, you absolutely can work to build a healthier relationship with money, grow stronger in your relationship to God, and return to the loving and generous person you were born to be.

Can you believe you are created in the image of a loving and generous God? Do you believe you were born to be generous? As you reflect on the tithing experience of A. J. Jacobs, what do imagine it would be like for you to tithe for a year? Are you suffering from affluenza? Do you find yourself unfulfilled regardless of the amount of stuff you have accumulated?

For the next week, our prayer is that you will be open to whatever nudging or leading you might experience. Follow the challenges, and then you'll be ready for *Gratitude*.



Week 1

DAILY CHALLENGES

Day 1: Take a Generosity Assessment

Each of us has his or her own view of what makes a person “generous.” What does generosity mean to you? Take this quick survey and reflect on what it means to be generous. There are no wrong answers and no scoring—this is purely for self-assessment. Be as honest with yourself as possible.

Rate the following from 1 to 5, with 1 being “Strongly Disagree” and 5 being “Strongly Agree”:

1. Compared to my friends and family, I believe I am very generous.

1 2 3 4 5

2. When I receive a bonus or raise, I consider how I could help someone else with the additional money.

1 2 3 4 5

3. I give a lot of volunteer time to my church so I don’t feel the need to give as much money.

1 2 3 4 5

4. What I contribute to church and charity represents a sacrifice (I have to give up other things I need or want).

1 2 3 4 5

"YOU WERE BORN TO BE GENEROUS; YOU WERE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD."

These abiding truths are made abundantly clear as readers navigate through *The Generosity Challenge*, written by church stewardship experts and generosity gurus Scott McKenzie and Kristine Miller. Through this interactive workbook, participants spend four weeks with Scott and Kristine, navigating the concepts of being Grounded in **G**ratitude, Revealed Through **P**rayer, and Sealed by Faith. This "GPS" leads even the biggest skeptics home to be the generous persons God created them to be.

Following each chapter are seven days of challenges with space for writing and notes. Paired with *The Generosity Challenge* DVD, these components make for an enriching group study. In just 28 days, you will hear these words in your head: "You have arrived at your destination."

I trust in Scott's and Kristine's work so much I have offered "double your money" back if a congregation is not satisfied with their results. I never had to refund any money, but have enjoyed celebrating with congregations as God-sized stewardship and generosity goals were met. This resource will have a high Return On Investment.

—**Brian Roberts**, District Superintendent, the United Methodist Church of Greater New Jersey

I have worked with Scott and Kristine several times, and I am always left hopeful and energized for the ways that generosity connects people more deeply to Jesus and helps individuals grow in their faith journey as disciples.

—**Sara Yotter**, Pastor at Joy Reigns Lutheran Church in Edgewater, MD

*Kristine Miller and Scott McKenzie are thought-leaders in the spiritual discipline of generosity. No matter where you are on your faith journey, you will discover anew a spirit of holistic generosity, faithfulness, and giving by engaging in *The Generosity Challenge*.*

—**David S. Bell**, President & Executive Director of the United Methodist Foundation of Michigan



SCOTT MCKENZIE and **KRISTINE MILLER** have collaborated in ministry for more than twenty years, bringing their inspirational message and passion for generosity to churches and nonprofits all over the country. Kristine and Scott are Partners and Senior Vice Presidents with Horizons Stewardship, driven by a desire to help churches create cultures of generosity and achieve their God-given visions for ministry.



Kristine and Scott are coauthors of *Bounty: Ten Ways to Increase Giving at Your Church* and *CLIMB Higher: Reaching New Heights in Giving and Discipleship*. Scott is the author of *Generosity Rising*.



www.abingdonpress.com

Cover design: Bruce Gore | Gore Studio, Inc.

Cover image: Alex Perez/Unsplash

RELIGION / Christian Life / Stewardship & Giving US \$14.99

ISBN-13: 978-1-5018-8275-3



9 781501 882753