

GENEROSITY | LEADERSHIP COACH
PHIL LING

THE GENEROSITY TSUNAMI



RECOGNIZING THE WARNING SIGNS AND SURVIVING THE
IMPENDING GENEROSITY TECTONIC SHIFT WITHIN THE CHURCH

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Introduction

The Generosity Tsunami

It was supposed to be another beautiful day at the beach. The Smith Family packed their items for the leisurely day ahead, and made the track from the resort to stake out their spot on the beach. The girls began playing immediately. The surf and sand of southern Thailand had long been a Christmas destination for British tourists looking for a tropical holiday getaway.

For nine-year-old Tilly Smith, it was a chance to enjoy time away from the classroom. She ran through the sand with her sister, splashed and kicked water, and did all of the things you would expect a girl to do on her first beach experience. Somewhere between the running, kicking, splashing, and laughing, she noticed something strange was happening. She later described it to the *National Geographic* saying that, “the water was swelling and kept coming in ... there was a froth on it.”¹¹ As the beach became smaller and everyone else continued to play, Tilly jumped into action.

Tilly had recently studied tsunamis in school. Her last project before she left for Christmas break was a class presentation on the signs of rare but deadly storms. Her mother, Penny Smith, recalled that Tilly began to run up

11 *Tsunami Family Saved By Schoolgirl's Geography Lesson*, National Geographic Magazine http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2005/01/0118_050118_tsunami_geography_lesson.html

and down the beach screaming about tectonic plates and underwater earthquakes. The nearly 300 people gathered on the beach were not sure what to make of the young hysterical British girl; but, they knew something was not right in the water. The entire beach evacuated, and, within minutes, watched the devastating Tsunami rip through the lobby of their beachside resort from the safety of the third floor. Every single person on Maikhao Beach in Phuket, Thailand, was saved from impending disaster and certain death because one studious little girl saw the warning signs and stood up to sound the alarm.

Not everyone was so lucky that December 26, 2004, around the Pacific Rim. The deadly and historic Tsunami killed 230,000 people in 14 countries. It was the largest natural disaster in modern history. Yet, months after the deadly storm, stories just like that of Tilly Smith started to emerge of those who saw the warning signs, heeded the warnings, and avoided disaster.

I believe that there are warning signs crashing at the feet of the church right now. I've been around the church my whole life. My father was a successful and respected pastor and laid a foundation of leadership in me. In the 1990's, I went to Seattle to plant a church which grew from a few friends to a few thousand, and started a school that has over a thousand students today. I left there to become the Executive Vice President for INJOY Stewardship Services with John Maxwell, and later was blessed to serve as Vice President of Development for the Billy Graham Evangelical Association.

As a sixth-generation pastor who has worked with every style, size, and denomination of church and has been blessed to coach pastors, churches, colleges, and various faith-based non-profits for the past nineteen years, the signs of tectonic shifts within the church are visible; but, none more strongly than in the world of generosity.

In days gone by, grandmother could get mad at the church or the pastor and she would still give generously. That's not the case anymore. She was a steward. We don't have stewards in our churches anymore. In large part, we have consumers.

This is particularly true for those churches in urban settings. Families identify with multiple churches. For a family in Anytown, USA, the mother may attend the newest Women's Ministry Study at First Baptist Church, the teen is plugged into the student ministry at Journey Church, the fourth grader plays basketball at First United Methodist, and, if dad is involved, he's going to a manly study at the independent charismatic church. Church has become a buffet option. We'll take some of this and a little of that while we grab something else down the road. The end result is particularly stunning in regards to generosity – rather than engaging in biblical generosity with any of the churches, the family likely avoids generosity all together.

Another tectonic shift occurring under our watch is the massive transference of wealth from one generation to the next. It is the greatest transfer of wealth in world history as the Greatest Generation begins to leave assets to Baby

Boomer children. The Boomer generation has helped create the consumer culture of the church. The people of this generation will not be the stewards their parents once were, even if they are a part of the church. The end result will be that we will witness churches downsizing, shuttering, and closing while actually still having people. We've seen churches dwindle and close when there are just a loyal few left to turn on the lights. The new shift will be churches forced with difficult sustainability concerns even though they are surrounded with people. Those people just don't give like their parents did.

Ten years ago, I set out to understand what was happening in the average American church. I partnered with a fantastic researcher and statistician and studied the giving trends of 4,000 churches in America. The results were startling: 45% of those who give money to the church give less than \$200 annually in the average American church. That 45% of the church combines to give about 1.5% of the average annual income.

If church leaders are not careful, the church becomes extremely top heavy and even reliant on one or two donors to stay afloat. We avoid generosity teachings. We would prefer someone else to do it. We are not comfortable talking about money. Think about it – most of the people who enjoy asking for money are probably in jail. So we stay quiet on one of the greatest discipleship tools of the Bible.

Each week across America, pastors gather with their finance teams to find out the offering figures before they

head home to determine what their week will be like, and then, turn around and do it all again the next week. There will be churches this week who wonder if they can pay their staff, pay their utilities, replace the broken furnace, send missions money, or fund ministry. What if it didn't have to be that way? What if there was a better way? What if your church had a culture of generosity?

We are standing on the shore watching tectonic shifts in generosity that will affect the church in the next 10 years, and so we are faced with two questions. The first question is not *if* these trends will damage the church – but *when*? The second question is – what do we do about it? How can we position our churches and build a culture of discipleship and biblical generosity that honors God and serves as a catalyst to reach those who are far off?

I've been blessed for nearly two decades to work with church leaders and pastors in the trenches of generosity and leadership. I've had the opportunity to sit in nearly a thousand church board rooms and work on hundreds of campaigns and generosity initiatives that have impacted the Kingdom, raising nearly a billion dollars. I love being a part of those stories.

I've been blessed to witness generosity taking root in churches across the country. These are stories worth learning from and worth sharing. These are stories that inspire, encourage, and motivate me every day. I also believe that there are five key elements of generosity that weave through each of the successful churches, campaigns, and strategic

initiatives of which I have been fortunate to be a part of the journey. These are stories that provide key principles for practical ways to build a culture of generosity, reach more people for God than you ever imagined, and avoid the impending tidal wave destined to destroy those churches who do not heed the warning signs.

1

The Vision Factor

“To grasp and hold a vision- that is the very essence of successful leadership.”

Ronald Reagan

One of the most gifted leaders I’ve ever worked with was Ken Barun. Prior to joining the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, at the same time I joined, he was the director of the Ronald McDonald House Charities and helped oversee its growth to nearly \$2 billion in assets. His life journey included so much more. Part of that journey included working for the Reagan administration helping to establish the early war on drugs. His stories of President and First Lady Reagan sparked an interest in me to read more about the 40th President of the United States and his impact on the world.

There is no doubt that if you could boil Reagan’s presidency down to a sound bite it would be a line from one of his most famous speeches given in West Berlin, Germany, on June 12, 1987, on the 26th Anniversary of The Berlin Wall. The wall was constructed in 1961 as a visual barrier of the Cold War that Reagan had battled and deeply desired to win. On that day in West Berlin, Reagan called on USSR General Secretary Gorbachev in a pointed statement when he famously said, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”

This was not the first time Reagan had mentioned the wall.

