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EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATIONAL GIVING

Beyond Your Ability: When Giving Got Out of Control

If you want some excellent examples of generous giving, you need only to look to the Bible. In two different passages, we witness some extraordinary and compelling stories on giving. One is in the Old Testament and the other is in the New Testament. One involves people who were rich, and the other involves people who were poor. One is about a building program and the other about giving benevolently to those in need.

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In the first “out-of-control” story, Moses has come down from Mt. Sinai, his face literally aglow, and 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, they were incredibly wealthy. (See Exodus 12:35-36).

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

“Out-of-Control Story” #1: Exodus 35:20-36:6 (NIV)

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 the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. 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, the son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan. 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 Bezalel and Oholiab, and 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 Bezalel and Oholiab and 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.' So Moses issued a command, and a proclamation was circulated throughout the camp, saying, 'Let no man or woman any longer perform work for the contributions of the sanctuary.' Thus the people were restrained from bringing any more.

“Out-of-Control” Story #2: 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 (NIV)

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 motivation to give. It would be quite instructive for us to go behind this explosion of generosity to determine what prompted this kind of out-of-control giving in these two circumstances. There are four lessons we can learn from these two stories.

LESSON #1:

Giving Will Get Out Of Control When God's People Catch A Bigger Vision

Both of these visions 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 believers in Jerusalem.

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 leaders had a vision and a plan.

There is a phrase that says, “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 is where most believers find themselves in their giving journeys.

In both of these stories, God’s people were challenged to embrace a vision that was substantially bigger and more challenging than anything they could envision themselves. They embraced the vision and exceeded all expectations as a result.

LESSON #2:

Giving Will Get Out Of Control When God’s People Surrender Themselves To The Lord

The most telling statement of this lesson is when Paul says that the Macedonians first gave themselves to the Lord. The beginning of any outbreak of generosity will begin when God’s people surrender to Him. Note the use of the word *surrender* and not *submit*. To 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 agree with their actions, but because we are commanded to submit, to give in, to respectfully yield.

Surrender, on the other hand, is to **give up**. In this case, there is no objection, no resistance, no biting our lip, no holding our tongue and reluctantly obeying. We completely surrender our will, our opinion, and our self-interests. This is what Paul is getting at when he says that the Macedonians first gave themselves to the Lord. They gladly and willingly surrendered what little they had in material possessions to God. They surrendered their personal agenda for what they wanted to do with those possessions (like having another meal) to God’s agenda of helping other believers who were even needier than they were. When God’s people finally and fully surrender (give up) to God instead of just submit (give in) to God out of respect and duty, out-of-control giving will be positioned to happen.

LESSON #3:

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 age—an eruption of generosity is poised to happen.

Sadly, many pastors, ministers, and church leaders have guided their people to look at their calculators to determine their required level of giving instead of directing them to look to the Holy Spirit for His desired level of giving. The former inhibits out-of-control giving. Paul is quite clear on the basis for Christian giving in Second Corinthians 9:7 (just one chapter after his report of the Macedonian's out-of-control giving). He says, *Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart* (NASB). Here Paul is offering us a procedure, 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 at levels far beyond anything we have experienced previously.

LESSON #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 His 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 one day 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 because they already have more than enough to perform the work that the church is doing? It would be a modern-day manifestation of out-of-control giving.

If you read the rest of Second Corinthians 9:7, you will see this fourth lesson emphasized. Paul concludes his giving instructions by saying that we should give *not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*. The Greek word for *cheerful* could also be translated "hilarious." When the act of giving brings us out-of-control joy, out-of-control giving is on the verge of breaking out.

How can we increase our joy in giving? One way would be to actually witness the results of our giving—the lives that will be changed or the work that will be done. There are surveys that indicate that of all the giving that Christians do, church giving gives them the least amount of joy. One reason is because the church has done such an inadequate job of connecting their members to the impact their weekly giving is having in the lives of people locally and internationally. Their giving simply goes in the plate, never to be seen or heard about again. Yet, these same folks derive great joy in supporting a needy child in a third-world country. Why? It is because they are connected to the recipient and to the outcome.

Wouldn't it be inspiring if each week just prior to the offering, your church would show a short, one-minute video of someone who has been impacted by the ministry of your church, whether it be a person who got saved, a marriage that was rescued, someone who was helped to overcome an addiction, a child who was impacted by a Vacation Bible School program, or a tribe in a foreign country that now has the Word of God in their language because of the ministry of the church? You could call this video vignette the "Money Clip." Wouldn't that make giving more meaningful and much more joyous for everyone?

Connecting giving to specific outcomes opens the door for greatly increased joy in giving. And the more "hilarious" we become in our giving, the more likely we are to start giving like the Israelites in Exodus 35-36 and the Macedonians in Second Corinthians 8. If you want to experience out-of-control giving, (1) embrace a bigger vision, (2) totally surrender to the Lord, (3) listen to the Holy Spirit, and (4) make your giving a joyous experience. Then, look out!

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. What impresses you most about these two out-of-control giving stories?
2. Does the statement, “You’re getting what you’re getting because you keep doing what you’re doing” apply to your giving and the blessings you are getting from it?
3. What is the biggest Kingdom vision you have ever been part of?
4. Why is the word surrender emphasized instead of the word submit when it comes to our obedience to Christ’s will? Why is surrender a requirement of out-of-control giving?
5. Second Corinthians 9:7 instructs us that “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” What makes this New Testament directive for giving so revolutionary, especially when compared to the Old Testament concept of giving?
6. Paul is giving us a procedure for giving instead of a percentage for giving. Discuss this giving procedure and how we are to settle on how much to give.
7. Have you ever felt like you were being forced to give? Have you ever given grudgingly in the past? What is Paul telling us about that kind of giving?
8. Of all the giving that you do, which of it brings you the least amount of joy? Why? What can be done to make all our giving a hilarious experience?

9. What has been the most personally meaningful (joy-filled) gift you have ever made and why was it so?

10. If you were to (1) start looking for a God-sized vision, (2) surrender fully to the Lord, (3) tune your heart to the voice of the Holy Spirit, and (4) find places to give that would bring you great joy – would your giving substantially increase? If yes, why? If no, why not?

11. What is going to change in your life going forward because of this lesson? What are you going to start doing differently?