

STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES

BETTER WAY GIVING SERIES STUDY GUIDE

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Lesson One

A MOTIVATED GIVER

In this exciting series, we are going to examine six powerful New Testament giving characteristics to help you frame a solid, biblical basis for your personal giving. Too often, believers have been taught that the amount of their giving is determined by a mathematical formula and is an obligation they are required to pay. Clean and simple; not much thought; little needed interaction with God. The New Testament, on the contrary, paints a radically different giving picture for us. And admittedly, it is not clean or simple. It requires lots of thought and continuous interaction with God. I call it *Better Way* giving.

Just as in every area of the Christian life, the New Covenant provides us with a *Better Way* to live and a *Better Way* to give. The entire theme of the book of Hebrews is about this *Better Way* – a better hope (7:19), a better covenant (7:22), a better promise (8:6), a better sacrifice (9:3), a better country (11:16), a better possession (10:34) and a better resurrection (11:35). The book's whole message is that “*God has provided something better for us*” (11:40) – a *Better Way!* And this includes a *Better Way* to give.

If you will allow it to do so, this study can transform your walk with the Lord and set you free to give like you never dreamed you ever would or even could! And you will have more fun and experience more joy with this *Better Way* of giving than you ever imagined possible! So, let's get started on this life-changing journey by considering the first *Better Way* giving characteristic – A Motivated Giver.

The New Testament gives us three clear and compelling motivations for giving which serve as pillars upon which all the other *Better Way* giving characteristics rest. So, let's examine these three foundational giving motivations.

Better Way Giving is Motivated by God's Unconditional Love

When I find myself engaged in a conversation with an individual who acknowledges he is opposed to Christianity, my first question is usually, “What is it about God's unconditional love that you don't like?” They have never been asked this question before and they are really not even sure how to answer it. But I believe that God's unconditional love is a foundational expression of the gospel.

I personally find His absolutely relentless love for me to be so compelling that I cannot help but be drawn to Him by it. Nobody has ever loved me like that before and nobody ever will. Jesus expresses it this way in John 3:16, “*For God so loved the world, that He gave...*” So, how do we respond to such unconditional love? Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:8, “*Freely you received, freely give.*” You see, you cannot freely receive God's love without freely giving it back. How can I not love back someone who has loved me that much? How can I not give back to someone who has given me that much?

The reason many believers are not significant givers is because they have never been significant receivers.

They have never fully accepted God's extraordinary flow of unconditional love that constantly pours over them. I can tell you this. Until you fully receive God's unconditional love, you will never be passionately motivated to love Him back. Until we freely receive, we will never freely give. There is an old saying, "he who truly loves, gives all, yet sacrifices nothing." If you feel like you are making a sacrifice when you give to Him, you simply need to fall more deeply in love with Him.

Amy Carmichael made a quite profound observation when she said, "One can give without loving, but one cannot love without giving." Sadly, many believers give without loving. They have been ordered to give, manipulated to give, threatened to give or pressured to give. But that is the old way of giving. The Better Way is for love to become the driving motivation for our giving. Once we find ourselves hopelessly engulfed in God's unconditional love, we will really have no choice. We will be motivated givers!

Better Way Giving is Motivated by Jesus' Amazing Grace

God's unconditional love and Jesus' amazing grace are two sides of the same coin. God's love leads to Jesus' grace. Paul beautifully expresses this thought in Romans 5:8 when he says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Do you remember when Jesus went to Simon the Pharisee's house to dine and a woman who was a known "sinner" came in and fell before Him, with her tears washed his feet, then dried them with her hair and then anointed His feet with expensive perfume. Simon was shocked and appalled that Jesus would even let a woman like that touch him. Jesus, knowing Simon's thoughts, confronted him.

Here is the account:

"And Jesus answered him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' And he replied, 'Say it, Teacher.' 'A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?' Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one whom he forgave more.' And He said to him, 'You have judged correctly.' For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.'" Luke 7:40-47

You see, our motivation to give is directly tied to the degree of forgiveness we believe we have received. That is Jesus' very point to Simon. The more grace we receive, the more we are motivated to give. If, however, we see ourselves as generally good people who are just in need of some spiritual fine-tuning in a few areas of our lives and we are looking to Jesus to finish and polish up our goodness, we will find ourselves with little motivation to give because we simply do not see ourselves as we really are – as "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Revelation 3:17). For these "good" people, how they live (and how they give) ends up looking much more like Simon the Pharisee than the sinful woman.

Unless we come to fully appreciate our desperate condition and the extraordinary extent of the heroic act of rescue that Jesus undertook to break us free from our eternal condemnation, we will miss one of

the key, driving motivations for why we give to God – that being an outward expression of our unspeakable gratitude for His abundant grace “which he lavished on us” (Ephesians 1:8).

I can tell you this, once you come to understand the utter magnitude of Jesus’ amazing grace, you will come to realize that any gift you make in response – no matter what the size – is going to be woefully inadequate and pathetically too small – even if you give Him all you possess!