In 1982 and 1986, he gave similar speeches in West Berlin asking the Communist leaders to remove the wall. Reagan's cabinet became very torn over the President's appeared obsession and willingness to speak out against the wall and to name Gorbachev by name. Both the White House Chief of Staff, Howard Baker, and the Deputy National Security Advisor, Colin Powell, tried to team up to ask Reagan not to speak of the wall or demand its demolition in fear that the speech would seem extreme and un-Presidential.

Reagan was not to be deterred. His vision was a world without a Cold War, and he knew that began at the Berlin Wall. He went on in the speech to say, “‘This wall will fall. Beliefs become reality.’ Yes, across Europe, this wall will fall. For it cannot withstand faith; it cannot withstand truth. The wall cannot withstand freedom.”

International newspapers accused Reagan of war mongering and inciting nationalistic rhetoric. The USSR promised swift replies. U.S. newspapers questioned if the language was too strong from the Hollywood veteran. But Ronald Reagan knew what it meant to grasp and hold on to a vision and, just two short years later in 1989, as that speech took root in the hearts of young people across Europe and leaders around the world, The Berlin Wall came down.

One of the greatest lines of demarcation between churches who excel in generosity and those who struggle is the ability to grasp the vision and hold on to it. I've been blessed in my life to spend time around amazing leaders. My friend John Maxwell says that vision is a bucket that leaks

and you have to continue to fill the bucket back up. I've seen too many churches struggle with leaky buckets.

I've also seen churches excel in refilling and keeping their bucket full. They know how to grasp and hold on to their vision. The church that talks about it wins. The church that assumes everyone remembers and focuses on the vision is the one who ends up wondering why no one supports the vision.

If we are going to provide a generosity shift in the church, our survival depends on vision. Vision really boils down to one word – “why.” Why are we doing this? Why does this matter? Why is this important? Vision must be clear, crisp, and compelling. If your vision statement doesn't fit on a business card or a tattoo, it's probably too complicated. When the winds pick up and the waves rise in your church, vision has to be the anchor.

Nothing can negatively impact the future of your church, college, camp, non-profit, or organization as much as a muddy vision. If you can't clearly and succinctly describe your vision neither can those who follow you. If you can't clarify it, they can't give to it. The depth of the question is driven by the depth of the need.

I love my son. When he was growing up, if he asked me for \$10 I didn't have a lot of questions. If he would have asked me for \$100 I would have had more questions. I would have needed a little clarity with what purpose the money would serve. The biggest stumbling block to giving is unanswered questions. Our vision must be clear to meet those questions

and give potential donors a clear understanding of, not only the project, but why the project matters.

If the vision should be clear, it should also be crisp. Nothing can kill a vision more than a rambling vision. If it can't fit on a business card, it is probably too long. Your vision should be concise. Not only should your vision be clear and crisp, but most importantly, it has to be compelling. Does it connect with the heart? Is there a reason why I should buy in?

Because of my profession, I receive solicitations from people raising funds all the time. Most of them go straight into a pile I never look at – namely the trash. Every now and then, one will catch my attention with a clear, crisp, and compelling vision. Some time ago I opened an email from an acquaintance who was working on a new project to help physically handicapped people in third world countries. He is an MIT engineer and learned through mission work how devastating life can be for those with physical handicaps.

He developed a portable wheel chair for those suffering from their handicaps in which a cheap but durable plastic lounge chair can be placed on a strong frame. Each time the plastic chair breaks another chair can replace it cheaply. He was raising money to give these chairs away to those in need. His email clearly depicted the vision, crisply communicated it, and made an ask in a compelling way to inspire me to give.

My friend, Greg Nettle, possesses a powerful vision for the organization he leads. Stadia is a global church planting

organization that shifted a large part of its operations to a partnership with Compassion International and planting churches in South America a few years ago. The precipice for the shift was a deep vision Greg holds that simply says, “Until every child has a church.” Stadia is committed to existing globally until every child has a church.

With that vision in place they partner each year with Compassion International as the church planting arm of that great organization. Compassion International works solely through local churches. Much of South America has no churches to work through but has hundreds of thousands of children living destitute in poverty. Stadia works into South American and plants a church so that Compassion International can support 200 children from that community through the church. The end result is that thousands of people – men, women, and children – in each community come to know Jesus because Stadia is committed to planting churches until every child has a church.

Some churches and organizations attempt to make their vision about “what.” What you are doing is not a vision – it’s a strategy to fulfill your vision. If your vision is building an expansion to your facility it probably won’t inspire true generosity because the focus is the what instead of the “why.” If your vision is building an expansion to your facility so that you can create more space to reach more children, because we know 80% of those who accept Jesus do so before the age of 15, you will inspire generosity because you are focused on the “why.” The what/strategy can change. The “why”

remains the same.

A few years ago, I worked with a church for a campaign to find a new 24/7 facility. The church was only a couple of years old and had grown to several hundred in a school when the new school superintendent issued a decree banning churches from staying in a school for more than two years. The church had been there a couple of months past that time limit and were given an eviction notice. They quickly found their dream facility to provide the expanded ministries they had dreamed about providing for the community, started the process to purchase the facility, and entered the campaign initiative to raise the funds to make it a reality.

The week before the church was going to gather to make financial commitments towards the project, the unexpected happened and the deal fell through. We had an emergency meeting to consider the options. Some wondered if we should cancel the commitment process. Some wondered if we should go ahead. It was a simple decision. They needed to move forward.

The Pastor had successfully communicated the vision – the “why” – so “the what” did not determine the success of the campaign. The church raised the commitments needed because they understood the impact that would be made on the community through a 24/7 facility. They ended up finding a building that was even better suited and exceeded their expectations and dreams of the location that fell through. They were able to grasp the vision and hold on to it. The why was greater than just the what.

It is also imperative to be committed to the vision. Walt Disney Parks grossed \$2.5 billion in 2015. The parks, including Disneyland & California Adventure in California, the seven parks of the Walt Disney World Resort in Florida, and parks in Tokyo and Paris, saw 150 million visitors over the course of the year. Yet, the success of the Disney Parks concept was not always a foregone conclusion. The Disney brothers – Walt and Roy, his CFO – faced early opposition in finding the financing to build Disneyland Park in California.

Roy O. Disney made a trip to meet with financiers in New York City to sell the idea of investing in the parks. The results were mixed. While he secured some funding it was not enough to complete the construction, and a large financial gap existed in the early 1950's as the development of the park was in full strength. Walt believed so strongly in his vision of a magical park where parents and children could laugh and enjoy each other that he took it upon himself to find a way to finance the gap. He cashed out his life insurance, sold the licensing rights to his name, brokered a long-term television deal with ABC, and revolutionized the business world by selling naming rights to Santa Fe Railroad for the park's railroad ride and Red Wagon for the park's first restaurant. Walt Disney was committed to his vision and refused to let go.

A church in southern Indiana featured one of my favorite church signs I've ever seen. The church was 180 years old and had been the same size of 150-175 people the entirety of that time. A couple of years ago, the leadership decided the

facility and rural location were a detractor to their vision of reaching people who don't know God. The church decided to purchase property and relocate to a town 7 miles away.

