

WHEN GIVING GOT OUT OF CONTROL

Introduction: Tonight, I'd like to draw our attention to two extraordinary and compelling examples of generous giving that are found right in the Bible itself. One of these stories is in the Old Testament and the other is in the New Testament. One involved people who were very rich, and the other involved people who were very poor. One was for a building program and the other was for benevolent needs. Quite a contrast in many ways, but the outcome in both of these stories was identical – their giving got out of control.

In our first out-of-control story Moses has come down from Mt. Sinai, his face literally aglow. He reports to the children of Israel that God wants them to build a tabernacle for Him to dwell in. It is important to keep in mind that even though the Israelites were slaves in Egypt for centuries, when they did finally leave that country, they left incredibly wealthy. Exodus 12:35-36 tells us, “Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.”

In the second out-of-control story the Macedonian Christians find themselves enduring both extended and extreme poverty – barely surviving themselves. Yet, they hear from Paul that the Christians in Jerusalem are facing even more desperate conditions than they are.

Let me take the time to honor the Lord by reading to you these stories from His Word. Listen carefully to what is happening to the giving of His people in these two stories.

Here is the first out-of-control giving story found in Exodus 35 and 36.

“Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel departed from Moses’ presence. Everyone whose **heart stirred** him and everyone whose **spirit moved** him came *and* brought the LORD’S contribution for the work of the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments. Then all whose **hearts moved** them, both men and women, came *and* brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and bracelets, all articles of gold; so *did* every man who presented an offering of gold to the LORD. Every man, who had in his possession blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine linen and goats’ *hair* and rams’ skins dyed red and porpoise skins, brought them. Everyone who could make a contribution of silver and bronze brought the LORD’S contribution; and every man who had in his possession acacia wood for any work of the service brought it. All the skilled women spun with their hands, and brought what they had spun, *in* blue and purple *and* scarlet *material* and *in* fine linen. All the women whose **heart stirred** with a skill spun the goats’ *hair*. The rulers brought the onyx stones and the stones for setting for the ephod and for the breastpiece; and the spice and the oil for the light and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. The Israelites, all the men and women, whose **heart moved** them to bring *material* for all the work, which the LORD had commanded through Moses to be done, brought a freewill offering to the LORD. Then Moses said to the sons of Israel, “See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel.... And He has **filled him with the Spirit of God**, in wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge and in all craftsmanship; to make designs for working in gold and in silver and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings and in the carving of wood, so as to perform in every inventive work. **He also has put in his heart to teach**, both he and Oholiab.... **He has filled them with skill to perform every work** of an engraver and of a designer and of an embroiderer, in blue and in purple *and* in scarlet *material*, and in fine linen, and of a weaver, as performers of every work and makers of designs.”

“Now...every skillful person in whom the Lord has put skill and understanding to know how to perform all the work in the construction of the sanctuary, shall perform in accordance with all that the Lord has commanded. Then Moses called... every skillful person in whom the Lord had put skill, everyone whose **heart stirred** him, to come to the work to perform it. They received from Moses all the contributions

which the sons of Israel had brought to perform the work in the construction of the sanctuary. And they **still continued bringing to him freewill offerings every morning**. And all the skillful men who were performing all the work of the sanctuary came, each from the work which he was performing, and they said to Moses, “The people are **bringing much more than enough** for the construction work which the Lord commanded us to perform.” Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: “No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.” And so **the people were restrained from bringing more**, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.”

Our second out-of-control giving story can be found in II Corinthians 8:1-5. Paul is writing to the Corinthians about the believers’ in Macedonia response to hearing about the extreme poverty among the believers in Jerusalem.

“And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their **overflowing joy** and their extreme poverty welled up in **rich generosity**. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even **beyond their ability**. Entirely on their own, **they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing** in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but **they gave themselves first to the Lord** and then to us in keeping with God’s will.

These two stories are extraordinary examples of what happens when God’s people get out of control in their excitement and motivation to give. I think it would be extremely instructive for us tonight to drill down into these two explosions of generosity to identify what really prompted this kind of out-of-control giving. As we do, we are going to discover four foundational cornerstones that were present bringing about the out-of-control generosity in these two stories.

Here is Foundational Cornerstone #1:
“Giving will get out of control when...
God’s people catch a bigger vision.”

In both cases the people’s enhanced vision for doing something greater than themselves began with strong leaders who had a clear vision and were able to effectively articulate that vision and the plan to achieve it – Moses had the blueprints for the tabernacle and Paul intended to personally deliver the benevolent support to the impoverished believers in Jerusalem.

I think Will Rogers understood the need for a good plan to accompany a good vision when he stated, “A vision without a plan is a hallucination.” Or, as the old proverb says, “A vision without a plan is just a dream. A plan without a vision is just drudgery. But a vision with a plan can change the world.” Both these two leaders had a vision and a plan and they presented them both persuasively.

