

STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES

BETTER WAY GIVING SERIES STUDY GUIDE

E.G. "JAY" LINK



Lesson Two

A JOYFUL GIVER

Would the word *joyful* describe how you feel when you give? Many believers would answer that question, “No, not really.” And there may be several reasons for this. We may be giving with feelings of obligation or duty or simply because we don’t know how to say no when we are asked. It seems far too rare that people experience any high degree of joy in their giving. That is primarily because they are still giving the old way. Better Way giving produces an overflowing, sometimes even an overwhelming flood of joy as we enthusiastically deploy God’s resources, as the Holy Spirit directs, for a purpose that is on God’s heart, to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others. In fact, let me go so far as to say that if you are not experiencing great joy in your giving, it should be a clear indicator that something is definitely wrong with how or where you are giving.

The Bible is filled with wonderful illustrations of joy-filled giving. For example, when the impoverished Macedonians got over-the-top “crazy” in their giving, Paul tells us that their giving proceeded “*out of their overflowing joy*” (II Corinthians 8:2-3). Paul goes on to tell us in II Corinthians 9:7, “*God loves a cheerful giver.*” Think about it. God loves joy-filled givers. In fact, the word translated “*cheerful*” is the Greek word from which we get “*hilarious.*” So, what Paul is literally saying here is, “*God loves a hilarious giver!*”

So, how can we experience this kind of hilarious joy in our giving? I would suggest that there are two steps that are necessary for us to experience maximum joy in our giving. First, we need to get *positioned* to experience joyful giving. Second, we need to get *proactive* to experience joyful giving. The first is *internal* and the second is *external*. Let me explain them both to you.

Getting Positioned to Experience Joyful Giving

To be properly positioned to become a joyful giver we must totally surrender three foundational areas of our lives. And the more totally we are able to surrender them, the more perfectly positioned we will be to experience the greatest levels of joy in our giving.

I. We must surrender ourselves.

If we want to experience real joy in our giving, we need to voluntarily vacate our throne. Easier said than done, I know! As long as we insist on remaining the center of our own universe, we will never find the deepest and most profound levels of joy in our giving. Paul tells us plainly and painfully in Philippians 2:3-4, “*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*” Paul also cautions us about an inappropriate overestimation of ourselves when he warns in Romans 12:3, “*I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think.*”

Unless we are willing to abdicate our “most important person” status and fully surrender our needs and interests to the needs and the interests of others, we will never be properly positioned to experience the deepest levels of joy in our giving.

So, in position #1: The “king” voluntarily gives it up and becomes a *servant*. (See Matthew 23:11.)

2. We must surrender our stuff.

There is something incredibly liberating emotionally and spiritually when we finally come to embrace the realization that we own nothing. Everything, and I mean everything, we possess belongs to God. He succinctly expresses this truth to Job in 41:11 when He declares, “*Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine.*” And He is still declaring this same message to us today. For many of us, we have absconded with God’s stuff and have claimed it to be our own. We need to return this stolen property back to the rightful Owner with our humble apologies for having taken it from Him in the first place.

Now, we will see that our “giving” is not about what of *my* stuff am I going to give to the Lord, it is about what of *God’s* stuff am I going to make available for His purposes. With this proper reorientation of our relationship to our stuff, we are now free to have the attitude that can say quite literally, “What is mine is yours and you can have it.” Because we understand that none of it is ours in the first place.

Jesus drives this point home further with this incredibly demanding statement, “*So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions*” (Luke 14:33). He says, total surrender of *all* your stuff is your only option if you want to be My disciple. The bottom line: we need to give it up – not necessarily the immediate *possession* of it, but the immediate *ownership* of it! As long as our hands are tightly gripping our possessions, *joyful* will rarely describe our giving experience. Corrie ten Boom understood this intense struggle to cling to our stuff and advised us to, “Hold everything in your hands lightly, otherwise it hurts when God pries your fingers open.” You will never experience joyful giving if God is always having to pry your fingers open to deploy some of His stuff. Remember, it is not a sin to possess things, but it is a sin for things to possess you. We need to surrender all our stuff.

So, in position #2: The “owner” voluntarily gives it up and becomes a *caretaker*. (See Luke 17:9-11.)

3. We must surrender our security.

Have you ever thought this before? “I need to be careful how much I give away because I don’t want to end up not having enough for myself?” If you have, you’ve got lots of company. My first response to this fear-based comment is, “Where is our trust – is it in our *provisions* or in our *Provider*?”

But just for the sake of discussion, let’s say you actually became so wildly generous that you ended up with no surplus, no reserves and not even enough to take care of your own personal needs for the future. Here is my question for you, “What would be wrong with living a hand to mouth existence, if it is God’s hand to your mouth?” Are we afraid to live such an open-handed life that we might get ourselves into a position that requires us to depend on God alone?

