



The Generous Heart

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At the heart of stewardship, as *God* defines it, is the virtue of generosity. Think about it: The Master for whom we "steward" is the one who "so loved the world that he gave" (Jn. 3:16). Effective stewards adopt the values and concerns of their master. They joyfully participate in what is important to that master. And our Master has been participating in acts of generosity since, well, since Day One.

God's character often gives us glimpses of what we are meant to be, what family resemblance we are intended to bear. Paul encouraged the Christians in Ephesus to "be imitators of God . . . as dearly loved children" (Eph. 5:1). Let's explore the generous heart of the one who made us, and then we'll consider how we might imitate Him.

The Greatest Owner

1. To fully appreciate the generosity of God, it helps first to grasp the extent of His ownership. It's alarmingly easy to slip into the attitude of the Israelites as described in Dt. 8:17-18. Summarize their attitude in your own words. _____

2. In contrast, consider Job. He was an enormously wealthy man. How does Job 1:1-3 describe the extent of his wealth? _____

3. Job was also a very upright man. But Satan belittled Job's blamelessness and insisted that Job would quickly fold if the gifts God had given him were suddenly withdrawn. God gave Satan permission to test Job. What was the extent of Job's one-day losses at the hands of Satan (vv. 13-19)? _____

4. How did Job respond (vv. 20-22)? _____

5. What does Job's response tell you about how he viewed his wealth? _____

6. We may find it easier to adopt Job's attitude and hold our wealth (be it in the form of money, health, gift-
edness, influence, and so on) with more open hands when we remind ourselves of its source. How do these
verses describe the extent of God's ownership?

Dt. 10:14 _____

Job 41:11 _____

Ps. 50:9-12 _____

Ps. 95:4-5 _____

Hag. 2:8 _____

1 Cor. 6:19-20 _____

The Greatest Giver

7. Scripture reveals that God is unlike any other owner. For the inclination of His heart has never been to hoard; it has always been to give. How do these verses describe the extent of God's generosity?

- Ps. 103:2-5 _____
- Ps. 115:16 _____
- Is. 40:29 _____
- Ezk. 36:26 _____
- Mt. 6:31-33 _____
- Jn. 3:16 _____
- Ro. 5:5 _____
- Ro. 6:23 _____
- Eph. 4:11-12 _____

8. Let's make God's generosity even more personal. Next to each letter of the alphabet, write a word or phrase that describes something God has given you. (This is a great exercise to try in a small group or with a friend.)

- A _____
- B _____
- C _____
- D _____
- E _____
- F _____
- G _____
- H _____
- I _____
- J _____
- K _____
- L _____
- M _____
- N _____
- O _____
- P _____
- Q _____
- R _____
- S _____
- T _____
- U _____
- V _____
- W _____
- X _____
- Y _____
- Z _____

9. Did making this list cause you to think differently about what you have received from God? Explain your answer.

In His Steps

10. From some of His earliest interactions with humankind, God made it clear that gifts from Him were meant to be passed along. Read Gen. 12:2-3. What outcome did God intend when He blessed Abraham? _____

11. How did the following biblical stewards show generosity of heart?

Joseph, Gen. 40:1-8 _____

Joseph of Arimathea, Mk. 15:42-46 _____

Dorcas, Acts 9:36-41 _____

The Antioch disciples, Acts 11:27-30 _____

Aquila and Priscilla, Acts 18:24-26 _____

Paul, 1 Thess. 2:8-12 _____

12. What other examples of generosity come to mind? They might be from Scripture, but they might also be from your life experiences. For example, has someone given you the gift of his or her time? Have you benefited as another believer has generously exercised a spiritual gift? Record two or three such examples. _____

13. What are some benefits God promises to the generous?

Prov. 11:25 _____

Mal. 3:10 _____

Lk. 6:38 _____

2 Cor. 9:6 _____

14. Describe a time when you shared generously with someone else (of your money, possessions, time, skills, wisdom, etc.). _____

15. What was the benefit to that person? _____

16. What was the benefit to you? _____

Acts of generosity such as we've looked at in these last few questions reflect the heart of God—His values and purposes. It is hard, then, to imagine stewardship—the process of participating in the outworking of God's purposes and values on earth—as separate from generosity. In fact, a deep understanding of our role as stewards of the "giving God" lends fresh joy to our generous gestures.

More Like the Master

17. According to the following verses, what motivation lay behind God's most generous act of all? Ro. 5:8, Eph. 2:4-5

18. Summarize what the following passages say about the link between love and generosity.

2 Cor. 8:7-9 _____

1 Jn. 3:16-18 _____

19. How might a focus on God's love and generosity affect your stewardship in the following areas? (Choose two or three.)

• Leisure time _____

• Gifts and skills _____

• Money and possessions _____

• Your wisdom and insight _____

20. Does the challenge to live more lovingly and generously leave you feeling overwhelmed? What encouragement do you find in Ro. 5:5? _____

As stewards, we are not only participating in the Master's purposes; we are participating in His very nature. The same God who redeemed us once and for all through the gift of His Son continues to give to us, moment by moment, through the gift of His Spirit. That Spirit gives us what we cannot conjure up for ourselves: a heart increasingly like the Master's, full of love that expresses itself through generosity.

Gifts galore! No wonder it's called the abundant life.