I have a friend who repeats often, “You’re getting what you’re getting because you’re doing what you’re doing.” In other words, more of the same leads to more of the same. This, sadly, is where most believers find themselves in their giving journeys. They get comfortable at some level of giving and they stop letting God challenge them and stretch them to even greater levels of generosity. Consequently, they continue to get what they’re getting spiritually because they continue giving what they’re giving financially.

In both these stories, God’s people were challenged to embrace a vision that was substantially grander and more challenging than anything they had envisioned themselves to be able to accomplish and once they fully embraced that vision, their resultant giving exceeded all expectations.

Foundational Cornerstone #2 is this:
“Giving will get out of control when...

God's people surrender themselves to the Lord."

The most obvious statement confirming this foundational cornerstone is when Paul says that the Macedonians **first** gave themselves to the Lord. Any outbreak of generosity will always begin with God's people fully surrendering themselves to Him.

I use the word "surrender" here and not "submit" for good reason. Let me give you a brief grammar lesson. The word "submit" means "to give **in**." We submit to the authorities over us (government, employers, husbands, etc.) not necessarily because we like what they are doing or even agree with their actions, but because we are commanded to submit – to give in – to respectfully yield to their authority. We have all at some point in time reluctantly submitted to someone who we did not agree with simply because they had the authority.

The word "surrender," on the other hand, means "to give **up**." In surrender, there is no objection, no resistance, no biting our lip, no holding our tongue or reluctantly obeying. We completely surrender our will, our opinions, and our self-interests. This is what Paul is saying the Macedonians did - they "first gave themselves up to the Lord." They gladly and willingly surrendered to Him what little they had in material possessions. They freely surrendered their personal agenda for what they may have wanted to do with their meager possessions – like maybe having another meal – to God's agenda of helping other believers who were facing an even greater financial crisis than they were.

Listen, when God's people are willing to finally and fully give **up** to God instead of merely give **in** to God out of respect and duty, out-of-control giving will be poised to erupt.

Foundational Cornerstone #3 is this: "Giving will get out of control when... God's people attune their hearts to the voice of the Holy Spirit."

We see this repeatedly mentioned in the story of the Israelites. It says the "spirit moved" them, their "heart(s) were stirred" and the people were "filled with the spirit of God."

When God's people tune their "inner radio" to the right frequency – the frequency of God's voice instead of the frequency of this present, secular, materialistic age, an explosion of generosity will be poised to happen.

Sadly, many church leaders have mistakenly guided their people to look at their calculators to determine their **required** level of giving instead of properly directing them to look to the Holy Spirit for His **desired** level of giving. Mathematically **required** giving inhibits out-of-control giving. Holy Spirit **desired** giving fuels out-of-control giving.

Paul is quite clear on the basis for Christian giving in II Corinthians 9:7 (just one chapter after his report of the Macedonian's out-of-control giving). He says, "Each one should do as God has purposed in his heart..." Here Paul is offering us a **procedure** for determining our giving and not a **percentage** for determining our giving. He is telling us to tune into the guidance of the Holy Spirit who can stir and move our hearts and fill us with an eagerness to give by faith at levels far beyond anything we have experienced previously.

I learned this life-changing lesson of Holy Spirit led giving many years ago from a young, ten-year-old boy named Jimmy Mitchell. One Sunday before church, I was standing up at the pulpit getting my sermon notes ready and Jimmy came running into the auditorium. He ran up to me with a dollar bill in his hand and said, "Jay, look what I've got." I said, "Jimmy, that's great. Where did you get it?" He told me that after he mowed his yard, he decided to go ahead and mow old Mrs. Brown's yard next door. "After I finished, she came out and gave me this dollar."

He went on to say, "Jay, I'd like to give some of it to the Lord." I replied, "Jimmy, I know the Lord would be so pleased that you would want to share some of that dollar with Him. How much do you think you would like to give?"

Even after three decades, I still remember what he said to me like it was yesterday. He looked down at the dollar and then gazed into my eyes, looked back down at the dollar, looked up again at me and said, “Do you think He would mind if I kept a dime?”

His words still ring in my mind, “Do you think He would mind if I kept a dime?” Can you imagine what would happen to the Kingdom of God, to the work of Safe Harbor if all of us here tonight were to begin listening and giving like Jimmy Mitchell?

When God’s people attune their hearts to the voice of the Holy Spirit, out-of-control giving is ready to explode.

**Here is Foundational Cornerstone #4:
“Giving will get out of control when...
God’s people experience joy in giving.”**

Both stories abound with comments about the extraordinary levels of joy God’s people experienced as their giving got out of control. They had “overflowing joy.” The people were “bringing much more than enough.” They were “restrained from bringing more.” They “urgently pleaded for the privilege of sharing. They gave “beyond their ability.”

Wouldn’t you love to be part of a worship service some Sunday where the leaders of the church get up at the offering time and tell the congregation that they are not going to take up an offering today because they already have more than enough to perform the work that the church is doing? Or, wouldn’t it be exciting to hear that Safe Harbor was not going to hold its fall fund raising banquet next year because they already had more than enough for its work to serve the needy woman in this city. These would be a modern day manifestations of out-of-control giving.