The church was so excited about the potential to connect people far from God that they engaged generously in the process and the relocation happened quickly. The church now runs 900 and is adding on to the building they just built three years ago. They've seen hundreds of people come to a life with Jesus. Most churches post church building signs on the property where they are planning to build. You've seen the "*Future Home Of...*" signs a million times. This church relocation happened so quickly that they posted a different type of sign on the old property. All it said was, "*We're Gone!*" The church was captivated by the vision and gave generously.

I've seen a lot of "*Future Home Of*" signs rusted, discolored, chipped, and broken. If your "*Future Home Of*" sign needs repainting, you've lost your vision. Vision is a bucket that leaks. Does your bucket need refilling? Grasp your vision. Hold on to your vision.

*"Where there is no vision, the people perish:
but he that keepeth the law, happy is he."*

Proverbs 29:18 (KJV)

2

The Participation Factor

“Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much.”
Helen Keller

Over the years, I’ve had the opportunity to spend time with some of the most gifted leaders and pastors in the country. I worked closely with my old boss, John Maxwell, to produce round table opportunities for pastors with Bill Hybels and Joel Osteen. They were great events, and I always enjoyed them as much as those attending. It resulted in one of my prized relics in my office. I have a photo with myself, Maxwell, Hybels, and Osteen, all with our arms around each other.

During one of the round tables hosted at Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, where Osteen preaches, I had the opportunity to go on a tour of the facility with him. While some of the others were speaking I found myself in the audio/video console with one of their technicians. I started talking with him about the tour of cities around the country that Joel was embarking on, and he told me their Lakewood team of musicians, production crews, and assistants would be making each trip. They would travel to their destinations, put on the events on Friday nights, and then be back to Lakewood for the weekend services. I couldn’t imagine the burden that would place on a staff.

A few minutes later, I was alone with Joel on the stage as

he gave me the grand tour. I asked him how many full-time staff he had because I couldn't imagine the strain on the staff in that season. He told me at that time they had 120 staff members. I was blown away that a church reaching 35,000 people every weekend could survive on 120 staff members. I'll never forget Joel's response. In that slow Texan drawl, he said, "Phil – you can't hire enough people to run this place. You better figure out their passions and plug them in to minister."

Joel understood that participation matters. It's impossible to move any church, business, school, non-profit, or organization in a determined direction without buy-in. After being asked what set his team apart from those they conquered, Vince Lombardi, Hall of Fame coach of the Green Bay Packers, famously told a newspaper reporter following a Super Bowl Championship, "Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work."

Participation is especially important in cultivating generosity. Ten years ago, we commissioned a statistician to study the data of 4,000 churches across the country. It gave us an unprecedented look into the American church. What we found verified a lot of our thoughts. 45% of the average American church gives less than \$200 in a year. The group as a whole accounts for 1%-1.5% of the average American church income. Imagine what would happen if we could make advances on those numbers. Imagine the ministries that could be fueled and the lives that would change as a

result.

As we face an impending shift in generosity trends and a coming storm in the American church, we are going to witness a new phenomenon of church closings. Churches in America close at a rate of 3,500 per year. Most of those currently close because there are only a few people left to lock the doors and turn out the lights. The next decade will change that equation as we will begin to see churches closing with plenty of people – and a lack of funds. Think about it. If your church is dependent on a small number of units to keep the doors open, what happens when some of those pass away, move away, or decide to go away? Are you devoting the discipleship efforts to cultivate generosity? Most churches are content to stay the status quo.

The end result is that most churches in American depend on a small percentage of donors to keep moving forward. That presents a real challenge, particularly when trying to raise additional funds. It's impossible to squeeze those at the top who are already giving sacrificially to just allow the church to continue ministry. The key to developing a culture of generosity rests on inspiring and mobilizing participation. So how do we do that?

Inspiring and mobilizing participation starts with asking the right questions. Why do we have a participation problem? Why does 45% of the church give less than \$200 a year? Are they all broke?

In all likelihood, they have either not caught the vision or have not felt the momentum. As we discussed, vision is a

catalytic movement that inspires us to generosity when we see the ‘why’ that drives the ‘what.’ A new couple will not walk into your church, look around, and say, “Honey, this looks expensive. Let’s pay for it!” It doesn’t work that way. We also cannot assume that people will give out of a sense of obligation and/or guilt. Guilt doesn’t make us give, it makes us critical. We have to connect the vision of the church to the heart of the donor. Equally important is: how do we connect the momentum of church?

My friend and client Dwight Mason understands mobilizing participation. He pastors NewPointe Community Church in northeast Ohio. NewPointe is one of the coolest churches you will ever find and originates from its main campus in the Amish-heavy Dover, Ohio. When I started working with NewPointe, there were thousands gathering to worship at NewPointe in Dover, a town with a population of 12,000; but, God wasn’t done with NewPointe. God laid a specific vision on Dwight’s heart to launch campus locations all up and down the I-77 corridor.

NewPointe was on the early side of the multi-site movement. The movement is here to stay. Multiple locations will be as important in the next generation of the church as multiple services were in the 1980’s and 1990’s. Studies already show us that satellite locations are one of the best ways to reach unchurched people. The big question for Dwight and the NewPointe leadership team was: will people give to things they won’t physically utilize? Will our church give to fund the launch of a new campus they will not attend?

The key was communicating the vision and connecting it with the heart of the donor. The church was energized by the idea of reaching those who did not know God. The result? NewPointe has now successfully launched campus locations in Canton, Coshocton, Millersburg, and Wooster, featuring a combined eight service gatherings between all campuses and reaching thousands of new people. The vision provided a catalytic movement to participation despite the fact the Dover campus would never physically utilize the other campus locations.

The key to both connecting vision and momentum is communication. The church that talks about it wins. We worked with a church in the northeast who called us in during the midst of a self-produced capital fundraising campaign. Part of the problem was the church felt like they were stalled and stuck. They were concerned they were failing. As we walked through their welcome center, the church of 1,300 displayed a sign that announced 118 families made commitments to the campaign. As we began the meeting we learned that there were over 500 families who had given to the campaign! Yet they were displaying only the 118 commitments!

They were missing the great news and the opportunity to celebrate weekly with the church! As they began to shift from the 118 families who made commitments to the more than 500 who had actually given, a few things started to happen immediately. First, their donors were energized and inspired to continue giving. Second, new donors joined the campaign

because they wanted to be a part of the momentum. Third, the church leaders were recharged to continue sharing the vision. All of that happened because the church caught hold of the momentum that came from celebrating participation.

Momentum is the single most difficult feeling to create in a church, but the key is simple. High participation rates yield large scale momentum. What story could you tell right now to grow participation in your church? What vision have you not communicated in a clear, crisp, and compelling way, keeping you from high participation rates? Tip the scales with participation and you'll be well on your way to momentum that fuels your generosity.

“For we are co-workers in God’s service...”

I Corinthians 3:9

3

The Unity Factor

“In unity there is strength.”

