



Giving as a way of life.

An interview with Mark Vincent of Design for Ministry

Plain Truth: Your focus is not so much on making donations as organizing your whole life around using your possessions and resources in a generous way.

Mark Vincent: Yes I think that is true. You have to make generosity a way of life. It isn't just money – it is your time, your talents and everything about you. All these must be considered as potential for worship through generosity – to demonstrate your love for God and your neighbor. You have to plan for that. You can't have this great aspiration for generosity and then spend 103% of your income on your self. In order to be generous you have to manage your life. You have to decide to organize your life around generosity. You need to spend less than you earn so that you can have peace of mind, and the time and the inclination to help someone in unfortunate circumstances.

PT: So would you describe this as a philosophy rather than a 'program'?

MV: Yes. I think that is well said. God has been generous towards the world and as a part of God's family I am going to make my life a life of generosity and I'll make my decisions with that in mind. Everyone's circumstances are different –so you can't legislate a formula.

PT: But surely generosity is a responsibility and not just an option for a Christian?

MV: I am searching for another word. I think I prefer 'characteristic' rather than responsibility. If I really am a Christian, if I have really embraced God's gift of grace for me, and I know he is not holding my sins against me—when I really realize what I have been given- then generosity is going to overflow.

PT: Well, it seems the need for generosity is overflowing. We are besieged with the needs of charities. If we were to respond with generosity to everyone with a good cause, we would soon be in need ourselves. How do we draw the line?

MV: Yes, I understand. There is a formula that I have been very fond of. I offer it because I have found it very helpful.

It is to think where your greatest joy intersects with the needs of the world. In that crossroads we need to find a sustainable capacity for generosity. It is where I should focus my gifts and my generosity. It is a natural extension of the way God has created me.

It will be different for each person. So choose a charity or charities where you feel empathy—where you really want to make a difference. Then, if someone asks ‘would you like to give to this organization, you can honestly say ‘here’s where my interests are; here’s where I am already giving; and here is where I can continue to grow in my giving.’ And someone else is going to have another priority.

You can feel OK with that. You don’t have to feel everyone else needs to share your experiences exactly, and you don’t have to feel guilty about not being drawn in to everyone else’s experience. Then you can have a peace about giving what you can and you don’t have to feel guilty about what you say ‘no’ to.

PT: Giving should not be a guilt trip then?

MV: No. If I get you to give out of guilt or fear, which is where a lot of fund raising appeals are rooted, then the only way I am going to get you to give again is to make you feel guilty, or afraid or angry again. And you’ll only give when you have those feeling. Generosity should not be associated with fear or guilt or anger.

PT: When talking or writing about giving, you use the word ‘sustainable’ a lot. Can you define it in the context of giving?

MV: Yes, I do use it a lot, don’t I? It has become a catchword. But, you see, many of us can’t afford to give because we have spent all our money on consumer items. So when it comes time to give, we find we have nothing. We should organize our resources so that giving is not haphazard, but an anticipated and budgeted part of our expenses.

I am an American but I have worked hard to cultivate an International perspective on giving. The details may be different from place to place. But God in Christ has given us himself, and because of that we have hope. Now he asks us to give ourselves so that others do not have to live in eternity apart from him, and also do not have to live in this life without a sense of hope.

PT: It seems that the poor are more generous than those who are better off? What can we learn from this?

MV: Yes, studies have demonstrated this is true. The poor are more likely to give more often and also a higher percentage. They don’t have any pretense that they can survive on their own. They know the value of small amounts. They know that they must depend on God and each other. The rich feel they are in control of their circumstances.

It is important to gain control of your resources. But not so that you become self-sufficient. It is a serious spiritual mistake to ever feel you are self sufficient. Jesus reminds us to be careful

about 'the deceitfulness of riches', which can be as much a spiritual hazard as to be overwhelmed by 'the cares of this world'. We all-rich and poor- owe our very existence to God's grace and generosity.

That is why I say make generosity a way of life. And why you should organize your resources so that sustainable giving is high on your list of priorities. It is one way you can show that you love God, and that you love your neighbor as yourself.

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