

Lifestyle Generosity: Christians & Tipping

The following is a true story. Granted, it happened several years ago. But I wonder how often such scenarios unfold.

Two pastors were at lunch together. The older pastor paid for their previous meal, so the younger pastor picked up the tab for this meal. The younger pastor paid cash for the meal, so his older friend asked if he had included a tip. He said he forgot the tip, so he put some cash on the table.

As they were departing, the younger pastor said he forgot something, and returned to the restaurant. The other pastor saw him through the window. The younger man went back to the table, picked up the cash, and put it in his pocket.

Hopefully, such stories are rare. But we do have reasons to be concerned when church members and Christian leaders treat restaurant servers and other service employees so poorly. Allow me to outline seven key concerns.

1. **Tipping is an opportunity we may not otherwise have.** We have social contact with people with whom we may not interact on a regular basis. This is our opportunity to represent the name of Christ well. God has put these people in our paths for a reason.
2. **Our generosity is one way we point people toward Christ.** We demonstrate our priorities with the ways we spend money. We have seen in numerous studies that churches with a passion and heart for their communities are the churches making a difference. We can't have a positive witness with a greedy attitude.
3. **We can help counter some of the negative impact of other church members.** A server in a restaurant told me she hated working the Sunday lunch shift. She said church members were the rudest and stingiest customers she encountered. Our positive witness with a generous tip can counter some of the negativity caused by others.
4. **Generous tipping reflects a compassionate and grateful heart.** Many servers work long hours and endure verbal abuse on a regular basis. Often their pay is very low. They may depend on tips to make ends meet. When we tip generously, we are demonstrating compassion for these servers, and we are expressing our gratitude for their service.
5. **Most of us are blessed with abundance. We should be generous with that which God has given us.** Healthy tipping is thus a matter of evangelistic witness and wise stewardship.
6. **Generous tipping can reinforce positive conversations with servers.** If we are kind to servers, and if we speak with graciousness and gratitude toward them, our witness is reinforced when we tip generously.
7. **Poor tipping can be a negative witness that takes time to overcome.** A few years ago, several people in my organization went to lunch together. They tipped very poorly. The server wrote on Facebook about these employees with clear reference to our organization. Our witness was thus compromised with the server and with the public in general.

I have little patience with those who are stingy to servers. If we can afford to eat out, we can afford to tip generously. Church leaders would do well to remind their members about this often-neglected topic of witness in the community.

By the way, the older pastor in the story I began above went back to the restaurant and apologized to the server. He also left her a 100 percent tip.

It is both amazing and tragic how the simple act of tipping can affect our witness in the communities in which we live. What do you think about this topic?

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