



# Depth Perception™

Commentary from Design For Ministry™  
Los Angeles • Milwaukee • Philadelphia

## Chimp stewardship 15 December 2005

A recent study demonstrated that our closest genetic relative—the chimpanzee—has no capacity for altruism. Chimpanzees can act selfishly. They can act in a way that benefits both parties. Chimpanzees do not, however, act in a self-giving or sacrificial way. (It might be argued chimpanzees give sacrificially to their children, but most scientists would agree protecting offspring is a benefit to both parent and child.)

At its best, a biblical stewardship education teaches a sacrificial and undemanding response to the God who gave salvation. Further, it invites those who follow Jesus to love others as they would love themselves. Altruism is a key identifying mark of the mature Christian and their stewardship.

This type of unselfish and loving action is to mark a congregation's use of money as well: assistance for the most helpless, proclamation of God's good news, an above average living paid to clergy so that they are free to attend to the spiritual condition of the congregation, and provision of a place

for worship, edification and fellowship.

So why are we acting like chimps? The dominant language is shifting to "purchasing good" and "getting something back for your gift." Whether it is philanthropy with its "help us save this child's life RIGHT NOW!" or a seed-faith prosperity theology that tells us to give to God so that God is pressed to give back to us in a miraculous form, we are settling for a base, almost animal reciprocity.

Yes, people are helped by self-interested giving. Yes, charities

and religious organizations should not be too troubled by the fact that many people give because of what they think the benefit will be. But also yes, we can invite people to give out of love and worshipful response, and not petulance or selfishness.

***"We are settling for a base, almost animal reciprocity"***

—mark l. vincent