

STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES

BETTER WAY GIVING SERIES STUDY GUIDE

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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?

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?

Lesson Three

A RELIABLE GIVER

When you hear the term *reliable giver*, you may think about how your church or your favorite ministry views your regular giving to them. But that is not the kind of reliable giver I am thinking about. Instead, I want us to consider whether *God* views us as *reliable givers*? In other words, when God sees a need or an opportunity that He wants to fund, how certain can He be that if He gets those needed funds to you that you would actually deliver them. So, the question we need to ask ourselves is, “Does God see me as a *reliable giver*?”

Let me frame this reliable giving characteristic with a question. How much would God have to get to you today for you to deploy \$10,000 for Him tomorrow? If He were to deliver \$10,000 to you today, would you be willing to deploy it all tomorrow? Or, might He need to give you \$100,000 in order for you to release the ten grand (the amount many churches would tell you that you “owe” God when you get \$100,000)? Or, might He have to give you \$333,000 before you would deploy the \$10,000 (the national average of giving by Christians)? I think you might agree that this question completely changes our perspective on what it means to be a *reliable giver*, doesn’t it?

Let me illustrate it another way. Imagine God has two stewards. He wants \$10,000 to be directed for a specific cause that is near and dear to His heart. He gives the first steward the needed \$10,000 and the steward obediently passes it all on as directed by God. The second steward receives the same amount but only chooses to deploy \$1,000 and decides to spend the rest on himself. Let me ask you, from God’s perspective, which one of these two stewards is the most *reliable giver*? Keep in mind this important truth: If we want God to get it to us, He needs to be confident that He can get it *through* us! A reliable giver lives and handles his material resources as if he’s a “pipe” – what comes to him, easily flows through him. He refuses to live and give like he’s a “bucket” with a small hole in it – of all that flows into him, very little actually escapes.

So, with these images in mind, let’s examine the three different reliable giving characteristics we find in the New Testament.

A Reliable Giver Is a Committed Giver

Most people miss the very first point Jesus makes in His teaching on giving in the Sermon on the Mount. He begins by telling his audience in Matthew 6:2, “*When* you give...” Notice, He does not say, “*If* you give...” You see, for a *reliable giver*, giving is not *if*, it is *when*. And as such, we must be committed to being obedient giving conduits, delivering what He wants, where He wants it and to whom He wants it to go.

In fact, a *reliable giver*’s commitment to give runs so deep that obedient *deployment* to others will be an even higher priority than immediate *consumption* for himself. The poor widow in Luke 21:1-4 illustrates

this commitment so dramatically. She has only two coins left to her name. Yet, her commitment to give exceeds her commitment to keep. And so she gladly gives it all. Let me ask you, “Is this how you live and think – God first, me second?”

Here is a challenging, theoretical question to ponder. If this widow would have come to you prior to going to the temple and asked you if you thought she ought to give her last two coins to the Lord, leaving her with nothing at all, how would you have counseled her? Would you have told her to go ahead and give both coins to the Lord and keep nothing for herself? Or, would you have counseled her to *not* do that? I am guessing most of us would give the latter advice. And had she actually followed our “wise” counsel, we would have never heard of this woman or been inspired by her faith or her selfless commitment to giving. We would have robbed her of her greatest testimony and possibly the greatest spiritual moment of her life. When it comes to giving, whose counsel are *you* listening to?

A *reliable giver* is also glad to make giving commitments, as the Holy Spirit directs. He then faithfully trusts God to continue to provide the committed funds to fulfill those giving commitments. In II Corinthians 8:11, Paul had to challenge the believers there to finish their giving commitment to support the poor in Jerusalem. He tells them, “*But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability.*” So, a *reliable giver* will be a committed giver.

A Reliable Giver is a Consistent Giver

In I Corinthians 16:2, Paul instructed the believers in Corinth on how to give. He tells them, “*On the first day of every week, each of you should take some of your money and put it in a special place. Save up as much as you can from what you are blessed with. Then you will not have to gather it all after I come.*” Here, Paul gives us three important giving directives. (1.) Be Consistent – “*On the first day of every week*” (2.) Be Sacrificial – “*Save up as much as you can from what you are blessed with.*” (3.) Be Prepared – “*Then you will not have to gather it all after I come.*”

In other words, consistent giving is a central part of how we handle God’s resources. For example, is our first thought when we receive an expected or an unexpected check, “How much of this money can we set aside to bless others when we see the opportunity?” Consistent, Sacrificial and Prepared! I can tell you that there is nothing more fun than having funds set aside in advance for giving and then to be on the constant lookout for where God wants those funds deployed!

