



GIVING GENEROUSLY OR LIVING GENEROUSLY

We can glean valuable wisdom about giving from our fellow stewards who are, like us, trying to figure out how to be good and faithful in the way they deploy what God has entrusted to them. One Sunday morning, as I was sitting in a pew at the large church I attend, the worship minister announced that they were about to watch an extraordinary video about a couple in their church. As the video rolled, I was surprised to see that I knew the husband, B. J. I had played basketball with him at church for the past few years. B.J. was a young man in his late twenties—a successful businessman and an extremely talented athlete. I proudly nudged my wife and said, “I know him!”

My 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 B.J. and his wife immediately said to each other, “Maybe we could give her one of our kidneys.” 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. 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 a kidney to spare and this girl had none.

I (who considered myself to be very generous) sat stunned and silently admitted, “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 my wife’s friends?” I said to myself, “I am all about giving of my time, talent, and treasure, but giving my *torso*—my body parts? That is a level of giving that entirely surpasses my current concept of generosity.”

Just a few days later, I was preparing to board a plane to return home from a business trip. I was first in line to board and was looking forward to getting comfortable in my first class seat and “zoning out” on the flight home. Just prior to the boarding call, a very heavy, crippled man had been escorted down the jetway in his wheelchair to board the plane. A few minutes later, just as first class boarding was starting, some guy cut right in front of me and handed the attendant his boarding pass. His rude manner and obviously arrogant attitude really irritated me.

As we reached the bottom of the jetway, four airline staff were struggling to get the heavy, crippled, man out of his wheelchair and into the airline wheelchair which was needed to get him on the plane. No one was able to board because they were blocking the plane door. I stood there stewing over this rude “line-cutter” right in front of me and impatiently watched as the airline employees struggled. Then, the bomb fell. The guy who had cut in front of me called out to the flight crew, “Hey, let me help you.” So, he dropped his bags and hurried over to help them get the man into the wheelchair. I confess, I felt so ashamed. I was standing there just like the line-cutter, 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.

But my humiliation wasn't over yet. Once the flight crew finally got the man in the wheelchair and through the plane door, Mr. Helpful Line-Cutter then said to the airline staff, "Let me go back out and get his bag for you." Coming back off the plane, he grabbed the bag of the man he had just helped (which, by the way, was sitting right at my feet) and took it back onto the plane to the crippled man. I missed yet another opportunity to live generously. By this point I was feeling very convicted about my lack of generosity. Interestingly, it turned out the line-cutter was sitting right across the aisle from me. I told him that I 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 to me it proved that of the two of us, I was the one who was really selfish and full of myself, not the line-cutter.

But God still wasn't finished rocking my generosity world. As I was finally relaxing in my first class aisle seat, the passengers in economy began filing past. I heard the woman directly behind me ask a soldier (who was standing right by me), "Soldier, what seat are you in?" He replied, "21B." "One of the dreaded middle seats in the back," I 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 while she went back to sit in his middle economy seat. I was humbled again! This conversation had happened right next to me. 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 teach us a very important lesson: 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 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, whether friend or stranger. They live out the extreme attitude, "*What is mine is yours and you can have it.*"

These stories vividly demonstrate that the key to living a generous life is easy to understand. It is, however, excruciatingly difficult to live out because of what it requires of us—a radical change in our self-assessment. Paul tells us in Philippians 2:3 (NASB), ...*with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves*. Did you catch that? ...*Regard one another as more important than yourselves*.

If we can wholly embrace this radical change in our self-assessment and truly come to believe that others are more important than ourselves, then we will be completely transformed into people 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.

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