

THE KINGDOM BUILDER



STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES

Giving Generously or Living Generously?

For many years I have been actively promoting the idea of generous giving. I have written books and articles about it; I have taught on it; and I have helped affluent families do it. To say the least, generosity is for me both a calling and a passion. But quite recently, the Lord has shown me through a sequence of unrelated events that I still have a lot to learn about what it means to be generous. Let me tell you the stories.

Recently on Sunday morning, at the end of our worship time, the worship minister announced that we were about to watch an extraordinary video about a couple in our church. As the video rolls, I am surprised – I know the husband, B.J. because I have played basketball with him at church for the past few years. I liked him from the very first time we played ball together. B.J. is a young man in his late 20s, has a successful money management practice and is an extremely talented athlete. Since I knew one of the main characters in this video, I proudly nudged my wife and said, “I know him!”

My excitement turned to embarrassment as he and his wife shared their story. B.J.’s wife had a high school friend who was very ill and in need of a kidney transplant. Both of them immediately said to themselves, “Maybe we could give her one of our kidneys.” Well, it seemed reasonable to me that B.J.’s wife might want to give her good friend one of her kidneys, but as it turned out B.J.’s kidney was the perfect match. So without hesitation he donated one of his kidneys to his wife’s high school friend. They shared that it just seemed like the right thing to do. B.J. had an extra kidney and this girl had none.

I was stunned. I wouldn’t give one of my kidneys to one of my wife’s friends. I would not even consider it. Of course I would give one to my wife or one of my children if they needed it, but to one of my wife’s friends? Don’t get me wrong, I am all about giving of my time, talent and treasure, but giving my torso – my body parts? That was a level of giving that entirely surpassed my current concept of generosity.

Just a few days later, I was ready to board a plane to return home from a business trip. I was first in line and was looking forward to getting comfortable in my first class seat and then “zoning out” on the flight home. (I often get upgraded for free.)

Just prior to our boarding, a very heavy, crippled man had been escorted down the jetway in his wheelchair to board the plane. So I waited patiently for the call for first class to board. However, just as they began to announce the first class boarding, another guy cuts right in front of me and hands the attendant his boarding pass. His rude manner and obviously arrogant attitude irritated me.

As we got to the bottom of the jetway, four airline staff were having difficulty getting the heavy, crippled man out of his wheelchair and into the airline wheelchair needed to get him on the plane. This delay was causing a back up in the jetway. No one was able to board because they were right in front of the plane door. So here I am standing and stewing over this rude guy who cut in front of me while I was waiting to get on the plane. I stood there a little impatiently watching the airline employees working futilely to get this crippled man into the airline wheelchair.

Then, the bomb fell. The guy who cut in front of me calls out to the flight crew, "Hey, let me help you." So he drops his bags and hurries over to them and helps get the man into the plane wheelchair. I was so ashamed. I was standing there just like the line-cutter was, but the thought never even crossed my mind to offer any help. Of all the people standing there watching this happen, this guy who I was convinced was so selfish and full of himself was the one who volunteered to help.

Unfortunately, the humiliation wasn't over. When they finally get the man in the wheelchair and through the plane door, Mr. Helpful then says to the airline staff. "Let me go back and get his bag for you." He comes back off the plane, grabs the man's bag, which by the way, is right at my feet and takes it back into the plane to him. Yet, another missed opportunity for me to live generously.

By this point I am feeling very convicted about my lack of generosity. Interestingly enough, it turns out the line-cutter is sitting right across the aisle from me in first class. I told him I appreciated his willingness to help the crippled man. He smiled and said, "It wasn't anything." To him, it wasn't anything, but to me it proved that of the two of us, I was the one who was selfish and full of myself, not him.

But God still wasn't finished rocking my generosity world. As I am finally relaxing in my first class aisle seat, the passengers in economy start filing past me. I hear a woman immediately behind

me ask this soldier who is standing right next to me, "Soldier, what seat are you in?" He says, "21B." "One of the dreaded middle seats in the back," I thought. She then says to him, "Would you like to sit here?" The soldier hesitated, but the woman insisted that he take her first class seat and she would go back and sit in his middle economy seat.

Humbled again! This is all happening right next to me. Know that I deeply appreciate what our military does for us as a country and for me as one of its citizens. I have even thanked soldiers for their service on many occasions. But the thought of offering this soldier my first class seat and taking a middle seat in economy class on a packed plane was another indicator of just how limited my generosity really is.

I have been mulling these experiences over in my mind for a few weeks and I wanted to share with you the main lesson that I think God has taught me through this. The lesson is this: *I can be generous in how I give without being generous in how I live.* Conversely, I have also learned that *a person who lives generously always gives generously.*

In other words, we may be willing to be extremely generous in giving what we want to give where we want to give it. But with what we don't want to give we can actually find ourselves being just as selfish and tight-fisted as the infamous Ebenezer Scrooge. *Living* generously, not *giving* generously needs to be our goal.

I have identified three characteristics of people who model generous living:

Characteristic #1:
Generous Living is Open-Hearted

Those who live generously are open-hearted and alert to find people who are struggling, hurting or in pain. They empathize with those whose world is difficult and they enjoy trying to make it better.

Characteristic #2:
Generous Living is Open-Minded

The minds of those who live generously are always thinking about creative ways to bless and encourage others in both great and small ways. They are consciously engaged in their world and the lives of those around them, poised to show generosity to anyone whenever the opportunity presents itself.

Characteristic #3:
Generous Living is Open-Handed

The resources of those who live generously, *all of them* – (time, talent, treasure [and torso]), are ready to be gladly given whenever a need or an opportunity is discovered. When it is within their power to respond, they relish the privilege to make a difference and bless the life of another – friend or stranger. They live out the extreme attitude, “*What is mine is yours and you can have it.*”

In these three recent experiences it has been vividly demonstrated to me that the key to living a generous life is easy to understand. It is, however, excruciatingly difficult to live because of what it requires of us – a radical change in our self-assessment. Paul tells us in Philippians 2:3, “...but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.” There it is

– in just one part of one verse – “regard one another as more important than himself.”

If we can wholly embrace this radical change in our self-assessment – and truly come to believe that others are more important than ourselves, we will be completely transformed into not just people who are *giving* generously, but more importantly into people who are *living* generously – who reflect an open-hearted, open-minded and open-handed life. If we really want to achieve maximum Kingdom impact in our lives, may I suggest that we expand our focus to not just *giving* generously, but more importantly to *living* generously.



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