What is so sad is that most Christians aren’t consistently and sacrificially prepared to give. Often the thought of giving only hits them as the offering plate is being passed on Sunday and they begin fishing around in their wallets for the bill of choice to drop in the plate. Is it any wonder this kind of unprepared giving produces no real blessing at all for the giver? And in fact may actually do more harm than good. What is even more tragic is how many believers only give when they actually attend a service. If they miss a week of worship, they also miss a week of giving and never even consider making it up when they do attend next.

Brothers and sisters, it shouldn't be this way. To be *reliable givers*, we need to be *consistent* in our giving: We need to be *sacrificial* with our giving: And we need to be *prepared* for our giving.

A Reliable Giver is a Progressive Giver

The old way of giving is percentage giving. Better Way giving is progressive giving. With the old way everybody, regardless of economic condition or financial capacity is taught to give the same fixed percent of their income. Unfortunately fixed percentage giving places the greatest financial burden on the poorest believers and places the least burden on those who make the most.

Let me illustrate what I mean. Imagine a poor widow barely surviving on a paltry \$12,000 a year of Social Security. Now envision a successful businessman making an impressive \$350,000 annually. If 10%, for example, is considered the fixed percentage, then the widow would be expected to give \$1,200 of her already inadequate income leaving her with a meager \$10,800 to exist on for the entire year. The businessman, on the other hand, after the same percentage giving still has \$315,000 left over to enjoy a quite comfortable lifestyle. You see, with the old way of fixed percentage giving the widow is *over-burdened* while the businessman is *under-challenged*.

Progressive giving, conversely, teaches that as my income climbs, I allocate an ever-*increasing* portion of what I receive for Kingdom use and an ever-*decreasing* portion for my personal use.

Jesus describes this progressive giving principle this way, “*From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more*” (Luke 12:48b). The more God *entrusts* to us, the more God *expects* of us!

One biblical example of progressive giving can be found in Acts 11:29. Believers who had a *surplus* voluntarily chose to deploy their surplus to help those who had a *shortfall*. Luke reports, “*And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea.*” Those who had more, gave proportionately more. Those who had less, gave proportionately less and maybe gave nothing at all.

A very wealthy gentleman once shared, “People always tell me that I am so generous because I give \$2 million a year away. But in proportion to my annual income of \$8 million, I am really not all that generous.” And he is right. With the old way of fixed percentage giving as the measurement, his giving is over the top – 25%. But with the Better Way progressive giving, he is still proportionately giving way too *little* and proportionately consuming way too *much*. Remember, *our degree of generosity is not based on how much we give, it is based upon how much we have left over after we give!*

Let me give you a more normal scenario to illustrate this idea. Assume you currently make \$60,000 a year and deploy \$6,000 of that for Kingdom purposes – 10% giving.

Then, you get a big promotion and your income jumps to \$80,000 annually. Old way giving would apply the same fixed percentage to this new, surplus income. Progressive giving, however, calls you to increase the percentage. So, out of your \$20,000 increase, let's say the Holy Spirit directs you to give \$10,000 and keep \$10,000 for your personal use. Now you are giving 20%.

You get another big promotion and your income increases to \$100,000. With this new \$20,000 pay raise, you choose to allocate only \$5,000 to your personal use and allocate the remaining \$15,000 to Kingdom giving. Now your giving has jumped to 31%.

Do you see how this progressive giving model works? As our income and assets continue to increase, what we *give* proportionately *increases* while what we *consume* proportionately *decreases*. Believe me, this is a very exciting way to live and give.

Let me say one last thing on this matter. There is no standard formula to calculate what your specific living-to-giving ratio should be. It will be different for everyone and even different for us at different times in our lives. You will discover the right number for yourself as you sincerely seek to align your mind and your heart with the mind and the heart of God. In that search He will reveal it to you.

Do you want God to see you as one of His most *reliable givers*? Then be (1.) *committed*, (2.) *consistent* and (3.) *progressive* in your giving? And in so doing you will now become a most valuable and effective tool for Kingdom impact in the hand of our Reigning King.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your initial reaction to this lesson?
2. What do you think of the idea of God seeing you as a reliable giver? On a 1-10 scale how would you currently rate yourself as being one of God's reliable givers?
3. How would you rank your giving to God and His Kingdom in your list of financial priorities? What can we learn from the widow in Luke 21:1-4 who gave all she had?
4. On a 1-10 scale, how would you rank the following three giving directives Paul gives us in 1 Corinthians 16:2:

_____ Consistent giver

_____ Sacrificial giver

_____ Prepared giver

Which of these three do you most struggle with and why?