Aesop

After more than 15 years and 1,000 church board rooms, some things never change. One of those is a simple question I get with each presentation we make for a Vision Campaign to help fuel generosity for a specific purpose: “When does it not work?” We have been blessed by God to work with some of the most gifted churches and leaders in the country. On average, our campaigns see over 97% of the dollars committed given over the course of a campaign. Many see well higher due to the fast-growing churches we work with. There are times, however, as rare as they are, when it doesn’t work. Why is that?

We coach that there are a couple of things that can kill your campaign. First, sin in the camp. When the people of Israel conquered Ai in Joshua 7, everyone got the memo that they weren’t supposed to loot the camp. Everyone except Achan, that is. He buried his treasures beneath his tent as if God couldn’t find them there. His sin was discovered, and God brought consequences. Our churches are the same way. Our hands must be pure as leaders. We can fool the camp but we can’t fool God.

The second killer can’t be hidden, and brings complete havoc on a church – division in leadership. Our hands have to be just as pure as our hearts. It’s one thing to arm wrestle

in a board room – it's another to be divided in the parking lot. No matter how much you disagree, you have to leave a meeting with a united vision. I have seen campaigns and churches destroyed by leaders who agreed in the room and then chose to sow seeds of discord in the lobby, parking lot, coffee shop, and anywhere else people will listen.

I'm always fascinated as hurricanes approach, and I watch the news coverage on TV. Communities band together to board windows, pack sand bags, and distribute supplies together. As the shift in generosity occurs over the next decade, we need to be prepared. The only way to do that is to be united.

Years ago, we had a campaign with a Midwestern church on the verge of doing big things for the Kingdom. The pastor had been there 25 years, and the rest of the staff had long tenures. Their leadership agreed on a common vision to be able to reach more kids because their growing children's ministry was reaching hundreds of children each week in space built to hold a fraction of that number. They believed strongly in the North American statistics that show 85% of those who give their lives to Jesus do so between the ages of 8 and 15. They were determined to make an impact on that generation.

As the campaign began to take shape, it was very apparent that one of the elders of the church was not on board with the rest. Emails were sent. Phone calls were made. Individual meetings were held. Each time, he agreed to get on board, literally, and live up to his calling as a leader. Each time, he

went back to the exact same behavior because he learned that, other than an awkward cup of coffee, there was no real consequence to his behavior.

Then, the unimaginable happened. Unbeknownst to our team, the current term limits of most of the elders expired, and a new team rotated into leadership who was not privy to the vision and heart of the previous team; but, they had one remaining holdover elder to look to for leadership. You guessed it: the guy who was constantly stirring division. The struggle became very tense between the staff and elder teams, as well as the prior elder team and the new elder team. The campaign and the church crumbled, all because one man was determined to stir up division among his brothers.

There is so much truth to Proverbs 6:16-19, “There are six things the LORD hates, a seventh he detests ... a man who stirs up division among brothers.” I have witnessed it so many times. There are more than 300,000 churches in America. Is that because we need so many? Nope. It’s because, inevitably, unity is lost in the church. There was a church split years ago near the area of the county where I live. The group who split off called their church *Unity*. It was not necessarily fitting due to the circumstances.

One of the elements I see in churches I work with that are growing and successful and changing lives for eternity is a strong sense of unity. A growing church often comes down to two key questions: (1) Can you make difficult decisions? (2) Can you make them quickly? In order to be able to process leadership at that level there must a great buy-in of

unity among leadership.

Hollywood seems to struggle for new ideas for films. Walt Disney Studios has been in the process of creating live-action films of their most treasured animated classics. They are on a schedule to release one per year to help prop earnings for the studio with a familiar story, plot, and nostalgia of fan base. One of the works they are recreating is their adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*.

Kipling was a fantastic poet and author. The story focuses on a young boy raised by a bear when his parents are tragically killed. One of my favorite parts of the literary work is a moment when the young boy is learning about life together as he studies wolves. Kipling writes, "*The strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack.*" I love that. It takes strong wolves to make a strong pack, but they are never as strong individually as they are together.

Our churches are sadly often filled with leaders who would rather be lone wolves than parts of the pack. What's even more sad is that we tolerate and accept their rude behavior. We don't call them to accountability, despite the fact that they are hunting and preying on the church. We allow them to continue rejecting their roles as a spiritual leaders and allow them to become spiritual terrorists bent on causing division, disaster, and death.

On the other hand, there is nothing a united church and leadership cannot accomplish when they run with God. My friend Brett Andrews pastors a fantastic church called New

Life Church in a Washington D.C. suburb. When I started working with them, New Life was a multi-campus church making a difference in an area that is not known as a Bible Belt, but they knew they wanted to do something more. They were presented an amazing opportunity to purchase an 83,000 square-foot former Anheuser-Busch distribution center, which most churches would have converted to a church facility.

The leaders at New Life Church had a little different of an idea. It didn't make sense to them to invest \$10 million in a facility that would sit empty through the week. After dedicated studies to examine the needs of the community around them, they determined to use the space during the week as a concept they called the nZone and convert it to a church for Sundays only. The nZone opened and immediately began to reach thousands of people a week, particularly children and students, with everything from basketball, soccer, and physical performance training to mixed martial arts. The concept attracted so much attention that *The Washington Post* featured the church and the nZone in a special article.

Can you imagine a lot of church board rooms around the country trying to make those decisions? *You mean we are going to build a facility and dedicate it as a physical training facility during the week and set-up and tear down for church each week? What if someone sweats or even worse – bleeds? Shouldn't our building be for our people? Don't we want a more reverent worship environment?* On

one hand, those statements seem so incredibly outlandish. On the other, we've all known churches who would have those conversations.

So how does a church leadership unite to make those types of bold and courageous decisions that fuel church impact and growth? They rally around the vision. When the vision is clear, crisp, and compelling we can easily coalesce around it. The same goes for the rest of the church.

Pastor Ricky is one of my favorite pastors I've ever worked with. Part of his appeal is his story. Ricky grew up around Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in an affluent family on a 1,900 acre farm with 600 cattle. Eventually, his life was turned upside down through family tragedies, and he found himself a young husband and father looking for a way to provide a life for his family. He began smuggling drugs across the Rio Grande River along the US/Mexican border. Even after multiple arrests, he continued to return to his ways, feeling there was no better option, until one night when his home was raided by agents who discovered cocaine, marijuana, and ecstasy.

Ricky knew this was the real deal, and bail was set at \$1 million. As he was being fingerprinted and remanded, he decided he only had one option. He asked if he could visit the restroom. The guard unlocked Ricky's shackles, and he frantically sprinted through the front door and headed straight into the swamps he had navigated his whole life. For the next 56 days, agents chased Ricky through the swamp as he survived on raw armadillo, frogs, blackberries, thistles, and

rain water. He eventually ventured out of the swamp, was caught, and faced a life in prison.

It was during that prison sentence that his life took an eternal change in direction. He met Jesus through a Baptist Chaplin who loved him despite his background. As the changes took root, he was eventually released from prison and returned to the Baton Rouge area to do the only thing he could think of – tell others about the life-changing power of Jesus. And so he did just that.

The church grew rapidly, and lives were changed. The church needed a new location so they purchased a rundown shopping center and renovated it as a new worship facility and an area to reach people just like him. They opened a wing of the facility for those who had just exited prison dealing with addiction. I asked him if it was a half-way house. Pastor Ricky responded, “No brother – it’s an All The Way House.”

Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005 just as they were moving into the new facility. They opened their facility as a refuge for nearly 500 displaced residents from the New Orleans area. Not everyone in the church agreed with the decision. After all, the church had given, not just generously, but sacrificially, for this new facility. They asked, why should we build bunk beds, add laundry facilities, and welcome in those who might steal from us? Pastor Ricky heard it all.

Some even left the church on Sunday. They would say, “It seems like the church cares more about these people than you do us.” To which Pastor Rick says he would hug them and respond, “You’re absolutely right, and right now we do.”

The church leadership was united in their calling by God to make a difference by loving those who were broken. The church nearly doubled in the time they housed the Katrina victims. God blessed the unity of their leadership, and He will bless the unity of your leadership as well.

*“How good and pleasant it is
when God’s people live together in unity!”
Psalm 133:1*

4

The Relationships Factor

*“If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together.”
African Proverb*

I love sports and have a complete bucket list of sporting events I would love to experience. I had the opportunity to check one of them off in 2005 when I attended The Masters at Augusta National Golf Club. My friend, Rick Campbell, and I had the opportunity to follow Tiger Woods for the day on a Saturday following a day of rain-outs in which they were forced to play 27 holes. The course was wet, soggy, and muddy.

We watched as Tiger teed off and pulled his ball deep into the muddy woods, and raced like everyone else from the tee box to get close to the ball. We managed to get really close. We were so close that my friend Rick would later be seen in a photo on the Sports Page of the Atlanta Journal Constitution. As Tiger arrived to the ball he almost immediately began to disagree with his caddie, Steve Williams. While his caddie suggested one club for the upcoming shot, Tiger was convinced a different club was the answer. The exchange became intense as they strongly disagreed. Tiger pulled the club he wanted and closed his eyes to visualize the shot. When he opened his eyes he placed the club back in the bag, selected the club that Williams had recommended. He

gripped the club, visualized the shot, and hit one of the most famous shots in PGA history to allow him the opportunity to birdie the hole and win The Masters.

I don't care how much money you make or how gifted you are – sometimes you have to listen to those around you. This doesn't always come easy for pastors. Most of us are Type A personalities who believe in our skills and knowledge. Unfortunately, we often miss the need to develop relationships.

I've had the opportunity to do some very unique things in life. One of those was serving as the Vice President of Development for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, representing Franklin Graham, the President and CEO. I learned so much during that time, and had the opportunity to network with dynamic leaders across the Christian world. One such group I had the opportunity to befriend was the National Christian Foundation (NCF). The National Christian Foundation is a non-profit that helps Christian donors give more wisely and tax-efficiently to support their favorite charities. It has a dedicated team of Christian attorneys that help navigate challenging and tricky gifting scenarios.

During my time at the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, I had the opportunity to spend time with the National Christian Foundation and a group of high capacity donors they brought in for conversations. It was the opportunity to get underneath the hood of what goes through the minds of a donors as they approach the concept of giving. We had the chance to ask questions and get feedback. One

of the biggest takeaways for me was that the group of high capacity donors were united in the fact that they did not want to be perceived as donors, but as partners.

I wonder how often we as pastors consider the idea of developing partners? If we're being completely honest – probably not very often. If you're in a small to mid-sized church you have sermons to write, talks to prepare, people to visit in the hospital, weddings to officiate, funerals to write, and meetings to attend. If you're in a large church, and you're not careful, the only people you ever get to know are key leaders and pains in your backside.

We are facing an economic shift in our churches unlike any that has ever been seen before. For the first time in American history, we have five generations alive and active in the church at the same time:

1. The Silent Generation (1927-1944)
2. The Baby Boomers (1945-1964)
3. Generation X (1965-1981)
4. The Millennials/Gen Y (1982-2000)
5. Unnamed/Gen Z (2001-Present)

Each generation differs in the way it approaches the church – far beyond mere worship preferences or how they dress.

The Silent Generation, the greatest generation who saved the world from dictators and the evil axis, was a generation of people taught by their parents to tithe no matter what – regardless of crops, recessions, wars, or even The Great Depression. That trait was not passed on from their

generation. The subsequent generations have been molded into consumer generations of the church. With that being said, we are facing the greatest transference of wealth in the history of our country as the Silent Generation passes estates to their Baby Boomer children over the course of the next decade. This scenario is leading to several key tremors that will be felt by the church.

First, your church may very well see less estate gifts over the next decade than ever before, despite the greatest transference of wealth in American history. People give to people, not projects. Think you have a great project and the Silent Generation in your church will give to it because you have pictures in your lobby? Not so fast. In large part, we have marginalized the Silent Generation in our churches and have failed to keep and develop these important relationships, not just because we want them to be generous, but because they deserve to love their church.

I worked with a church in Kentucky several years ago both in helping reorganize the leadership structure and in taking vital steps forward in relevance for years to come. Prior to beginning the partnership, the church had been through a time where a blended contemporary style was forced down the throats of everyone attending. I was there on a Sunday and realized it didn't please anyone. I looked out and couldn't help but see Herman.

Herman was in his 80's and a proud member of the Silent Generation. He was a marine in the Pacific during World War II, and spent his professional career as a bank president

after the war. Every Monday, he showed up to church to work on odd jobs like a resident handyman. It was clear that Herman loved his church. It was also clear as I watched him that Sunday that, even though he tried to hide it, he wasn't in love with the Sunday experience. We decided that everyone should love their church till the day they die, and we started a traditional service for that generation.

In large part, Herman's generation has often been marginalized in our churches. That goes for cementing relationships as well. We take them for granted. I spoke recently with a Pastor Emeritus at a large church who told me he would love to have the opportunity to have lunch with the Senior Pastor to discuss his generation, but he hasn't found an opportunity for him yet. The Senior Pastor has been there a few years. Take time and build those relationships to honor a generation deserving of our honor and to lay the ground work for generosity. We don't have the relationships we should have with the Silent Generation, and it will have a negative affect our churches.

We also tend to lag greatly in forming relationships with new people in the church. There is a part of us, as pastors, that believes we have to treat people differently based on what we think they do in terms of generosity or what they do in terms of keeping the church going. The problem is that we frequently treat the wrong people the wrong way. I have seen this play out in churches and non-profits around the country. "We can't afford to lose them. They give a lot of money." When in reality, they leave and we find out they didn't do

nearly as much as we thought; but, they were a very squeaky wheel getting a whole lot of the grease. The end result is that we neglect new families with potential.

I worked with a church in the New York City area who saw this play out in a dramatic way. The pastor was preparing for a large generosity campaign to help expand their facility's usable footprint. We designed an opportunity for him to meet with the top 50 giving units in the church, and designed the conversation. As he began the process, he found out that he didn't know very many of the top 50 at all. As a matter of fact, many of the units he expected to be in that list were missing.

He met with one young couple who was relatively new to the church. After meeting with the couple, they were very gracious and thanked him for taking the time to get to know them. We designed an event and opportunity for this list to step out and make lead commitments for the campaign a few weeks later. That couple made a six figure commitment to the campaign. The pastor was floored. He had never met them and never would have considered them as leading generously in the church; but, he took the time to build a relationship and to care for them.

