

Generosity

Matthew 6:2,3:

Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

We are often reminded that Jesus taught more about money and possessions than any other topic and that there are hundreds of verses throughout scriptures admonishing us to be generous. How do we know if we are generous and how do we know if we've become greedy? Whatever does the passage from Matthew 6:2,3 (above) mean when it says, "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing"?

What is your favorite Bible story about money and/or possessions?

Take a few moments to reflect; what is your definition of generosity?

What does it look like when you are being generous?

Can you think of a time when your left hand didn't know what your right hand was doing?

How would Jesus describe generosity?

Do we agree that the following is *not* generosity?

1. Cleaning old clothes out of your closet and giving them to a thrift store.
2. Carefully calculating the exact amount of a "tithe."
3. Ignoring the homeless.
4. Rationalizing sudden thoughts of supplying a need we hear about in order to prevent giving.
5. Refusing when someone offers to give *us* something, especially if they do not have as much as we do.

Then the opposite would be...

1. Buying something new for yourself and giving it to a person in need.
2. Listening to God's "nudging" for monthly giving to advance God's Kingdom, in faith that our needs will be supplied.

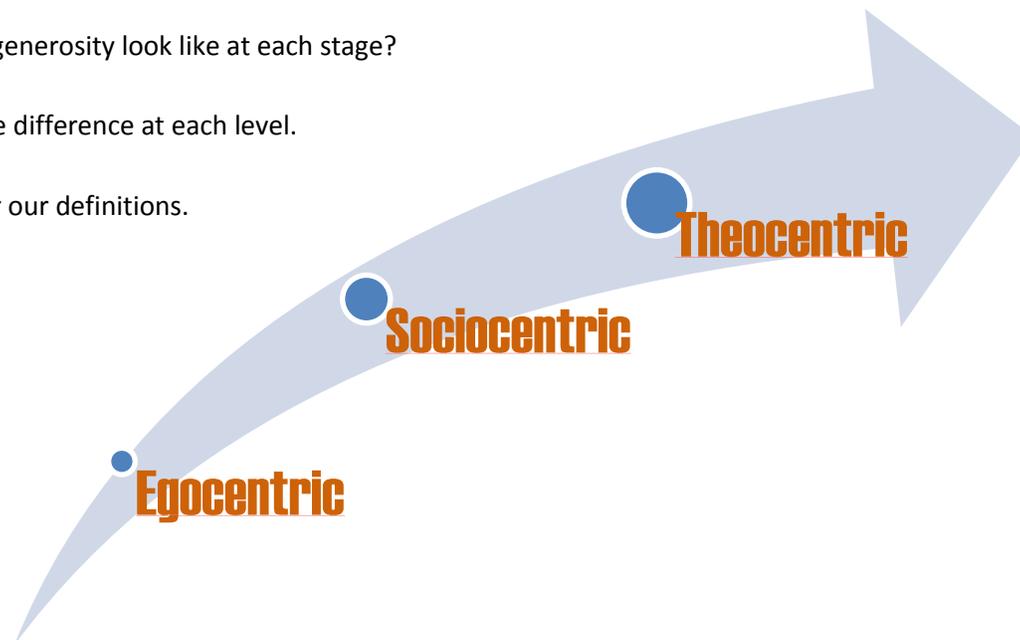
3. Making time for the homeless, prisoners or others in your community who would normally not be in your “network.”
4. Asking more questions to explore the possibility of giving towards a need, learning to discern God’s generous impulses and dependence on his supply?
5. Swallowing our pride and receiving; allowing others to benefit from Jesus’ promise that it is better to give than receive, enabling the interdependence of community.

International Steward explains Christian growth in giving with this diagram:

What would generosity look like at each stage?

Dramatize the difference at each level.

See below for our definitions.



Egocentric Generosity:

We would describe egocentric generosity as giving so that a person appears (to others) to be generous; giving in order to be admired as being a good and generous person.

Sociocentric Generosity:

We would describe sociocentric generosity as giving due to a feeling of guilt or social responsibility.

Theocentric Generosity:

We would describe theocentric generosity as giving out of thankfulness and worship to God; generous in spirit. In other words, giving has nothing to do with us and everything to do with God.

Henry Chadwick, early church historian wrote, “The practical application of charity (that is, kindness in generosity) was probably the most potent single cause of Christian success.” Robert Reese adds to this observation that the early church worked from a position of weakness and persecution. After Constantine, the Church worked from a position of power which, in a simplistic overview could be described as changing the essence of Christianity into “haves” being benevolent rather than equally involved with “have-nots.” Christians were funded from power to go out and reach the “pagans” rather than sharing as equal sisters and brothers in the Lord.

Sharing what we have is quite different from funding ministry. We see both methods modeled in scripture because both sharing and funding can exude from a generous spirit. The problem seems to occur when we focus on the money and not the personal relationship. When we expect the rich to pay for the poor or we think that the rich have the answers instead of the poor, we are focusing on the money and not on the person. The answer to funding becomes a logical measuring of who has the most instead of joyful giving which is held up as the ideal over and over in scripture.

Andy Stanley in his book, “How to be Rich,” makes some interesting observations to prove that generosity does not increase with wealth:

- rich is roughly double the amount possessed by the person defining it
- Maslow’s hierarchy theoretically proves that once you no longer have to worry about having enough to survive the next day, you worry about things that hadn’t occurred to you when you were hungry
- median earners (in the US) give approximately 6% of their income to charitable causes; the higher the income, the lower the percentage of giving.

Reflect again on your favorite Bible story featuring money and/or possessions.

What about Mark 12: 41-44? Why do you think the poor widow was not a beggar at the temple gates but put her money in the offering box? Why could she be an example of the “right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing?”

The fact remains that we cannot and we should not feel obligated to give in every situation. Our next video talks about “Accountability.”

Consider signing the Global Generosity Pledge. The helpful scripture references on the web site are meant to guide you in growing a generous spirit. www.generositymovement.org

Andy Stanley: *“I will not trust in riches but in him who richly provides”*