Randy Alcorn nails this very point when he says, “Ironically, giving isn’t a cause for insecurity, but a cure for it.” Anne Frank knew this too. She said, “No one has ever become poor by giving.” But that is our perpetual fear, isn’t it? I don’t want to be so generous that I might run out of stuff for me. And then what would I do? You see, many believers want to experience a miracle from God, but no one wants to be in a position to need one!

William MacDonald takes this surrender of our security even one step further when he proposes, “God’s will is that we should be in a perpetual crisis of dependence on Him. We defeat His will when we lay up treasures on earth.” You see, we cannot allow trusting in God to be our *last* resort. It must be our *only* resort.

Unless we are willing to surrender what the world tells us is our source of security, we will likely be far more of a *fearful* giver than a *joyful* one – more of a *miserly* giver than an *extravagant* one.

So, in position #3: The “secure” voluntarily gives it up and becomes *vulnerable*. (See Matthew 6:25-34.)

Once we agree to surrender *ourselves, our stuff* and *our security*, we will then be properly positioned to become a joyful giver. Now, we are ready to get proactive in our giving!

Getting Proactive to Experience Joyful Giving

Let me give you three practical ways to really juice up the joy in your giving.

1. Give Intentionally

Far too often our giving is *reactive*. We give when we are asked or when we receive an appeal letter. If we want to experience maximum joy in our giving we need to intentionally go on the hunt for where to give. We need to live with open-minds, open-hearts and open-hands – consciously looking for opportunities to deploy some of God’s human or financial resources in places or people’s lives that He reveals to us need our support and/or involvement.

Let me suggest an exciting, new way to think about your giving. Here it is. “If I wait until I am asked to give, I have waited too long.” Our goal is to become so spiritually in tune to the world around us that we recognize needs and opportunities before we are ever even approached to help. I will tell you, this is an incredibly exciting way to live and give! By the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit we are already there – ahead of the request for help or support – seeing the places to give before they even see us! Start praying, “Lord, show me where and when You want me to give!”

If you want maximum joy in your giving, start *intentionally* hunting for who and where to give!

2. Give Passionately

Look for ministries, people and causes that “light your fire!” What fires you up? God gives each of us a unique set of passions for a reason. Part of finding maximum joy in our giving is giving in places and ways

that are aligned with our personal passions. We need to have a heart connection to what we invest God's resources in. And let me assure you, it's really okay to say "No" to good ministries and causes that you are not personally passionate about. Giving where there is no passion will be dry and lifeless – joyless.

Here is the key. For maximum joy in giving, put your money where your heart is! (See Matthew 6:21.)

3. Give Confidently

Confident giving is critically important for us to experience maximum joy in our giving. Too often people give with little certainty that what they are giving will be used wisely and effectively. They often have even less of an idea what their gift is going to actually do. Many individuals and ministries are incredibly sloppy and inefficient with the gifts they receive. And since we all have limited resources with which to advance the Kingdom, we do not want to waste even one dollar of His resources by failing to make sure that these funds are stewarded carefully and efficiently.

Then, once you give, follow up to make sure your gift did what you gave it to do. Track your giving outcomes. There is nothing that brings greater joy in giving than actually seeing how people's lives have been blessed and changed and the Kingdom advanced because of your giving. Knowing that you are giving wisely and actually witnessing the life changing impact from your giving will dramatically increase your joy in giving!

So, to experience maximum joy in giving, give *confidently* and be sure to witness the outcomes!

When we proactively start giving *intentionally*, *passionately*, and *confidently*, the degree of joy we receive from our giving will just explode!

So, are you ready to get both *positioned* and *proactive* to experience maximum joy in your giving? If the answer is yes, then fasten your seatbelt because you are about to begin the joyful giving ride of your life!

Discussion Questions

1. What is your initial reaction to this lesson?
2. What is the greatest struggle you have with totally surrendering yourself to the Owner? Read Philippians 2:3-4 and discuss ways in which we can live like this on a daily basis.
3. Luke 14:33 says, "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions." What is it going to take for us to want to follow Jesus more than to possess our stuff?
4. How do you react to Randy Alcorn's statement, "Ironically, giving isn't a cause for insecurity, but a cure for it"?
5. William McDonald makes a very provocative statement, "God's will is that we should be in a perpetual crisis of dependence on Him. We defeat His will when we lay up treasures on earth." How do you harmonize this statement with how you are currently living and giving?
6. Would you describe yourself as being more of a fearful giver or a joyful giver? Why is that the case for you?
7. What most excites you and/or scares you about the idea of going "on the hunt" for where to give?
8. What do you think would happen to your giving if you were to start each day praying, "Lord, show me where and when You want me to give today"?
9. Share with the group the extent that your current giving does or does not excite you. What can you do to align your giving with your God-given passions?
10. Share a story about when you gave and you actually got to see what happened as a result of your gift.
11. Share why seeing the outcome of your giving is so important and inspiring.
12. Share what is going to change in how you think and how you give because of what you have learned in this lesson?