We also run the risk of becoming co-dependent when we don't focus on developing new relationships. We worked with a fantastic ministry that is changing the course of South America one village at a time. Their vision is clear, crisp, and compelling; their leadership is strong; and their impact is unquestionable. Their number one donor is a very well-

known billionaire in the tech industry in California. He is determined, though, that he will never give more than 10% of the annual budget to the ministry even though he could easily do so. The reason? He doesn't want them to become dependent solely on him. This has forced them through the years to be strategic in developing new relationships.

At the end of the day, there are things that those who are faithful to your church, college, camp, non-profit, and organization want to know. Their best avenue to answer questions is through a relationship with you. Every time you ask them to give money there are questions that go through their heads, and the largest stumbling block to giving is an unanswered question. You have to raise friends before you raise funds.

There are three key areas particularly that high capacity donors want to know about you through your relationship. First, they want to know if you lead with integrity. Several years ago, I was on a flight across country. I hopped a red-eye flight trying to get home to my family quicker, and ended up way back in the coach cabin on the plane. A little while into the flight, I noticed the man next to me was hard at work. During the five-hour flight, we struck up a conversation when I admitted that, from reading his laptop, I couldn't help but notice that he was the sports agent for one of my favorite baseball players who was active at the time and is now a Hall of Famer. This was a great opportunity to pick his brain. As we chatted, it dawned on me that he was sitting in coach despite the fact that contract he was negotiating was

worth nearly \$100 million. I knew why I was in coach; but, it was a mystery to me why he was in the back of the plane. Curiosity took over, and I asked him why he was in coach. He simply said, “It’s not my money.” The people who give to our churches, schools, camps, colleges, organizations, and non-profits, want to know that we understand that it is not our money – it’s God’s.

Second, they want assurance that we know what to do with it when they give. Too many pastors and church leaders don’t have rudimentary understandings of things like profit and loss statements or management skills. Do you understand healthy debt limits and ratios for growing churches? They want to be able to have these conversations with you and know that you can lead.

Third, they want to know that you are hard-working. Unfortunately, pastors have gotten a rap as being lazy. The sad part is that, in a lot of cases, that rap is not undeserved. There a lot of pastors who work 40 hours a week to get 15 hours of work on the clock. Demonstrate that you are hard-working.

When I was in Seattle, I had the opportunity to host a radio show – America Today with Phil Ling. It was a hoot as I had the opportunity to speak out about hot button political topics. One of which, at the time, was Ted Turner’s support of Planned Parenthood and the abortion epidemic that still plagues our country. My wife and I are very involved in the pro-life movement. I criticized Ted Turner relentlessly about his connections and the amount of money he used to fund

Planned Parenthood.

After we moved back to Kentucky, we found out there was a new restaurant opening near us called Ted's Montana Grill, owned by, you guessed it, Ted Turner. I love bison burgers and Ted's has some of the best. I told my wife we should go for the opening and she reminded me about my disdain for Ted's contribution to Planned Parenthood, and I assured her, "It's not like he's going to be there." We pulled up to the event, and there was a large cardboard cutout outside the restaurant of Ted Turner. As we got closer, we realized it wasn't a cardboard cutout – it was Ted Turner in the flesh. That night, we watched as Ted taught the hostess how to greet and the servers how to offer the bison, and he even came to our table to interact. The Lexington Herald Leader even snapped a photo of our little family and ran it on the front page. You would have thought he was opening his first business – not the self-made billionaire from Montana. The lesson learned from the billionaire serving bison was work hard every day.

One of the mysteries of the ministry that never ceases to amaze me is how difficult many church pastors find to talk about giving. Jesus talked about money more than any other topic, yet we struggle to broach the discussion. We worked with a church in the upper Midwest some time ago, and we sat down with the pastor who had served the church diligently for nearly 20 years. He hesitantly admitted to us that he was nervous because he had never preached a sermon on giving. Never – in 20 years! We were floored,

and asked him why. He responded that they he didn't see the need because they had never had trouble paying the bills or keeping the lights on.

Removing just the discipleship implications of that statement, I think a lot of us struggle to preach about giving because we haven't built the relationships to be able to have the discussion. When you flip that switch, you overcome the fear that, whenever you talk about money, you are asking people to pay for something; but, instead, you are leading people to a closer walk of discipleship with Jesus. That happens when you grow authentic relationships.

“But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see that you also excel in this grace of giving.”

2 Corinthians 8:7

5

The Impossible God Factor

“You may not see a way, but God still has a way. It may look impossible, but God can do the impossible.”

Joel Osteen

Thomas Jefferson sent a letter to his close friend, John Adams, in 1813 telling him of his new project. It was eventually titled *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*. Jefferson spent years tearing Scripture apart to create what is often referred to as *The Jefferson Bible*. The third President of the United States removed anything he deemed to be supernatural from all biblical accounts. His version still pictures Jesus born in the manger, although certainly not of a virgin birth. His version concludes with only the death of Jesus, as the resurrection is certainly supernatural. Jefferson managed to get his wee book, as he called it, trimmed to 46 pages, mainly consisting of the wisdom and philosophy found in the teachings of Jesus.

Jefferson maintained that he believed in God, just not in the traditional sense. He and other deists of the time believed that God created the world, but had no interaction with daily affairs. They viewed God as a cosmic clock-maker, winding the clock and allowing it to run on its own. They did not believe God would, or even could, choose to interact with His creation under any circumstance.

It's really easy to go after Jefferson. How could God

create the universe yet be unable to interact with it on a daily basis? How could God set creation in motion yet be uninterested in its daily course of events? How could one so easily handcuff God?

Pretty easily. We do it all the time. Maybe you don't come right out and say it. Maybe you don't put it in those terms. Maybe you haven't gotten around to cutting up Scripture – yet. Maybe, when faced with large challenges of leadership, difficult days of ministry, daunting financial goals, seemingly impossible vision, you say things like, “God is different than He used to be.” “God doesn't do that stuff anymore.” “God changed how He interacts with His people.”

It's easy to handcuff God, and, if we're being honest, we're all guilty of it from time to time. We don't believe God does big things anymore. Maybe you picture Him asleep at the wheel. Maybe your view of God shows a grandfatherly figure snoozing and rocking comfortably on the front porch. Maybe you see Him as a tireless cop ready to step in and punish the first violator. We all handcuff God. Thomas Jefferson just had the nerve to tell others about it.

I've spent so much time with pastors and church leaders who feared the impossible vision God called them towards. God still wants to do big things in this world. God still wants His presence to be felt through His people. God still wants to do something so seismic it ripples around the world. God still wants to shake the Earth. That's exactly what He did in one of my favorite narratives.

Hebrews 11:30 says, “By faith the walls of Jericho fell,

after the people had marched around them for seven days.” Joshua 6 records the events surrounding this commendation of faith found in Hebrews 11 which serves as an Old Testament Hall of Fame. The city of Jericho was besieged by the Israelites. No one entered the city nor left it. The Israelites looked for their opportunity to overtake the city.