The chorus of the old hymn *He Giveth More Grace* is so powerful. “His love has no limit. His grace has no measure. His power no boundary known unto men. For out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He giveth and giveth and giveth again.” How do you respond to this extravagant outpouring of unconditional love and amazing grace?

Better Way Giving is Motivated by the Spirit’s Guiding Freedom

Receiving God’s unconditional love and Jesus’ amazing grace frees us from the bondage of law keeping and its resultant condemnation! Paul confirms this in Galatians 5:1, “*It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery [the law].*” He adds in Romans 8:2, “*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.*” Hallelujah, we are once and for all finally free from the bondage and the judgment of the law!

But now that we are no longer subject to the law, how can we know how we should live? Paul tells us in Galatians 5:18, “*...you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.*” The Spirit of God is now living inside of us, guiding us, teaching us and empowering us. He serves as a kind of internal, spiritual “GPS system” to lead us in how we are to live *and* how we are to give. He also serves as the internal motivator, prodding and urging us in our giving. With His influence, we will now be able to give with both clarity and confidence because we are being guided by Him in when and where and how much and for what to give. What an exciting thought! The Holy Spirit and I teaming up to do something meaningful in the world!

Paul contrasts this New Covenant Better Way giving with the old way of giving in II Corinthians 9:7. He charges us, “*Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion...*” Notice, Paul says Better Way giving is determined by careful, thoughtful, personal consideration – which is *internally* determined by you and the Holy Spirit. He also cautions us to not get dragged back into the old way of giving – “*grudgingly or under compulsion*” – which is *externally* forced upon us by others.

You see, God wants our giving to Him and for Him to be a free will act, guided and encouraged by the Holy Spirit and gladly deployed by us. Paul in writing to the Corinthians about their giving tells them, “*I am not speaking this as a command...*” (II Corinthians 8:8). He also points out that the Macedonian church “*gave of their own accord*” (II Corinthians 8:3). Paul was not *ordering* believers to give. He was *inviting* believers to give. And that is the difference between *internally* motivated giving and *externally* motivated giving.

Let me give you a practical illustration of why having this freedom in our giving is essential. Men, let me ask you a question. What if your wife were to tell you that as a sign of your love for her, she expected one dozen long stem red roses placed on her kitchen table every Friday at noon. And, by the way, if you did not carry out this expression of your love as directed by her, you were going to suffer terrible, negative consequences. Let me ask you, how long would it take before getting your wife flowers every Friday would no longer be a joyful expression of your undying love for her? I suspect as a loving husband, you would carry out her “wishes,” or at least make sure that it got done (with or without your personal involvement). But I think we would all agree her demand would very quickly deteriorate into just a routine duty and/or something you would continue to do simply to avoid the inevitable “trouble” that awaited you if you failed to deliver her required gift on time and in the right number.

This illustrates the old way of giving – giving out of duty, with a sense of obligation, with fear of possible retaliation, a thoughtless, habitual action that had no heart connection to the gift. Better Way giving, on the other hand, does not prescribe an amount, the timing or the nature of our gifts to God for this very reason, because as soon as a gift is expected or required, it sooner or later ceases to be a gift and becomes more like a payment. You see, God wants our gifts to Him to be our idea, in an amount that in some way appropriately reflects our unspeakable love and gratitude to Him. He wants us to give because we want to, not because we have to give.

So, you can see how these three Better Way motivations: (1.) God’s unconditional love, (2.) Jesus’ amazing grace and (3.) the Spirit’s guiding freedom present a radical paradigm shift from the old way giving. If we will fully embrace these three motivations for giving, we will no longer find ourselves grudgingly asking, “How much do I *have* to give?” We will, instead, find ourselves enthusiastically asking, “How much do I *get* to give?” It is this last question that we ultimately want to be the only question we ever think to ask!

Discussion Questions

1. What is your initial reaction to this lesson?
2. Why do you think God's unconditional love is such a compelling motivation for giving?
3. What is your response to the quote, "He who truly loves, gives all, yet sacrifices nothing"? Share a time in your life where you have seen this to be true.
4. Read Luke 7:40-47 as a group and then share what struck you most about this story and how forgiveness compels us to want to give.
5. How is seeing ourselves as "wretched" sinners (Revelation 3:17) so important for us to fully appreciate Jesus' amazing grace? How should this grace motivate us to give?
6. Share your reaction to this statement, "once you come to understand the utter magnitude of Jesus' amazing grace, you will come to realize that any gift you make in response – no matter what the size – is going to be woefully inadequate and pathetically too small – even if you give Him all you possess!"
7. How do you think being free from the bondage and the judgment of the law motivates us in our giving?
8. How do you feel about the idea of trusting in the Holy Spirit to direct you in your giving? Read II Corinthians 9:7 and discuss what it means, "each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart." Does this give us the freedom to not give at all if we do not want to?
9. Share your reaction to the story about the man being expected to give his wife flowers every Friday or else! How do you think the wife's expectation dampened the joy and blessing of the husband making the gift of flowers to her?
10. How do you respond to the idea that God wants our giving "to be our idea, in an amount that in some way appropriately reflects our unspeakable love and gratitude to Him"?
11. Share what is going to change in how you think and how you give because of what you have learned in this lesson?