5. How do you think your giving would change if you always had a certain sum of money already set aside for giving whenever the Lord showed you a place He wanted it deployed?
6. Why is the old way of fixed percentage giving over-demanding to the poorest and under-challenging to the richest among us? How does progressive giving fix this inequity? Read Acts 11:29 and discuss it.
7. What do you find most challenging about the idea of progressive giving – that being the more we make and have the more proportionately we give?
8. Luke 12:48b says, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more." Compared to the rest of the world, how can this verse easily apply to everyone of us here in America? How does this
9. What most excites you and/or most troubles you about the idea of making, say, 50% of your income available to the Lord to advance His Kingdom and serve His people?
10. What is both liberating and scary at the same time that God has given us no fixed formula that applies to everyone to calculate our specific living-to-giving ratio?
11. Share what is going to change in how you think and how you give because of what you have learned in this lesson?

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?

Lesson Five

A SELFLESS GIVER

At first blush the idea of selfless giving seems pretty safe and nonthreatening. But the truth is that this selfless giving characteristic may be the most challenging and dangerous of them all. As you will see, depending on where people choose to “stand” when they do their giving may cause them to exchange their *eternal* reward for a *temporal* one.

Many believers have falsely concluded that the “safest” place to stand when giving is behind closed doors where no one can see who is actually doing the giving. However, finding a safe and effective place to stand when doing our giving is just not that absolute, simple or clean cut.

We need to understand that the key to personally embracing this selfless giver characteristic is not about knowing *where* to stand, it is about knowing *who* is doing the giving. To flesh this out further, let’s consider what Jesus and the New Testament actually teach us about selfless giving.

A Selfless Giver Intentionally Avoids Praise

Let me begin by saying there is a huge difference between avoiding any *praise* for our giving and avoiding any *knowledge* of our giving. Many, I fear, have entirely missed the primary point Jesus was making when He told His audience how to give in Matthew 6:2-4. Here is what He actually said in His Sermon on the Mount:

“So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

Jesus, here, is not addressing the *method* of our giving (known vs. secret). He is addressing the *motive* for our giving (self-praised vs. God-praised). He is telling us here that when we give, we need to avoid at all costs getting praised for it. He does suggest here the most obvious way to avoid receiving any praise, that being keeping our giving a complete secret from everyone. And in some situations that may actually be the best way to ensure we avoid inappropriately accepting misdirected praise rightfully belonging to God.

Jesus, here, wants to make sure that when we give, we are standing out of the way of any praise and thanksgiving that *inevitably* comes as a result of giving. When a gift is made, someone is going to want to say, “Thank you.” He is warning us to avoid the “*honor of men*” when we give. Any praise from our giving is to be directed towards *Him*, not towards *us*.

Here are a couple biblical examples of this idea of avoiding praise. Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:8-18 healed a lame man right in front of a huge crowd. Notice, Paul did not try to keep his gracious gift to this lame man a secret. However, when the crowd saw what happened they started *worshipping* Paul and Barnabas and when that happened they came “unglued!” They cried out to the crowds, “Men, what are you doing? We are men just like you!” Paul realized the crowd had wrongly positioned them to be the recipients of the praise and glory for what had been done and he did all he could to avoid it.

Barnabas and several others in Acts 4:32-37 did some pretty substantial giving that everyone knew about. Everything was fine with these publicly known gifts because God was getting all the glory. Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11 also wanted to be included in the same company with Barnabas and these other big givers. However, because their giving was motivated by getting recognition (praise) instead of motivated by meeting needs, it ended up costing them their lives. Standing in the wrong place in their giving was, for them, deadly.

Understanding this distinction between a gift being made known and who gets the praise for it is very clear in an earlier statement Jesus makes in this same sermon in Matthew 5:16. He tells the same audience, “*In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*” You see, here Jesus is telling us to let our light shine, to do our giving and good works to be seen by men. Is He contradicting Himself in Matthew 5 and 6? I think not. We must look at the content of His entire sermon to clearly understand His primary point on giving – that being that our generous giving should compel people to give praise and “*glory to [our] Father who is in heaven*” and not to us here on earth.