God spoke to Joshua, and delivered explicit instructions as to a new battle plan. Joshua then informed the people. The army was to march around the city once each day for six days. On the seventh day, seven laps would be made. The army would be joined by the priests on the seventh lap. At the conclusion of the seventh lap, the priests were to blow their trumpets, and the people were to scream. God promised the walls would then fall and the city would be open for the taking.

You have to wonder how that went over when Joshua told the people. After all, these are the same people who complained at the Red Sea even though they had witnessed the Ten Plagues. These are the same people that had a wild party of sin at the base of the mountain thinking God had forgotten them even though they had crossed the Red Sea on dry land. You get the point. The people struggled with their faith. They struggled because they too often handcuffed God.

You also have to wonder what the people of Jericho thought. By the third day, it almost certainly produced laughter for the people to watch the army walk around the city once. It was not exactly the most intimidating battle

methodology or tactic available in the ancient world. They hurled insults and mocked the Israelites. Some nations were known for beheading their counterparts and stacking their heads against the city gates. Others were known for piling entire bodies together. The Israelites were known for walking in circles.

The seventh day must have heightened the curiosity of the residents of Jericho even more. It must have intensified the march of the Israelites. I've tried to picture the scene. It had to be intense.

As the trumpets blew and the people yelled, the walls of Jericho tumbled to the ground. The Israelites rushed into the city claiming the victory of God. After all, everyone knew He was to credit. God did something seismic that day. He shook the ground and made the impossible possible.

If we are being honest, our generosity initiatives often struggle because we don't trust God to provide. When we see the size of our impossible visions, the financial needs, the leadership challenge, we are often left wondering if the walls will really fall when we march around them. The walls fell in Jericho that seventh day – not because of the people marching or the trumpets blowing – because of a God who does the impossible.

The Israelites didn't cause the walls of Jericho to fall that day so long ago. No marching in the world can collapse a city. No trumpets known to man are powerful enough to move walls. No yell ever invented can shake foundations. All of those elements, however, united together at God's

instruction and in faith, were used by God to shake the world that morning, and He's still shaking the universe.

Sometimes we read narratives from Scripture as if they exist in some sort of spiritual vacuum. God wants to do something just as seismic in our churches, camps, colleges, and non-profits today. He wants to use us in just as amazing ways. He's still in the business of shaking things up. Sometimes, sadly, the only thing standing in his way is our lack of faith.

I've had the opportunity of being around some of the greatest outpourings of generosity in this country. Each of them involved gifted leaders, great strategy, crystal clear vision, and powerful relationships. None of them would have worked, however, without a God of the impossible. We serve an Impossible God who wants us to break through walls just as much today as He did in the time of Joshua.

I've had a front row seat to so many incredible moments of seemingly impossible walls collapsed by an Impossible God. There was the church in Houston that needed to raise \$67 million dollars and topped \$100 million, the small country church which didn't appear to have a path towards the half a million dollars they needed to raise, and then the town struck oil, and they raised nearly three quarters of a million dollars, the church planting agency at a dinner hoping to raise enough money to plant 5 churches that raised enough to plant 18, or the megachurch staring extreme financial hardship in the face until God intervened. Time after time, I have seen God tear down financial walls that

seemed impossible and immoveable.

It really comes down to three key elements. First, do we really believe God can tear down the walls? Do we really believe God is bigger than the walls? Or have we taken a stance closer to Thomas Jefferson and see God as there, but not invested in what happens? God shows up when His people truly believe He can and He will, and often in the ways we least expect.

True North Community Church on Long Island, New York, is a great church in that region. In 2008, long before we worked with them, True North was facing an impossible scenario. The church was growing rapidly, and, as many growing churches experience, they were outpacing their existing donors. They rapidly added a third and fourth service and experienced overcrowding. At the same time, their ability to minister to a rapidly expanding church could not keep up with the demand, and they drastically needed a new space to serve as a home as their current contract was approaching its termination date.

Pastor Bert Crabbe, one of our favorite pastors, took to the platform to speak to the church and to tell an amazing story. Following that day, the amazing story made headlines. “Our congregation has outgrown its facility,” Crabbe explained in an interview with ABC’s *Good Morning America* in 2008. “We’re having four services a week and adding a fifth. We needed another place to meet, and I told the congregation, ‘Unless God drops a couple of million on us ... ’” As the financial pressures and stresses mounted, they knew God

would provide, but had no idea how.

That's when an anonymous church member called Bert and asked if he could meet with him. He told Bert he had previously purchased a scratch-off lottery ticket, scratched it off to reveal he had won \$3 million, and wanted to donate the entire amount to the church. Pastor Bert told *Good Morning America* that he addressed the congregation and said, "Hey, look, we don't endorse gambling. Gambling is a bad way to finance a church ... I said we haven't done any gambling, we just received a donation. When I said that, everyone laughed." They trusted and believed in God to provide, and He did.

The second key to believing in the impossible is the question: are you running with a God-honoring vision? Not all visions are created equally, and God's vision will outdo our vision every time. Have you spent time in prayer? Are your hands clean and your hearts pure? Is this God's vision that He laid upon your heart? His vision will always go further than our vision.

Lastly, have you sought God's blessing for your generosity initiative? One of my favorite events we coach with each campaign or initiative that we design is to incorporate an opportunity for each church or organization to carve out a time to seek God's blessing corporately – a night of prayer or worship. It ends up being a powerful time for people to know that everything that is being done is being done to honor God.

Several years later, we had the opportunity to work with

True North Community Church. They had grown to nearly 2,000 people in a 40,000 square foot facility with only 16,000 square feet built out. They were once again maxed for space and leveraged for impact on ministry. They entered into a multi-million dollar strategic generosity initiative with us to address the future with a vision of raising funds to build out the additional undeveloped space. They had a feeling God wasn't providing a lottery ticket again.

The challenge was daunting, and the project was large. Construction in and around New York City of any kind is crazy expensive. We crafted the vision and cast it before the church through various sized settings. Towards the end of the campaign, the leaders had the opportunity to make their advanced commitments. Pastor Bert knew that it would be powerful to go to the church and be able to say that there was already \$1 million committed from the leaders.

The advanced commitment event fell about \$150,000 short of that \$1 million mark that had been bathed in prayer. The event was on a Saturday and Pastor Bert was still excited to walk in on Sunday and challenge the church with the \$850,000; but, he wished it had been the full \$1 million dollars. That night, God moved in the lives of one of the couples who had been in attendance at the leadership event and made a generous pledge. The next morning, before the service, they pulled Pastor Bert aside and said they wanted to add \$150,000 to their amount – the exact amount needed to have the \$1 million in advanced commitments. Once again, and in an entirely different way, God provided, and the

rest of the church was moved by generosity of the advance commitments to meet the challenge that day.

I could fill a book with just these types of stories – where God surpasses the humanly impossible. We serve a God who wants to shake the Earth just like He did in Jericho that day. A God who still wants to do big things. A God who specializes in the impossible. A God who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask and imagine. An Impossible God.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power...”

