

STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES

BETTER WAY GIVING SERIES STUDY GUIDE

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Better Way
GIVING SERIES

Lesson Four

AN EXTRAVAGANT GIVER

Hidden deep within each of us is an emotional vault where we store our most valuable and precious treasures. We securely lock them away, carefully protecting them from exposure and worse yet, from loss. This vault is hidden so deeply within us that very few of us will even acknowledge to ourselves or to God that we possess such an emotional vault, much less give Him the combination to the lock and free access to anything and everything that is within it. For us, the contents of our vault are off limits to all. It makes no difference how rich or how poor we may be. Everyone has a secret vault. The only difference between us is the size of the vault and how much we have hidden away in it.

So, what does having this hidden vault have to do with extravagant giving? It has everything to do with it because it is from this “sacred,” hidden vault that extravagant giving will flow. Until giving includes our most hidden and precious treasures, we will not experience the personal life-transformation that comes from this extravagant giving. The key is that we must give God the combination to the vault and give Him full and unrestricted access to everything we own.

Sounds kind of scary, doesn't it? Do you know why? Because we all know that we really do have such a hidden vault inside us. And just the *thought* of opening up that hidden vault to God can be very unsettling. But this is exactly why we need to do it – because if we don't make God Lord *of* all, He will never be Lord *at* all.

The New Testament provides us with a host of compelling examples of believers who opened up their vault and gave extravagantly. These stories can both instruct and inspire us in how we can become extravagant givers too. There are three often repeated characteristics seen in these extravagant giving stories. One or more of them will always be present when extravagant giving is practiced. Let's examine some giving stories to see what they can teach us.

Extravagant Giving Will Exceed What is Expected

One of the most notable examples of extravagant giving is when the desperately impoverished, Macedonian believers chose to support the poor in Jerusalem. Paul in II Corinthians 8:1-5 describes the situation:

“...in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that...they begged us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected...”

Their giving was so extravagant that it even caught the apostle Paul off guard. These believers gave more than anyone expected. They gladly surrendered what little they still had left in their hidden vaults to help others.

Do you remember when Zacchaeus, the tax collector in Luke 19:1-10 had his literal “come to Jesus” meeting? This man who had gotten wealthy by stealing from others was so transformed that he chose to voluntarily repay all that he had stolen. The law required him to repay the amount stolen plus an additional 20%. (See Leviticus 6:2-5.). Zacchaeus, however, opened his hidden vault and volunteered to return four times what he had stolen – over three times more than the law required! Talk about extravagant giving. No one ever expected any “repayment” at all from Zacchaeus, much less that excessive of an amount.

But that’s not the end of the story. Zacchaeus then tells Jesus he is going to give away half of everything he has to the poor! Can’t you imagine how people responded to this news? “Yeah, right. That is really going to happen!” You see what had happened in his conversion is that he gave the key to his hidden vault to Jesus and now everything he had was on the table and available for deployment. He was not just going to give away some of his income, he literally had gone into wholesale liquidation mode which exceeded everyone’s expectations.

Then there were those affluent believers in the new, fledgling church of Jerusalem. We learn that many who were saved during the feast of Pentecost didn’t go home, but stayed in Jerusalem to keep growing in their faith and knowledge. Consequently, they used up all the supplies and only further swelled the number of needy in Jerusalem. When the believers with a surplus saw this huge need, Luke tells us in Acts 2:44-45 that **“they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all....”**

How often today do we see believers with a surplus selling their homes, farms or rental properties, liquidating their retirement plans or emptying their savings to help those who have a shortfall? I think we would all agree this kind of wholesale asset liquidation to help others is far beyond what anyone would have expected then or even now. Yet, these affluent believers had opened their protected vaults making available considerable additional resources for the Lord’s use. It was so unexpected that Luke felt compelled to make note of it in his account of the church.

May I ask, have you ever given like this, even once? Have you ever opened up your hidden vault to the Lord and made such an extravagant gift that the recipients were speechless, amazed, overwhelmed and/or stunned by the unexpected size of the gift? Believers in the New Testament model this extravagant giving for us time and time again. In fact, in the lives of these New Testament believers this kind of extravagant giving was not the exception, it was the rule.

So, the first characteristic of extravagant giving is that it *exceeds what is expected!*

Extravagant Giving Will Exceed What is Affordable

With this next extravagant giving characteristic, we again find ourselves learning from the Macedonian believers. Paul adds an additional description to their giving. He says, *“For I testify that according to their*

ability, and **beyond their ability** they gave...” One indicator of extravagant giving is that you are giving more than you can “afford.” The world, your financial advisors and maybe even your family will tell you, “That is too much. You can’t afford to give that much away!” And that is just the point. It is when those with a worldly mind begin telling us that we are giving too much that we know our giving is just starting to be the right amount! The Bible repeatedly uses the descriptive term *sacrifice* to describe our giving to the Lord because in our giving we should be sacrificing something we really “need” for ourselves.

