



GENEROUS GIVER OR OBEDIENT COURIER?

Have you ever heard the term “generous giving” used to describe someone who gives a lot away? The words “generous” and “giving” are both used in Scripture, albeit not in the same place very often. In Psalm 37:21 (NIV) 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.* As you seek to personally embrace and consistently apply the concept of biblical stewardship in your own life, you might be surprised to hear that the term “generous giving” should create some uneasiness in you. Here’s why!

If someone labels a person a generous giver, it seems to imply two things about them: first, what they give is *theirs* to give; and second, *they* decide how much to give (making them “generous”). Within the context of biblical stewardship, however, both of these implications would be at the least misleading, if not patently incorrect.

Consider this question: Is it appropriate to describe a person as a ‘generous giver,’ if what they give is not theirs to give in the first place? Let’s make this even more personal: Is a person a generous giver if what they give away is, unbeknownst to you, coming out of *your* personal checking account and not their own?” I suspect you might have a few descriptive terms for him, but generous giver would not be one of them.

Imagine a very rich man decides to give his nephew an extraordinarily generous gift. He calls his nephew and informs him that tomorrow he will be receiving a certified letter with a cashier’s check in it for \$1,000,000! The next day the doorbell rings, and there before the nephew stands a 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 bursts forward, grabs the postman in an enthusiastic embrace, and gushes with thanks at how generous he is and how much he 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? It is indeed true that the postman gave the nephew a cashier’s check for \$1,000,000. The problem is the postman is getting all the acknowledgment and appreciation for a gift that he merely delivered for someone else. He was, in reality, nothing more than the one charged with the responsibility of delivering the gift to the proper person. I suspect the postman would have 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, or 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 a gift to someone from His abundance (of which we are caretakers), then we are truly nothing more than obedient stewards, commissioned to make the delivery to the designated recipient

When I was a boy, there was a television show called *The Millionaire*. In the series, a multi-millionaire named John Beresford Tipton, Jr. would randomly give one million dollars, tax free, to complete strangers. Tipton delivered his cashier's checks 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. (If I recall, 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 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 watching *The Millionaire*, you would never consider Anthony to be 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 (NASB) 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.'

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

In His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:16 (CSB), 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 in heaven'* [the Provider of the generous gifts]. As we 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*.

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