

A Tip Worth Taking

By Jamie Buckingham

It was Ghandi, legend has it, who said, "I would be a follower of Christ were it not for Christians."

A restaurant waitress from Pueblo, Colorado, struggling with that same problem, asked, "Why are Christians so rude to waitresses?"

Every place she had worked, she wrote, this was a hot topic among the waitresses. "Believe me, sir, I'd rather serve a party of drunks than a party of Christians—and I'm a Holy Ghost-filled Christian woman."

I sat reading her letter, imagining a group of waitresses standing in the kitchen talking about the loud, rude bunch of people who had just come in from a church meeting.

"Church people demand beyond reason—then they don't tip at all."

Well, she's right about that. I was with a man recently who, after sending his meal back twice because it wasn't cooked to his taste, punished the waitress by not leaving a tip. I could have lived with it, since he was paying the bill, had he not made a big deal of bowing his head and praying out loud before we ate—while the little waitress stood to one side watching. After we got outside I excused myself, returned and gave her a double tip. I told her I was doing it for two reasons: One, because she had earned it for having to put up with my friend; two, because God wanted to bless her in a special way.

She cried.

I have a young friend who is raising a child as a single parent—working as a waitress at Denny's. She leaves for work at 5:30 a.m.—six days a week—in order to drop her baby off at the day-care center. She makes \$3.25 an hour, the rest on tips. "Non-Christians tip best," she says. "Christians leave small tips and sometimes a gospel tract. Some don't even tip—especially breakfast."

"It's hard enough," she told me, "to go to church on the one day I don't have to work. But what really stinks is finding yourself behind the loudmouth who's always complaining that his coffee is cold, then leaves 25 cents—which I have



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to split with the bus boy."

It seems stupid that I would take an entire column to write about treating waitresses, and anybody else who works in a service job, like human beings. I mean, this world is burning down with problems. Drugs and abortion are destroying our nation. Humanism has taken over government, education, even the church. Communism and Islam are out to conquer the earth. Surely we've got more important things to discuss than the size of tips.

But it's more than the size of tips. It has to do with being kingdom citizens. When Ghandi went to South Africa after graduating from law school in England, his mind was open to receive the gospel. Instead, because his skin was brown, Christians treated him as trash. Who knows what massive changes in history would have occurred had Christians acted like Christ.

That's the reason I'm kind and generous to "servers"—waitresses, lawn mowers, snow shovelers, garbage collectors, bag boys and cab drivers.

Many of these are working at minimum wage and depend on tips to make it. Christians should be the best tippers in the world. The Bible has more to say about giving to those in need than all the other kinds of giving combined.

Besides, what ever happened to being nice? Polite? Friendly? We live in a world of people who seldom say "thank you," "please" or "I'm sorry."

Kingdom kids, of all people, should treat others—especially those who serve us—with love, dignity and generosity.

I've come from church services where the pastor greeted each person at the door like he was the richest person on earth; but at the restaurant he wouldn't look the waitress in the face, much less grunt a thank-you for his food.

There's just a chance, you know, one of these "servants" might be an angel on assignment. And how do you get around "if you do it to the least of these you do it to me"?

Last Sunday night I sat in a local restaurant with my wife. The corner booth next to us was filled with a happy, laughing group from another church. They kept the waitress, an elderly grandma-type, on the run. "More coffee. We're out of catsup. Can you bring more water? My hamburger is rare instead of well-done. My fried egg is hard." Never a kind word. Never a thank-you.

I sat there, looking across the table at Jackie and thinking. What if that were my widow waiting tables at night? Would God's people treat her like that? As you would that men should do unto your wife, so do you to the waitress...the checkout girl at the grocery store...the sales clerk.

Last winter I arrived at the Norfolk airport after midnight. There was snow on the ground and one lone cab at the curb. On the ride to the hotel God whispered, "Bless the driver for Me."

At the hotel I paid the fare, then handed him an extra \$20. "God knows you're having a tough time. He asked me to give this to you on His behalf."

He sat—just staring at the bill. I hastened inside. I hate for strangers to see me cry.

Be generous with those who serve. God, I suspect, blesses tippers as well as tithers. ■

Editor's Note: Jamie Buckingham recently released his book, The Truth Will Set You Free, But First It Will Make You Miserable. Send \$10.95 plus \$1.50 postage and handling to Creation House, P.O. Box 790, Johnson City, TN 37605.