Do you remember when King David wanted to make a sacrifice to the Lord and Araunah offered to give David everything he needed to make the sacrifice; the land, the wood, the alter, the animal, everything? David flatly refused his gracious offer because, he explains, “I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God which cost me nothing” (II Samuel 24:24). The very idea of sacrifice is hard-wired into the concept of giving.

I think C.S. Lewis is right on point when he writes, “I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditures on comforts, luxuries and amusement, etc. is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charities expenditures exclude them.”

Let me ask you, does your current giving “pinch or hamper” you at all?

Once we allow the mind and the heart of God to totally permeate *our* minds, *our* hearts and *our* lives, we will come to gladly embrace the idea that the more frugally we can live, the more extravagantly we can give!

So, the second characteristic of extravagant giving is that it exceeds *what is affordable!*

Extravagant Giving Will Exceed What is Needed

Extravagant giving not only meets a need, it exceeds it. A wonderful example of this is seen in Paul’s response to the Philippians who had just sent him a gift to support his work. He gushes, “*I now have plenty and it is more than enough. I am full to overflowing because I received the gifts that you sent from Epaphroditus...*” (Philippians 4:18 CEB). The Philippian believers not only met Paul’s need, they exceeded it.

The same thing happened to Paul with the Corinthian church. In II Corinthians 9:12 he writes about their giving, “*For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.*”

We cannot forget the well-known parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37. What makes this story so striking is the extent to which the Samaritan met this injured man’s needs. Jesus tells us he felt

compassion for him, poured oil on his wounds and bandaged them up. He put the injured man on his beast to ride, leaving him to walk. He then took him to an inn and even provided additional aid to the man once they arrived.

Then the Samaritan goes “over the top” and exceeds this man’s immediate needs. He gives the innkeeper funds to take care of all his future needs while he recovers – telling the innkeeper that if those funds aren’t enough, when he comes back, he will make up the difference – literally giving the innkeeper an open line of credit to help this stranger during his recovery!

I was actually pondering this very story when my sister, who has advanced MS and is completely disabled texted me and said, “Jay, I’ll cut to the chase, I need to borrow \$100. I will pay you back.” I knew that this time, as in the past when she asked to borrow money, there was absolutely no way she could pay me back anything I would loan her. But this “exceeding what is needed” idea was fresh on my mind and it had already found its way into my heart. So, I texted her back and said, “Susan, I won’t *loan* you \$100...but I will *give* you \$200. You can use the \$100 for your immediate need and you can set the other \$100 aside in case you run short again.” Can I tell you how much fun it was to text that message to her? My sister texted back, “I am speechless, what can I say?” I told her, “Once you regain your speech, tell God, ‘Thank you,’ because it is His \$200 and He told me to give it to you.”

You might want to try this kind of extravagant giving for yourself. Find out what is needed and then exceed it! You see in this extravagant giving characteristic it is not the *size of the gift that makes it extravagant*, it is the *size of the gift relative to the size of the need* that makes it extravagant.

May I ask? Deep within your heart, locked away in that hidden vault of yours, don’t you secretly wish that you could be totally free to be extravagant in meeting and even exceeding someone else’s need? We just intuitively know, don’t we, that “life indeed” is found not in what we keep hidden away in our vault, but in what we give to bless and serve others!

So, the third characteristic of extravagant giving is that it *exceeds what is needed!*

Conclusion:

So, extravagant giving (1.) exceeds what is *expected*; (2.) exceeds what is *affordable*; and (3.) exceeds what is *needed*. If we really want to become one of the Lord’s obedient and extravagant givers, we need to open our minds, open our hearts and open our secret vault of hidden treasures to Him. And once we open ourselves completely to Him, He will begin transforming us into someone that people might just say acts an awful lot like Jesus. Now, wouldn’t that be a glorious way to finish out the rest of our days here on earth!

Discussion Questions

1. What is your initial reaction to this lesson?
2. Do you have a hidden vault? What do you have hidden away in it? It's okay to be honest.
3. What scares you the most about opening up your hidden vault to God and allowing Him access to everything in it?
4. The lesson says "if we don't make God Lord of all, He will never be Lord at all." What will happen to our spiritual lives if we choose to not allow God to be Lord of all?
5. Read the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10. What is it about the giving of Zacchaeus that most troubles and/or amazes you? What is the difference between you and Zacchaeus and why?
6. Share a time in your life that you gave more than was expected. How did you feel about it?
7. How do you respond to C.S Lewis's comment that the only "safe rule is to give more than we can spare"? How does the idea impact you that there ought to be things we should like to do, but cannot do because our giving prevents us from doing or having them?
8. Share a time when your giving exceeded the specific need that you were giving to. How did it make you feel?
9. Discuss the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37 and compare it to the way we live and give when we see people in need.
10. Since it is not the size of the gift that makes it extravagant, it is the size of the gift relative to the size of the need that makes it extravagant, how can all of us become extravagant givers regardless of how much or how little we have?
11. Share what is going to change in how you think and how you give because of what you have learned in this lesson?