If you finish reading the rest of II Corinthians 9:7 you will see this fourth cornerstone emphasized. Paul concludes his giving instructions that we should give, “...not grudgingly, nor under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” This Greek word “cheerful” Paul uses here could just as easily be translated “hilarious.” “for God loves a hilarious giver!” When the act of giving itself brings us out-of-control joy, out-of-control giving is poised for a supernatural outbreak.

The more “hilarious” our giving becomes, the more likely we are to start giving like the Israelites and the Macedonians.

Conclusion: Let me conclude tonight by specifically connecting these foundational cornerstones to the work of Safe Harbor. Did you know that the Bible talks more about giving to help the needy and the helpless than any other purpose for giving? There is not even a close second. Let me give you just a sampling of the many verses that call us to give to help those who have no resource. May the Lord speak to each of our hearts as we listen to His Words.

“He who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and (the Lord) will repay him for his good deed.”

“For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.’”

Ladies, (the excellent wife) “extends her hand to the poor; and she stretches out her hands to the needy.”

“...happy is he who is gracious to the poor.”

“He who is generous will be blessed, for he gives some of his food to the poor.”

"Is (fasting) not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house..."

"For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me." Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?" And the King will answer and say to them, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me."

"For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need."

"But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

May I take a minute and be completely candid with you regarding the personal impact this one verse has had on me. For many years I felt conflicted about helping people who were poor and homeless. I would rationalize that the reason they are in this mess is because they have made foolish choices and given in to sinful behavior. And if I give them some money, they will probably just use it to go buy more alcohol or drugs and so all I would be doing is helping them continue their self-destructive behavior. I saw the poor in need and I routinely would close my heart against them and walk on by.

Then one afternoon, I pulled up to an intersection and there at the corner was an incredibly scruffy man in rumpled and ripped clothes, standing there with a sign asking for money for food. And as I sat there, I was jolted by the thought, Jay, you know if it wasn't for God's grace, that could be you standing there begging for food! I was stunned by the thought.

All of a sudden I felt the humiliation of standing at a corner begging, I felt his hunger. Who knows how long it had been since he had a hot meal. I saw the emptiness and hopelessness in his eyes. As I starred at this man, I saw myself – having made many foolish decisions in my life, having sinned in more ways than I can even count. I was looking out my windshield at myself! That man never spoke a word to me. He never even looked at me while I was sitting at the light. But his image was screaming at me. My eyes filled with tears. God had somehow put me in this man's place and let me feel for just a few seconds what it was like to be begging poor. At that moment I repented of my callous, hard heart against the homeless and poor.

Now I no longer question how a poor person might have gotten where they are or what they might do with any money I would give them. God has commanded me to open my greedy, selfish heart to the poor and give and I was going to do it from now on. And, by the way, five or ten bucks is not going to ruin anyone. But it might just give them some meager sustenance, some brief warmth, some momentary comfort in their difficult times. Today, I carry money in my wallet for the express purpose of giving it the poor when I see them. No questions asked, no hesitation, no attempted assessment of how deserving the person might be, or whether they were a con artist or not. I have changed from being a reluctant giver to the poor to a joyful giver to the poor. And having been both, may I recommend to you the latter.

Tonight, God is giving each of us yet another opportunity to experience out-of-control giving right here in Hickory, NC. But if it is going to happen tonight each one of us that is here needs to (1.) embrace a bigger vision for Kingdom ministry than we now have, (2.) we need to totally surrender ourselves to the Lord, (3.) we must carefully tune into the voice of the Holy Spirit and (4.) we need to allow our giving to be a joyous experience.

Tonight as you decide what you will give to help the poor and needy whom Safe Harbor serves in this city, it would be my sincere desire that as you think about that amount you are considering giving that you will say to yourself,

"Wow, I'm not sure I can really afford to give Safe Harbor that much.... Doesn't it feel great!" If this is your response tonight, I'd like to welcome you to the out-of-control giving club!

We must never forget the words of Proverbs 14:31, ". . . He who is gracious to the needy honors Him." May our God and Father be honored by what we give to help the needy and may we collectively witness tonight an extraordinary demonstration of out-of-control giving of biblical proportions!

Lord, call each of us to get out-of-control in our giving tonight! Amen.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER — E. G. "JAY" LINK

E. G. "Jay" Link has a unique combination of being an ordained minister with a Master Divinity degree in Biblical Theology and a professional Stewardship planning coach who for over 40 years has been working with very affluent Christian families to enable them to optimize their Kingdom impact with all that the Lord has entrusted to them to manage. After retiring from his personal practice, he then served for five years as Director of Taylor University's Stewardship Planning Ministry, which he launched for them. Most recently, Jay founded the Stewardship Resource Group to serve Christian ministries, colleges, and churches to better minister to their highest capacity families. He has written six books, hundreds of articles and has provided extensive training curriculum for hundreds of professional financial and legal advisors in how to provide stewardship planning services for their clients.