

The 5 Traits Of Highly Effective Christians

Godly Generosity

Have you ever noticed that there are certain topics that are considered taboo for church? There's things you're not supposed to talk about.

For instance, some people think that you should never name any names of people who are teaching something false. But then, when you go to the Bible, Jesus, the New Testament writers, and the old Testament prophets all chose to name names at times. They did it carefully and selectively, but they did it when necessary so that others could be warned.

Here's another. People think the subject of sexuality isn't suited for Sunday morning. Again, the Bible is careful how it presents the subject but it speaks openly about sex. If we shy away from the topic, then people will only get their input from a culture that wants to distort and misrepresent something that a holy God created for our good.

Here's one more. Money. The church should never talk about money. How many times have you heard people use this excuse for not coming to church, all they want is my money?

Unfortunately there's been some churches and Christian ministries that have been all about the money. There have been abuses and scandals for sure. But think about this. There are at least 2,350 passages in the Bible dealing with money and material possessions. That's more than on any other subject.

Maybe the real reason why we don't want to talk about money is because there are few subjects that expose our hearts more quickly than our view of money. Perhaps it's not so much the frequency of the sermons on money that folks struggle with, but rather the fact that the topic cuts so close to who we really are.

This is week 5 of series we're calling *The 5 Traits Of Highly Effective Christians*. In these 5 weeks we're looking at those traits, or characteristics, of Christians who are really successful at living out their Christianity. These are qualities that you'll find in people who take their faith seriously and have a consistent lifestyle that reflects God and His principles.

So far we've looked at having a biblical mindset, having a heart for worship,

being passionate in prayer, and having a servant's heart. This week we want to see that a highly effective Christian is a generous Christian.

There's no question that we live in a very self-absorbed, materialistic culture. And just like anyone living in this culture we are all affected to one degree or another.

Now you might say, "Not me. I'm not impacted." So just to clear the air here let me just ask you a couple of questions. See if these can help to determine whether money and stuff has made an impression on you:

- Have you ever bought something you really didn't need, because you thought it would make you happy?
- Have you ever spent money you didn't really need to spend because you wanted to keep up appearances?
- Have you ever taken on unnecessary debt because you bought something "extra" you didn't want to wait for?
- Have you ever envied someone else for what he or she possesses, maybe even feeling a little tinge of resentment because you weren't able to possess that thing yourself?
- Do you own expensive things that you rarely use or rarely enjoy?
- Do you find your desires for things exceeding your needs, not to mention your budget, and do you sometimes fulfill those desires even though you know you shouldn't?
- Do you sometimes work extra hours to make money you really don't need, sacrificing your important relationships in the process?
- Do you find yourself speaking in terms of material "needs" which, if you're honest, aren't really needs at all?
- Does your spending on yourself ever cause you to be less generous with other people?

The truth is, we're all impacted by money and stuff. In fact Jesus said these striking words: *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* Matthew 6:21

Our checkbook is a picture window into our spirituality.

Jesus went on to say that from God's perspective, a person who can't be trusted with material things can't be trusted with spiritual things either. Money is a constant and central reality in our lives.

So what do we need to know to really grab onto the concept of godly generosity? What does the Bible say are principles that will help us see life as God sees it?

I. Ultimately Everything Belongs To God

Turn to Psalm 24 Page 491

This Psalm was written to commemorate the return of the Ark of the Covenant, which was a central part of Israel's worship, to Jerusalem after it had been held by the pagan Philistines for 7 months. There was rejoicing in Israel when they got it back.

Later when Israel had a permanent temple each day the temple worship leaders in Jerusalem sang a psalm in the temple. On Sundays they always sang Psalm 24.

Read verses 1-2

Louie Giglio, in his book *I Am Not, But I Know I Am*, writes: After an eternity of being God, He shows no signs of wear and tear. He has no needs. His accounts are in the black. He's the owner, not to mention Creator, of all of the world's wealth and treasure. He made the gold and silver, and the trees we print our paper money on. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, and all the hills the cows are standing on. He holds the patent on the skies above - not to mention the earth, the seas and their depths below, the breeze, the colors of the sunset and every flowering thing. They all are His invention. His design. His idea.

