

Giving and Growing Spiritually

Originally published in BOARDWISE, April 18, 2002, used by permission

“Giving is primarily a spiritual matter . . . an act of obedient worship.”

– R. Scott Rodin, *Stewards in the Kingdom*

God is watching what we do with our possessions, and how we use our stuff on earth will affect our eternal soul in heaven. As Randy Alcorn notes, “There is a powerful relationship between a person’s true spiritual condition and his attitude and actions concerning money and possessions.” A believer’s attitude toward money, possessions, and giving is directly related to his spiritual maturity. As a board member, an awareness of this correlation between faith maturity and generosity should relate to you on three levels: 1) Personally, as it affects your own giving; 2) It provides a framework for you as you work with others to encourage their generosity, and; 3) It gives you direction as you oversee the fundraising programs of your organization.

Consider these six stages of how your depth of faith correlates with your giving:

- *Stage 1, Imitator: Mimics the examples of others in giving when shown or instructed.*
 - An example is the young child, whose parents provide a dollar for allowance and then instruct the child to place ten cents in the offering plate. Like the child, people at this stage understand little about faith and give only if someone else suggests they should. There is no particular correlation to faith in God.
- *Stage 2, Modeler: Gives sporadically when given an example to follow.* – A modeler frequently puts something in the offering plate solely because it is the thing to do; it is generally spontaneous, not thought out, and given out of obligation. Like a pre-adolescent child, the believer is subject to strong swings in giving patterns. If a believer is aware of the concept of a tithe, a radical change in the giving pattern will generally try to be made. Seldom does the pattern last.
- *Stage 3, Conformer: Generally gives because it is the thing to do.* – The giver begins to develop a little more internal depth, seeing how it can benefit others as well as self. However, convenience and relationships tend to shape behavior

- rather than internalized convictions of faith, and the horizontal act of giving (fulfilling practical needs and satisfying a sense of personal obligation) is still the main focus. The giver is heavily motivated by recognition, tax benefits, and other personal gain from giving. Most believers fit in this category.
- *Stage 4, Individual: Starts to give in proportion to what God has given.* – A giver at this stage gives more freely and more often. Some joy is experienced from giving, and an understanding of giving's centrality to human existence is developed. The believer's effort to give more to God deepens the personal faith, the vertical issues of soul development and discipleship start to become internalized, and giving becomes a more integrated lifestyle of faith. However, there is a danger of becoming prideful regarding giving or giving for the wrong motives. The giver may start to wonder why others do not give more.
 - *Stage 5, Generous Giver: Recognizes that all one owns is from God.* – At this stage, a person begins to further detach from earthly possessions and material security, and to depend more on God in all areas of their lives. The giver begins to give of one's own initiative rather than obligation or routine, to derive joy from giving, and to experience continued vertical soul growth. Giving becomes much more integrated into spiritual life, rather than just daily life, and dependence upon material possessions weakens.
 - *Stage 6, Mature Steward: Recognizes the role of a faithful steward of God's possessions.* – At this top level, the person develops a firm conviction that God owns everything, just as it is written in Leviticus 27:30. The believer gives not knowing where money will come from and gives more so that others can experience spiritual and material benefits. Giving is seen as integrally linked to their character and soul, which become actively transformed by this new understanding and use of possessions.

Donald Whitney has said, "If you love Christ and the work of His Kingdom more than anything else, your giving will show that. If you are truly submitted to the

lordship of Christ, if you are willing to obey Him completely in every area of your life, your giving will reveal it.” Hopefully, these six stages provide a guide that will help you to assess the correlation between how you use your earthly possessions and the effect these actions will have on your eternal soul and the organization you oversee.

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