

LIVING THE GENEROUS LIFE

Obedient Courier: Generous Giver or Obedient Courier

Is it appropriate to describe a person as a generous giver if what he is giving is not his to give in the first place? Would you describe a man as a generous giver if what he was giving away was, unknown to you, coming out of your personal checking account and not his own? These are the questions we seek to answer in Lesson 2 of Living the Generous Life.

Have you ever heard the term *generous giving* used before to describe someone who is giving a lot away? Both the words *generous* and *giving* are used in Scripture, albeit not in the same place very often. In Psalm 37:21 David says, “*The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously.*” James 1:5 tells us that God, “*gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*”

However, as you continue to seek to personally embrace and consistently apply the concept of biblical stewardship in your own thinking and life, the use of the term *generous giving* should begin creating some uneasiness in you. Here’s why.

If someone labels a man a *generous giver*, it seems to imply two things about that man: (1) what he gives is *his* to give and (2) *he* decides how much to give (making him *generous*). Within the context of biblical stewardship, however, both of these implications would be, at the least, misleading if not patently incorrect.

This point can be made by asking a question. Is it appropriate to describe a person as a *generous giver* if what he is giving is not his to give in the first place? Let me frame the question to be even more personal. “Would you describe a man as a *generous giver* if what he was giving away was, unknown to you, coming out of *your* personal checking account and not his own?” I suspect you might have a few descriptive terms for him, but *generous giver* would not be one of them.

Consider this hypothetical scenario. Imagine a very rich man decides to give his nephew \$1,000,000 in cash. He calls his nephew and informs him that he is mailing him a certified letter with a cashier’s check in it for \$1,000,000 and the check will be arriving tomorrow. The next day the doorbell rings and there before the nephew stands the postman. The nephew can barely contain himself as the postman asks him to sign for the letter. The postman then hands the young man the envelope. The young man burst forward grabbing the postman in an enthusiastic embrace, gushing with thanks at how generous he is and how much the nephew appreciates his kindness for giving him such a generous gift. He repeats over and over again, “Thank you, thank you, thank you, you are just so generous!”

What is wrong with this picture? The truth is the postman *did* indeed give the nephew a cashier’s check for \$1,000,000. What is wrong is that the postman is getting all the acknowledgment and appreciation for making a gift that he merely delivered for someone else. He was in reality nothing more than the individual charged with the responsibility of delivering the gift to the proper person. I suspect the postman would have likely been quite surprised by

the nephew's overflowing gratitude for simply making a normal delivery as part of his routine duties.

Do you see the point? If we are merely stewards (managers) of our Master's property and not the owners, then nothing is ours to give away in any amount. And if our Master, the Owner, instructs us to deliver someone a gift from His abundance of which we are caretakers, then we are really being nothing more than obedient stewards commissioned to make the delivery to the designated recipient as instructed by the Owner.

Many decades ago there was a television show called "The Millionaire." In the series a multi-billionaire named John Beresford Tipton, Jr. would randomly give one million dollars, tax free, to people that were complete strangers to him. How Tipton delivered his cashier's checks was through his executive secretary, Michael Anthony. In each episode Anthony would deliver Tipton's check to a different individual. The rest of the show followed what happened to the recipient because of the gift. (It was almost always a bad outcome.) As he delivered the check, Anthony would make it quite clear that the gift was not coming from him, but from someone else who insisted on remaining anonymous. He was simply delivering the gift from this unknown benefactor.

This is the way it should be with us and our giving. We have been entrusted with assets for the purpose of delivering them to the intended recipient as per the directive of the Benefactor. If you were to watch "The Millionaire," you would never think of Anthony as being personally generous simply because he was the one delivering the checks. You would only think of him as doing his job – a fun job, no doubt.

Jesus describes this very idea in Luke 17:7-10 when he says, "*Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'? But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink'? He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done'*" (NASB).

No matter how much we ultimately deliver of God's resources to the intended recipients, would the description of *generous giver* ever be appropriately applied to us because, "*we have done only that which we ought to have done?*" Maybe instead of applying the term *generous giver*, it would be more appropriate to use the term *obedient courier*. This label more accurately describes the proper stewardship mindset we should have in delivering generous gifts from the one and only *Generous Giver*.

In His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:16), Jesus expresses this very idea when He says, "*In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works (the delivery of the generous gifts) and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (the Provider of the generous gifts).*"

As we all seek to be good and faithful stewards, carefully and responsibly carrying out the delivery assignments of the *Generous Giver*, may we never lose sight of the fact that at most, *“We are unworthy slaves;...having done only that which we ought to have done.”*

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. What is your initial reaction to the message of this lesson?
2. How does understanding that God is the Owner of everything you possess change the way you think about your giving?
3. How does understanding this “giver” versus “courier” concept change your thinking about giving?
4. Why does the story about the postman and the nephew seem so absurd?
5. Share how the following statement challenges your idea of being generous:
“If someone labels a man a generous giver, it seems to imply two things about that man: (1) what he gives is his to give and (2) he decides how much to give [making him generous].”
6. How did the story of the old TV show, “The Millionaire”, give you a different perspective on giving?
7. How can using the term “obedient courier” help you keep a more healthy perspective on your giving?
8. How can Luke 17:10, “We are unworthy slaves . . . having done only that which we ought to have done” help keep you humble about your giving?
9. Read Matthew 5:16. When you obediently deliver a gift from the Owner (the real Generous Giver), what do you do to ensure all the praise and gratitude for the gift go to the Owner and not to you as merely the obedient courier?
10. What is going to change in your life because of what you have learned in this lesson? What are you going to start doing differently?