Ultimately everything belongs to God because He's the Creator. In Haggai chapter 2 God's speaking of the nations of the world when He says, *The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts.* Haggai 2:8

In the New Testament book of I Corinthians there's a question posed to the congregation, *What do you have that you did not receive?* I Corinthians 4:7 The answer is "nothing!"

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. Colossians 1:16

It's all by God and for God. So as our Creator He owns it all, but at the same time He chooses to entrust material possessions to us. That means that we have a responsibility to use our finances in a way that honors God.

So money can be a blessing. When you're down and out and that unexpected check come in the mail you're blessed. You're excited. You're thankful.

But money can also be a curse. Probably the most famous lottery winner in the US is Jack Whittaker. When he was 55 he won the \$315 million Power Ball jackpot. Whittaker gave 10% of his winnings to churches and used \$14 million to establish the Jack Whittaker Foundation, a non-profit organization that provides food and clothing to low-income families in rural West Virginia.

Unfortunately he was robbed, swindled, and sued by people trying to cash in. He gave a \$2100 a week allowance to his granddaughter who died of a drug overdose. His wife said, "I wish all of this never would have happened. I wish I would have torn the ticket up."

All you have to do is Google "lottery winners" and you can read heartbreaking story after heartbreaking story about the trouble that almost ever big lottery winner has suffered.

Of course, in the end, the key is wrapped up in our attitude toward money. If you recognize where it came from and who ultimately owns it, you'll be able to keep your money and your stuff in it's proper perspective.

Have you ever thought this way, "I could do so much good, if I was just rich. I could give so much to missions, I could help the poor. All I need is just a little more cash."

You know, the real question isn't what would we do if we had more. The question is what do we do with what we have now. How do I treat the 10 bucks in my pocket today, not the hundreds of thousands I may never have?

Jesus put it this way, *He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much.* Luke 16:10 In other words the real test of our Christian character is displayed in the small stuff. As one man said, and I wrote this in the flyleaf of my Bible. "Little things are little things, but faithfulness in little things is a big thing."

I. Ultimately Everything Belongs To God

II. God Is Our Example Of What It Means To Give Generously

Turn to Ephesians 5 Page 1041

Ephesians 5 is all about relationships: how we talk to each other, how we encourage each other, and how to get along in a marriage. Look at verse 25 with me. This is the husband's main responsibility.

Read verse 25

That doesn't mean husbands love your wives as much as Christ loved the church. That would be impossible and God doesn't ask us to do the impossible. That's His domain. With God all things are possible.

What verse 25 is saying is, "Husbands love your wives in the same way Christ loved the church." The "just as" means "just like" and the verse clarifies what that means for us. Just like He did when He gave Himself.

Jesus Christ gave Himself. He didn't give money. He didn't give stuff. He didn't give anything external to Himself. He gave Himself.

Listen to these verses and see if you can pick up on a biblical theme.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world He gave

Galatians 1:4 Who gave Himself for our sins,

Galatians 2:20 I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me

I Timothy 2:6 Who gave Himself a ransom for all

Titus 2:14 Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us.

I John 4:10 He loved us and sent His Son

See the theme? God loves by giving.

This love gives and, this is so important, it has nothing to do with how attractive the one receiving the love is.

God so loved the world. Was the world physically attractive to God? Of course not. Was God fond of the people who had sinned against Him? Not at all. The people of the world are described as the enemy of God. The people of the world didn't go looking for God. They ran from God and went into atheism or made up gods and religions of their own.

But God loved the world like this. He did it in this way. He gave His only begotten Son. God entered into human history as Jesus Christ. He took on humanity to die for sinful humans.

Louie Giglio again: God arrived with skin, the Divine in the form of a sweaty, laughing boy playing with other kids in a narrow street on a summer afternoon. That's how God chose to connect with us, to deliver us, to come for us.

He didn't send a note, an e-mail, a check, a cosmic event, a mandate, or an image on a toasted cheese sandwich. When God came to man He became flesh.

God became flesh to be the go-between connecting a sinful world and a perfect heaven. Think about that. We are far from perfect. We have thought wrong things, we have said wrong things, we have done wrong things. Those things may vary from person to person but God says anything less than perfection is sin.

