

## LIVING THE GENEROUS LIFE

### **Generous Living: Giving Generously or Living Generously**

*If we really want to achieve maximum Kingdom impact in our lives, we need to expand our focus to not just giving generously, but more importantly to living generously.*

We can glean so much valuable wisdom about giving from our fellow stewards who are, like us, trying to figure out how to be good and faithful in how they deploy what God has entrusted to them. In this week's lesson, we are going to hear a couple of very transparent stories that stretched a businessman, who considered himself to already be a very generous giver, far beyond his current understanding and giving comfort level. Here are his compelling stories.

One Sunday morning at a large church, the worship minister announced that they were about to watch an extraordinary video about a couple in their church. As the video rolls, this businessman was surprised – he knew the husband, B.J., because he had played basketball with him at church for the past few years. B.J. was a young man in his late 20s, had a successful business and was an extremely talented athlete. Since he knew B.J., he proudly nudged his wife and said, “I know him!”

His excitement, however, quickly turned to embarrassment as B.J. and his wife shared their story. B.J.’s wife had a high school friend who was in need of a kidney transplant. Both of B.J. and his wife immediately said to each other, “Maybe we could give her one of our kidneys.” It seemed reasonable to this man 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 B.J. 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.

The businessman sat stunned. He silently told himself, “I would never give one of my kidneys to one of my wife’s friends. I wouldn’t even consider it. Sure, I would give one to my wife or one of my children if they needed it, but to one of his wife’s friends?”

He said as he was relating this story, “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, this same businessman was preparing to board a plane to return home from a business trip. He was first in line to board and was looking forward to getting comfortable in his first class seat and then “zoning out” on the flight home.

Just prior to boarding, a very heavy, crippled man had been escorted down the jetway in his wheelchair to board the plane. A few minutes later just as the announcement for first class boarding started, some guy cuts right of the businessman and hands the attendant his boarding pass. His rude manner and obviously arrogant attitude really irritated the businessman.

As they 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. No one was able to board because they were right in front of the plane door. Our businessman shared, “I stood there stewing over this rude “line cutter” right in front of me and impatiently watching as the airline employees struggled to get this crippled man into the airline wheelchair.”

Then, “The bomb fell,” he shared.

The guy who cut in front of him called out to the flight crew, “Hey, let me help you.” So he drops his bags and hurries over to help them get the man into the wheelchair.

The businessman confessed, “I felt 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, the guy who I was convinced was so selfish and full of himself was the one who volunteered to help.”

Unfortunately, this businessman’s humiliation wasn’t over yet. Once the flight crew finally got the man in the wheelchair and through the plane door, Mr. Helpful then says to the airline staff, “Let me go back out and get his bag for you.” Coming back off the plane, he grabs the man’s bag, which, by the way, was sitting right at this businessman’s feet and takes it back into the plane to the crippled man – the businessman missing yet another opportunity to live generously.

By this point he was feeling very convicted about his lack of generosity. Interestingly, it turned out the line-cutter was sitting right across the aisle from him. The businessman told him that he appreciated his willingness to help the crippled man. The man smiled and said, “It wasn’t anything.” To him, it might not have been anything, but the businessman shared, “It proved that of the two of us, I was the one who was really selfish and full of himself, not the line cutter.

But God still wasn’t finished rocking this businessman’s generosity world. As He was finally relaxing in his first class aisle seat, the passengers in economy begin filing past. He heard a woman immediately behind him ask a soldier who was standing right by the businessman, “Soldier, what seat are you in?” He says, “21B.” “One of the dreaded middle seats in the back,” the businessman thought.

She then said to him, “Soldier, 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.

The businessman was humbled again! This conversation was all happening right next to him. He admitted, “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 on a packed plane was another indicator of just how limited my generosity really was.”

These small, but powerful stories taught this businessman and can also teach us a very important life lesson. The lesson is this: *We can be generous in how we give without being generous in how we live.* Conversely, *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 when and 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 life goal.

We should note three common 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.*”

These stories of our businessman vividly demonstrate to all of us 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, we need to expand our focus to not just *giving* generously, but more importantly to *living* generously.

## **STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS**

1. What is your initial reaction to the message of this lesson?
2. Which of the three stories shared were you able to most relate to and why?
3. Why is it so much more difficult for people to live generously than it is to give generously?
4. Three characteristics were given of a person who lives generously: Open-Hearted, Open-Minded, Open-Handed.
  - a) Which of these is the easiest for you to successfully live out and why?
  - b) Which of these is the most difficult for you to successfully live out and why?
5. Share a personal experience of when you did successfully live generously?
6. Share a time in which you later realized that you had walked right past an opportunity to be generous to someone, but because you were so distracted at the time with your own agenda, you missed the opportunity completely?
7. Respond to the quote, “I can be generous in how I give without being generous in how I live.” How can we become more conscious about living generously so we can more effectively present a Christ-like example for the world to see?
8. Read Philippians 2:3. Why is it important to keep this in the forefront of our minds in order to improve our efforts to become more overtly generous in how we live our daily lives?
9. 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?