Paul reinforces this same point in II Corinthians 9:13 when he writes about the Corinthians’ giving to the poor, “*Because of the proof given by this ministry [of helping the poor], they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all.*” The Corinthians will do the giving and God will get the glory!

As selfless givers, our greatest desire should be to receive praise and honor for our obedient giving from our heavenly Father and not from our fellow man. We should most want to hear from Him, “Well done.”

A Selfless Giver Never Expects Praise

As selfless givers we must be so focused on our role of obediently deploying God’s funds for God’s purposes that we find ourselves being quite surprised when anyone would even think about praising us for what God had done. For selfless givers, we might ask with some degree of surprise, “What’s the big deal? I didn’t do anything.”

Jesus illustrates this selfless attitude so clearly in Luke 17:7-10 when he offers us a hypothetical scenario:

Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, “Come immediately and sit down to eat”? But will he not say to him, “Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you

may eat and drink”? He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, “We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.”

This is the attitude of selfless givers. “*We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.*”

Let me illustrate this point with my own hypothetical scenario. Imagine a very rich man decides to give his nephew \$1,000,000 in cash. He calls his nephew and informs him that he is mailing him a certified letter with a cashier’s check in it for \$1,000,000 and the check will be arriving tomorrow. The next day the door bell rings and there before the nephew stands the postman. The nephew can barely contain himself as the postman asks him to sign for the letter. The postman then hands the young man the envelope. The young man immediately bursts forward grabbing the postman in an enthusiastic embrace, gushing with thanks at how generous he is and how much the nephew appreciates his kindness for giving him such a generous gift. He repeats over and over again, “Thank you, thank you, thank you, you are just so generous!”

What is wrong with this scenario? The truth is the postman did *indeed* give the nephew a cashier’s check for \$1,000,000. What is wrong is that the postman is getting all the credit and praise for making a gift that he merely delivered for someone else. I would guess the postman might have even been quite surprised by the nephew’s overflowing gratitude for simply making a normal delivery as part of his routine duties.

A selfless giver is so selfless in his giving – so “it is not about me” – that he doesn’t even expect to be praised for having done that which he ought to have done – that being faithfully delivering the directed gift for the One True Giver.

A Selfless Giver Gladly Deflects Praise

God has called us as selfless givers to be both *reflectors* and *deflectors* – *reflecting* the glory of God and *deflecting* the praise of man. Succeeding in consistently living out either of these is a daunting task. Doing them both simultaneously *and* regularly, in my judgment, is clearly hopeless apart from the enabling power of the Holy Spirit working in us.

We must keep in mind that we live in a fallen world with fallen people who simply do not understand that there is only one Generous Giver in the entire universe and it isn’t you or me. James 1:17 expresses this plainly, “*Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow*” – not some gifts, but every single “good and perfect gift” comes from the same Source.

So, when we give we need to *reflect* God's glory and His image to those around us. We also need to simultaneously be ready to *deflect* man's praise for whatever we may do which does reflect God's goodness, grace and glory – what has come *through* us. And that is the key – it has only come *through* us, it has not come *from* us. We need to deflect all praise and thanksgiving back to the One who is the real giver of the gift.

Our joy and satisfaction will come in knowing that we have been *attentive* to the voice of the Holy Spirit and we have been faithful to deliver what He directed when and where He wanted it to go. In doing so, we have been good and *faithful* stewards! This profound joy and satisfaction ought to replace any desire on our part to be praised or recognized for some minor part we played in the gift being delivered.

So, if our thinking is right and our hearts are right, it really doesn't matter if people know that we are the ones who actually delivered the gift. And even more, we don't care if anyone knows or not, because it is simply not about us. We are so singularly focused on the One who is *making* the gift and the one who was *receiving* the gift, who is *delivering* the gift is entirely irrelevant.

Our singular objective should be to use every giving occasion we can as an opportunity to reflect the glory of God to a world (and even a church) that so desperately needs to see His love and His grace and His generosity. And to actually see it reflected in someone who has compassionate eyes, willing hands, and a loving heart. This will never happen if we choose to do all our giving secretly from behind closed doors. However, when His gifts are known, the recipient gets to see not just a reflection of God, they will actually get to see God "*with skin on.*" What a sacred privilege.