The Bible pronounces us all sinners. Some people measure themselves by other people and figure they're no so bad. God says, "Use me as your point of comparison and you'll see how bad you really are."

A perfect God requires a perfect sacrifice to pay for sin. The God of the Bible gave Himself as that perfect sacrifice.

Listen, the Almighty who deserves everything, humbled Himself beyond description to enter our world as Redeemer. Any definition of godly generosity has to have the character and example of God Himself as the template. There's no other valid measurement. God locked Himself into humanity in Christ.

If we're really going to understand generosity we have to understand:

I. Ultimately Everything Belongs To God

II. God Is Our Example Of What It Means To Give Generously (He's our paradigm)

III. God Blesses Us Richly When We Follow His Example Of Selfless Giving

Turn to II Corinthians chapter 9 Page 1030

The Corinthian believers were so like us it can be unnerving. In both Corinthian

letters God used the apostle who started the church there in Corinth, Greece to challenge the thinking of the congregation.

They had so many of the same struggles we do. The first century Corinthian congregation was made up of people who wrestled with moral issues, with relationship issues, with theological issues. One of those areas where they were still in process was what it means to be generous.

That apostle's name was Paul and he was taking up an offering from the churches to help the poor Christians that were living in Jerusalem. The Christians who had come out of a Jewish background were suffering. Many times they were fired from their jobs because of their faith. They were ostracised by the society and disowned by their families.

So Paul gets the congregations to chip in to help. The problem was the churches in poorer areas like Macedonia sacrificed and gave while the wealthy congregations like the Corinthians held back.

Doesn't that sound familiar? The more we have the more we think we need.

Read 9:1-4 He's saying, I don't want you to be embarrassed if I bring some of the Macedonian Christians with me to Corinth and they find out you haven't given yet.

What happens in the rest of the chapter is God gives us principles for generosity. These are biblical principles for generosity. Let's look at them.

1. God rewards our giving **Read vs 6**

Sometimes you hear the guys on TV say, "Send me your money and God will bless you." From Robert Tilton to Benny Hinn they say God will enrich you if you enrich them. Amazingly, people funnel millions of dollars to these guys.

Now notice what God says here. If you throw out a little bit of seed you reap a small harvest. Lots of seed means a large harvest. Obviously he wasn't talking about giving money and getting more back.

When Paul first told the Macedonians about the need to give he used the Corinthians as an example. He said, "Look how much these guys promised to

give.” The problem is they never came through on their promise. Now he’s going to turn the tables and use the Macedonians giving to challenge the Corinthians.

He’s not going to say, “Look ,those Macedonians gave generously and now God has made them rich.”

The reaping is the results. Because the Macedonians gave, poor Christians were cared for, God was honored, others were challenged to give, the Macedonians were spiritually blessed, and the nonChristians saw an amazing demonstration of Christ’s love.

This isn’t about giving to get some material incentive. There’s not always a monetary payback. Although it is true that it’s impossible to out give God. But here’s what God has promised: *And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.* Philippians 4:19

You know who the Macedonians were? The Philippians. God said follow me and I’ll supply your needs. I’m not going to give you everything you think you want or desire but I will take care of your needs.

You know when some of the greatest times of growth and development come in our lives? Not when God’s supplying us with stuff. It’s when we’re giving to Him. When I’m giving sacrificially I’m giving some of my own selfishness away. When I’m giving sacrificially I’m directing my attention away from what I want. I’m looking away from me and focusing on God. I’m laying up for myself treasures in heaven.

So God rewards our giving. We give to Him and we grow spiritually. He’s not broke. He’s not going to have to close up shop if finances get too tight. It’s all His anyway. God calls us to give because in giving we learn to have the heart of God and God wants us to have His heart.

1. God rewards our giving
2. God calls us to give purposefully

Read verse 7a

You know, once and a while we can be really moved by a need that we hear about or see. We can give in an emergency situation. We can be motivated by emotion.

There's nothing wrong with that. But just think, if you only brushed your teeth when you were moved emotionally things could get ugly real quick.

