

“TESTIMONY OF A “GIVER”

By Noel Clark

After pondering over the Giver/Taker dance, I painfully acknowledge I am a so-called “Giver.” I can be the Taker, however, it depends on whom I am with. Nevertheless, OVERALL with friends/associates I am the dreaded “Giver” working beyond what’s healthy and appropriate, by wanting acceptance and to be liked. In the following paragraphs you will see how I became a “Giver,” my pattern of a being a “Giver,” and how I’m working on breaking free from the perpetual “Giver” cycle.

How I Became a “Giver”

My “Giving” dance was learned as a child. “I’ve got to figure out how I can please others”, was the theme song of my upbringing. My family for many reasons did not accept me. Unfortunately, I took ownership for not being accepted.

I was brought up in a family of six where showing love, acceptance, and appreciation were absent. What took place instead were my father’s unpredictable explosive anger and my mother’s appeasing nature to calm him. My mother and the four of us children walked on eggshells so as not to disrupt my father’s unknown tenuous moods. It was easy to trigger him. I learned at a very young age the art of pleasing by doing, in order to survive in this environment.

What I wanted more than anything was acceptance and love from my father, mother, and siblings. Since my mother was preoccupied trying to cope with my father’s volatile temperament, she was to no avail. Likewise, my siblings dealt with the tensile climate in their own way. Our home life was not safe and there was no connectivity. Since my father was emotionally unavailable, as children, we would jostle for any and every opportunity to receive the little glimpses of attention he gave. This dynamic set up a sub-conscious competitive structure among the children to get my father’s attention.

What did I do to fit into my family? I intensely studied the others in my home and reinvented and molded myself to what I believed was what they wanted. Owing to this, I became ‘other focused’ by becoming a ‘Giver’, jokester, and put myself down to please others at the expense of my self-esteem. As long as I did these things, it seemed I had acceptance. This pattern planted the seeds of hurt and anger deep within me; however, getting something back was better than nothing at all, so I thought. It was the only way I knew to survive and keep my sanity. My goal was to attain acceptance and to belong no matter the consequences.

My Pattern of Being a “Giver”

This is painful to admit, being a “Giver” has been my struggle since childhood. This pattern has overlapped many relationships I’ve had. By way of illustration, unconsciously I have chosen

difficult people to be part of my life. In order to gain that difficult person's approval and acceptance, the only way I knew is by "Giving." Once I begin giving, the endless cycle begins. Keeping that person's approval is often short lived. Therefore, I keep giving wanting them to meet my unrealistic expectations. I want them to appreciate me and see my worth. "See what I'm doing for you? See how valuable I am?" However, I am demanding something from someone else, which only God can fulfill.

Since I don't get my unrealistic expectations met from that person, I get angry and the anger builds into a crescendo that eventually erupts. The relationship becomes damaged and ultimately I retreat, thinking my anger is justified. Consequently, my self worth suffers even more and so does my relationship with God. Do you see how the pattern can evolve and keep repeating itself? I have been locked into the perpetual cycle of anger due to my own inability to break away from my past. I have only myself to blame. What's more, this manner of manipulation not only hurts me, the "Giver," it potentially adds to the dysfunction of a "difficult type Receiver."

Breaking Free

My real value comes from believing who God says I am, not letting the people and/or events in my life define who I am. What's more, I have learned a new process - *Communication Skills* - that helps align and bring clarity to the motives behind my actions. By knowing and utilizing this process, I work on keeping myself in balance by asking the questions; "What is the reason I am giving? How appropriate is it? Who is it benefiting? Who is weakened? What are my wants/expectations in return? What am I feeling? Etc."

By using effective *Communication Skills*, I have a solid framework for identifying and logically breaking down the issue. I am able to do the following:

- explore and analyze what I am believing about what is or isn't happening to me
- identify my own emotions because of what I believe
- be honest with myself regarding what I have been and am doing that is and isn't working
- determine better goals
- create a realistic and healthy action plan

My overall goal is to be fair with others, and myself. These *Communication Skills* have helped me experience life in a productive way; a life that is more honoring to God.