Ephesians 3:20

Conclusion

When the 9.0 magnitude earthquake off the coast of Sumatra unleashed the cataclysmic tsunami on December 26, 2004, it propelled a storm estimated to have had the power of 23,000 Hiroshima-type atomic bombs. The violent shifts of the tectonic plates left a rupture of over 600 miles in the Earth's crust under the sea and shifted the tectonic plates by 40 yards, propelling water that brought widespread death and destruction to 11 countries from East Africa to Thailand. The storm radiated as far as 3,000 miles, and, despite the several hours it took from the time of the earthquake for the deadly waves to reach the devastated shores, nearly 230,000 people lost their lives that day.

A report commissioned to study the disaster revealed that there were no Tsunami Warning Systems in place throughout the Indian Ocean. Such a warning system as exists in other parts of the world would have saved most, if not all, of the lives lost that day. If only the warning systems had existed.

Reflecting back on the storm, the most puzzling part was why some had been able to survive, such as Tilly Smith and her family in Phuket, Thailand. They simply heeded the warning signs.

The warning signs are clear for the church. As donors become less attached to the church, discipleship of biblical generosity remains lacking, and leadership remains void – a storm is beginning to take shape. We have the warning signs. The question remains: what will we do with them?

We have a couple of choices. First, we can continue as usual. We can hope that the small minority who currently gives the majority continues to do so and somehow they will rub off on others. That strategy is short-sighted and unfortunately will only last as long as those donors last within the church. It leaves the church open for disaster and destruction in the event of a death of a key donor or a critical crisis. At the most, it lasts for the current generation.

The second option is to prepare for the impending storm and to build a culture of generosity. Craft a clear, crisp, and

compelling vision that elevates participation, creates momentum, solidifies unity, builds authentic relationships, and depends on a big God. Begin to teach biblical generosity and provide inception opportunities for new potential donors. Begin to embrace generosity as a critical ministry of your church from this point on, not just a plate that is passed on Sundays while we make announcements.

The options are simple. The outcomes are very different. So why would we not choose to build and develop a culture of generosity? I'm convinced the answer to that question comes down to fear.

In the midst of the greatest depression ever seen, Franklin D. Roosevelt was sworn in as President of the United States on Saturday, March 4, 1933, in which he gave his 1,883-word, 20-minute speech that left a mark on Americans. He began the speech by dispelling the idea of fear by saying, *“Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is ... fear itself — nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.”*

I'll admit that I have seen a lot of unjustified terror bring paralysis to church leaders and pastors and turn advance into retreat when considering the concepts and ideas of teaching biblical generosity. Yet, Jesus spoke and taught openly on the subject. I have seen churches take bold steps of caution because of a fear that permeates the topic.

Churches that talk about generosity and truly begin to develop cultures of generosity are the churches who will survive the impending storm. The warning system has been sounded. Will you heed the warning? Will you craft a clear, crisp, and compelling vision that elevates participation, creates momentum, solidifies unity, builds authentic relationships, and depends on a big God? If so, you will not just survive the impending tsunami but bring an impact to countless real lives for very real eternities.

*“Excel in this grace of giving.”
2 Corinthians 8:7*

An Introduction to Phil Ling

As a church planter, business entrepreneur and sixth generation ministry leader, Phil Ling provides energetic leadership and strategic direction to The Ling Group, LLC and The Giving Church consulting team. His expertise in building networks and developing resources



to establish and strengthen congregations and non-profit organizations is a hallmark of his ministry and is an unparalleled asset to the clients he serves

Prior to launching his own consulting firm, Phil served as Vice President of Development for the *Billy Graham Evangelistic Association*, representing Franklin Graham, the President and CEO. Phil led a team of individuals with the responsibility of donor relations, underwriting of the annual operating budget that exceeded 130 million dollars, developing major donor strategies, Foundation interaction, and developing strategic partnerships.

Preceding joining the executive leadership of BGEA, Phil served as Executive Vice President of *INJOY Stewardship Services*, representing the founder, Dr. John C. Maxwell, and the *INJOY* Group in the largest church in America. Under Phil's leadership, his mega-church team successfully helped

350 churches raise in excess of 600 million dollars.

Phil has 21 years of pastoral experience. Prior to serving INJOY, Phil successfully launched two dynamic ministries over a twenty-year span. The most recent, he served as founding pastor of the Northshore Christian Church (WA), and founder of Northshore Christian Academy. Under his leadership the church grew to nearly 2,500 in weekly attendance and the school became one of the largest private primary education institutions in the Pacific Northwest. Phil also served as Senior Minister of the historic Broadway Christian Church, Lexington, KY.

Phil received a Master of Ministry degree from Kentucky Christian University and is a highly sought after speaker and ministry teacher. Phil is committed to facilitating organization and leadership development within diverse ministry contexts and coaching pastors and leaders. Phil and his wife, Georgia Curtis Ling, have been married 36 years and have one son and daughter-in law, Philip and Lauren Ling. They call home a log cabin on their farm, Cabin Ridge, in Kentucky.

An Introduction to Tim Cooper

*Tim Cooper,
Senior Project Manager
with the Giving Church*

Tim works with churches and non-profits across the country in generosity and leadership development. Prior to that work, Tim spent 15 years on church staffs overseeing day-to-day operations and financial resources. He is the author of *Miles Past Normal & Awestruck*. Tim lives with his wife, April, and their three children – Makayla, Trace, and Lilly Grace in Georgetown, Kentucky.



The Giving Church Client References:

www.thegivingchurch.com

Greg Nettle – President, Stadia Global Church Planting
| www.stadia.cc | gnette@stadia.cc “My only regret about hiring Phil Ling as a coach was that I didn’t do it ten years ago. Phil is an amazing coach at a personal, church-wide and global organization level. One of the best ‘Kingdom Return on Investments’ I have ever made.”

Dwight Mason, Senior Pastor – NewPointe Community Church – Dover | www.newpointe.org | damson@newpointe.org “Phil Ling is knowledgeable, personable, and he is able to connect and help you create a positive future. He is not only a good friend but a great coach in my leadership.”

Scott Beckenhauer – Lead Minister – Calvary Christian Church, Omaha, NE | www.calvarychristianchurch.org | scott.beckenhauer@calvarychristianchurch.org “Two times over the last four years, we have called on Phil Ling to guide us through a season of raising our vision and finances to help us expand our ministry. Both times, Phil helped us plan a campaign for our unique needs, helped us anticipate our challenges before they arose, and – ultimately – helped us raise more funds for our vision than we had originally set out to raise. By leaning on Phil’s knowledge and experience, our church body has now more than doubled over the last

four years.”

Brett Andrews – Lead Pastor – New Life Church – Chantilly, VA | www.newlife4me.com | bretta@newlife4me.com “New wine needs new wineskins. Phil’s strength is offering fresh wineskins. He doesn’t just offer a cookie-cutter template, he thinks dynamically. He applies proven principles to fresh challenges. The result is a personalized campaign, a fresh approach, and the experience of watching God do a new thing in your church.”

Bo Chancey - Senior Pastor – Manchester Christian Church, Manchester, NH | www.manchesterchristian.com | bo@manchesterchristian.com “Phil Ling’s approach to consulting is fresh, innovative, and effective. His ability to quickly understand the church’s current climate and their desired direction enable him to provide clear insight and strategic wisdom. Phil is an excellent resource for unleashing resources to fund ministry vision.”