You brush your teeth because you purpose to brush them. You have a plan that includes a regular time to brush your teeth. That way it gets done 2 or 3 times every day.

You're giving should be like that. A generous person has a plan and a purpose to their giving. Sometimes if we're not careful, our emotions can lead us to do some pretty foolish things. That's true with moral issues and it's true with money.

Sometimes we might be motivated to respond to some appeal we hear for money without finding out how the money is really being spent or who the people truly are that are asking. Purposeful giving takes the time to investigate and pray about the wisdom of giving to an organization or a cause.

Maybe you've noticed the yellow Planet Aid clothing collection units that are spread around our area. There's several in the parking lot of David's Natural Market.

Here's how Planet Aid describes themselves on their web site: Planet Aid is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the environment and creating sustainable development in Africa and Asia. We collect and recycle used clothing and shoes in 19 states in the USA. Items donated to Planet Aid are resold and proceeds are used to support education, community development and HIV/AIDS programs in Africa and Asia. We partner with individuals, schools, organizations, companies and government agencies to inform about and contribute to community based development.

That sounds like a worthy cause so I Googled "Planet Aid" and found a number of articles questioning the organization. You can look on their web site and read their annual report for 2005.

That year their total income from reselling donated clothing and a \$2 million grant from the USDA was \$14 million. They spent a little over \$4 million on international aid. That's only 14.3% for their stated purpose. American Institute of Philanthropy, which monitors nonprofit groups gave Planet Aid a grade of "F."

Something's wrong with that picture but, who ever takes the time to check?

If God owns it all and He calls us to use what He's entrusted to us wisely then we need to give purposefully.

1. God rewards our giving
2. God calls us to give purposefully
3. God calls us to give willingly

Read verse 7b

The Message translates verse 7 *God loves it when the giver delights in the giving*. The word translated "cheerful" in our Bibles is the Greek adjective *hilaros*. It's where we get our English word "hilarious."

The last thing God wants is His people giving grudgingly. If you know the Creator of the universe personally and you even half way understand the immensity of His generosity to you, you're not going to have trouble giving to legitimate needs.

One of the reasons we don't pass an offering plate is because we believe that it is the congregation's responsibility to support the ministries of this church. That's something we do as an act of worship when we put money in one of the offering boxes. What we don't want to do is stick an offering plate in everyone's lap.

If you're a guest or you're still looking for a church home we don't expect you to give. We're not asking you to give.

But when anyone does give, God expects it to be done with a willing and joyful spirit. If you're part of this congregation and you're having a problem giving with the right spirit then don't give until you sort things out with God. Take the time to find out what the obstacle is. Then you can give with the right spirit.

Someone once said, "God isn't in the business of raising money. He's in the business of raising His children." The whole thing about giving revolves around spiritual maturity. God has a goal for us and how generous we are is a reflection of how close we are to reaching that goal.

1. God rewards our giving
2. God calls us to give purposefully
3. God calls us to give willingly
4. God values sacrificial giving

Read chapter 8:1-5

Remember the Corinthians had jumped on board and said, “We want to give to the poor saints in Jerusalem.”

The problem was they never followed through. Paul had motivated the Macedonians by telling them how excited the Corinthians were. The Macedonians got excited and gave. Now he’s using their giving as a fire starter to get the Corinthians going.

Here’s what happened in Macedonia. They didn’t have a lot. They weren’t as high up the income ladder as the Corinthians but they gave above what anyone expected. They really got into giving. But now notice where they started. *They first gave themselves to the Lord.*

They gave themselves back to the God who gave Himself for them. Not to get to heaven. They already knew they were forgiven and going to heaven. That was settled when Jesus died and rose again. This was about how they chose to serve God.

Sacrifice doesn’t start with how much of our money, time, or possessions we give away. It begins by giving up our likes and desires, our wants and comfort, our life to the God who has given all to us.

Jesus Christ demonstrated His love for us by giving Himself. Giving back to God is how we demonstrate the sincerity of our love for Him.

Is it OK to talk about money in church? It’s not only OK it’s my obligation as a pastor, first to model that spirit of giving, and then to challenge you to do the same.

You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s. I Corinthians 6:20