



Design For Ministry™

Depth Perception

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Begrudging Largesse

With all the self-interested reasons for giving, developing generous lifestyles seems increasingly precarious. However, theologians keep pointing out that true generosity does not manipulate or place demands on the recipient (James 1:5). The scriptures consistently points to to people being far more important than economic asset – even if the asset is completely lost. A celebrated example of this is the Loving Father risking half of his estate for his prodigal son (Luke 15:11ff). In both of these texts, God serves as the example.

Placing people ahead of asset when giving is difficult. There are always financial temptations and abuses when someone has unsupervised access to funds. One bad experience along the pipeline of giving to receiving leaves a generous person inclined to dictate expectations for their next gift – to make giving more important than the ministry. But to dictate outcomes moves the gift from generosity toward paternalistic control. This only adds complication as it builds up resentment in those who receive a begrudging largesse that no longer feels loving. And isn't begrudging largesse an oxymoron anyway?

Not giving helps no-one, especially the formerly generous person. Manipulating the gift abandons generosity, and adds administrative cost to the gift as staff seek ways to honor instructions. Yet, lack of oversight leaves open a doorway for moral failure to walk through.

So how to respond? You can start with a series of simple questions.

For the giver

- 1.) Who am I focused on when giving this gift -- myself? the ministry? those being ministered to? the God to whom I am grateful?
- 2.) Does my giving help or hinder the ministry in achieving its goals?
- 3.) Does this ministry consider it a best practice to regularly and accurately communicate how it distributes money and to what end?

For the charitable institution

- 1.) What is our focus when receipting contributions: how much we took in to meet our operating budget or completing our mission as an organization?
- 2.) Do we in any way impede people from celebrating God's goodness as they give?
- 3.) Do we consider it a best practice to regularly and accurately communicate the distribution of money and to what end?

It is good to evaluate both your giving, and the fiscal policies you have in the congregations, non-profits and service-minded organizations to which you connect. Since we live in both worlds, it is up to us to be integrated and thorough as individuals and as leaders. Only then is the tension managed. Only then can trusting generosity be cultivated.

-mark

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