



The Risks of Generosity

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Almost every time we engage a broader group of leaders from the church around the topic of generosity, we get this question: “What is the tipping point of generosity where you move from being a good steward of God’s resources to being unwise?” Another way of asking this question is, “As I try to follow the ways of God, which is more important...stewardship or generosity?”

That can be a very legitimate question. If we throw our resources fully at every generosity opportunity that comes along, we are going to run out of resources quickly. I don’t think anyone debates that point.

The question can also be a cop-out. Sometimes, people ask this question to say, “How uncomfortable is too uncomfortable when I’m following God?” But, let’s focus on the honest version of the question. When does radical generosity become unwise stewardship?

In reality, there are probably two issues that need to be addressed in order to answer this question appropriately.

1. Despite the way that most people think of these topics, generosity precedes stewardship, not the other way around.

The premise of this question usually comes from a “stewardship first” approach to life. In other words, it comes from the worldview that classifies generosity as one aspect of stewardship. The thought is, “If we are good money managers, we will be secure and will have enough to give from the overflow.” Makes sense... right? But, that’s not necessarily the Biblical position on stewardship.

Think of it this way...we are able to be stewards because God is generous. In other words, the only reason we have anything to manage is because He has first given it to us. So, in that sense, generosity always precedes stewardship. And that leads to the second part of this answer, where Scripture fleshes these ideas out for us.

2. The most dangerous financial move you can make is to downplay the voice of the Owner.

Financial wisdom is found, first and foremost, in seeking God’s kingdom.

I know this sounds like a Sunday School answer that may be out of touch with reality, but stick with me.

Do you remember the Parable of the Rich Fool? When He was asked to settle a family dispute about money, Jesus told this story. According to Luke 12, Jesus said, *The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, “What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.” Then he said, “This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’ But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.*

I love that answer, because Jesus does not disparage the man for being rich. Instead, He comes down on him for not seeking God’s wisdom for his possessions.

Remember this... *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord (Isaiah 55:8).* It applies to money, too. I don’t care how sound your financial practices are (and they should be sound!), your planning should never trump the wisdom of God.

That means that the only practical answer is simple: Your giving becomes too radical the moment you give apart from God’s voice. And your stewardship becomes too safe the moment you save apart from God’s direction.

Here’s a story of how this plays out like in everyday life.

A friend was recently struggling to pay the bills. His family had gone through several months of hardships and he had been forced to bail his adult daughter out of several financial “mishaps” over that time. In the midst of that struggle, he received a paycheck that would allow him to simply get the basic necessities that he needed

for the week: food and gas. But, as he went to deposit the check, he felt prompted by the Spirit to give \$100 to someone else in need.

He listened...and gave away money that he knew he would need for basic necessities later in the week. That same evening, a friend of their family stopped by the house to say hi. As they spoke, the friend told them that God prompted him to bring them \$100 that night. So, he did. \$100 wasn't a big sacrifice for this man, but it was completely unexpected.

As a result, both of those families saw the good deeds that God was carrying out through them and were able to glorify Him for His goodness.

The first of those gifts was not "wise", but it was orchestrated by God for His glory.

One more everyday life kind of story...

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, *"Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."*

So, maybe we should change our question. Maybe we should ask, "God, as I follow you in generosity, will you show me how to be a good steward of what's left?" When we wade into the risky end of generosity, we stop asking, "Am I going to have enough" and we start asking, "Is God really who He says He is?"



WHAT DOES JESUS WANT FOR HIS DISCIPLES ?

Trust Him
Obey Him

• **Freedom from materialism** – Matthew 6: 25-33

learn to be content with what you have
learn to give to God first
learn to get out of debt
learn to receive God's provision
learn generous living

• **Eternal rewards** – Matthew 6: 19 – 24

laying up treasures in heaven

• **Greater joy** – 2 Corinthians 8: 1 – 3

abundance of joy

• **Deeper relationships** – 2 Corinthians 8: 4 – 15

give yourselves first to the Lord

• **Life Purpose** – 2 Corinthians 9: 6-15

enriched in every way

WHAT DO YOU GET WHEN YOU TRUST & OBEY & GIVE ?

ALL of the above

"But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. "

- 2 Corinthians 8:7-9

"The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. "

- 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

"thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. "

-1 Timothy 6:6-19