So, to be a selfless giver, we need to do all we can to avoid any praise for gifts God directs us to deploy. And on those occasions when man's praise is inappropriately directed towards us, we need to gladly deflect it to the rightful Recipient of all praise. If we will choose to become a selfless giver, it will make us a very useful reflector in the hand of the "*Father of lights.*"

Discussion Questions

1. What is your initial reaction to this lesson?
2. Read Matthew 6:2-4 and pay attention to why Jesus told the crowd to keep their giving a secret. Is He addressing the method of our giving or the motive for our giving? Why is this so important to understand the difference between these two?
3. Why was it okay for Barnabas (Acts 4:32-37) to do his giving so that everyone in the church knew about it, but it was not okay for Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) to do their giving publicly?
4. What do you find most surprising about the idea that we should never even be expecting praise for the giving we do for the Lord? How do churches and especially ministries wrongly position us to be praised for our giving?
5. What was your reaction to the hypothetical story of the nephew and the postman?
6. Practically speaking, how are we to be both reflectors and deflectors – reflecting the glory of God and deflecting the praise of man?
7. Discuss James 1:17 and why keeping this verse in mind can be a spiritual safety net helping us keep a proper perspective on who is really doing the giving.
8. Discuss how focusing on the One doing the giving (God) and the one who is doing the receiving helps us avoid getting over focused on the minor role we play in having simply delivered His gift.
9. What is gained when we get personally involved in giving instead of hiding behind a closed door and doing it anonymously? How does our personal involvement greatly enhance the impact of the gift on the receiver?
10. Discuss why seeking our praise from the Owner for our part in the giving is such an important focus for us?
11. What is going to change in your thinking and your giving because of what you have learned in this lesson?

Lesson Six

AN EXPECTANT GIVER

This expectant giving characteristic may be last in our *Better Way Giving Series*, but it is anything but the least of the six giving characteristics. In fact, it is this expectant giving characteristic that can turbo-charge our giving beyond anything we are currently aware of. You see, giving is not just about having the right attitude, or even about giving properly and effectively, it is also about having very specific expectations about what is going to happen when we give.

The New Testament is very clear that giving is not a one-way street – not done in a vacuum – isolated, with no results beyond the blessing to the receiver. Things literally happen in heaven and on earth when we give. When we fully comprehend this, expectations in our giving will soar. So let's examine the three New Testament giving expectations we ought to have each time we give.

We Can Expect to be Resupplied

Let me ask you: If you knew that you had an *unlimited* supply of financial and material resources from which to give and regardless of how generous you were in deploying them you would never run out, would the amount you give change? In other words, if your “well” of material possessions could never run dry, would you gladly increase how much “water” you are drawing from it to quench the thirst of those who had too little to drink? I think we would all say, “Yes, I would definitely be more extravagant in my giving if this was the case.”

The good news is that this is the case. We do have a well from which to draw that will never run dry. Listen to what Paul says in II Corinthians 9:6, 8-10:

“Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written, ‘He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor. His righteousness endures forever.’ Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.”

Here, Paul is describing what I call the *Law of Resupply* – that God continues to resupply us enabling us to continue to deploy resources to serve others. Do not miss what he has said here: “*he who sows bountifully, reaps bountifully...that we might have an abundance for every good deed...and multiply your seed.*” We deploy, He resupplies – and often He resupplies us with even more than we actually deploy!

Can we be totally honest with ourselves? Our greatest fear in giving is that we might give away too much and end up not having enough for ourselves. You see, this *Law of Resupply* addresses this exact fear. It reassures us that we cannot give too much away. We cannot ever run out.

One of my favorite illustrations of this *Law of Resupply* is the story of R. G. LeTourneau, the man who designed and built the massive earth moving equipment that we see. By the latter part of his life, he was giving 90% of his income away and living on 10%. Yet, in spite of this, his net worth continued to climb. A gentleman once asked him, “Mr. LeTourneau, how is it that if you are giving 90% of all your income away, you continue getting richer?” His answer is classic. He said, “I shovel it out and God shovels it back, but God has a bigger shovel.” The *Law of Resupply* at work.

Remember what Anne Frank said, “No one has ever become poor by giving.” And do you know why? Because it is *impossible* to become poor by giving. The *Law of Resupply* is our “safety net” and God will never allow us to run out for ourselves because we gave too much away. Much like the widow of Zeraphath in I Kings 17 who used her last bit of flour and oil to give bread to the prophet Elijah, then prepared to lie down with her son and die of starvation. She didn’t know about the *Law of Resupply*. Because of what she had given to God’s prophet, God miraculously kept her jar of flour full and her jug of oil from ever running dry. She gave, God resupplied.

The spiritual and emotional challenge for us regarding the *Law of Resupply* is that we must first give in faith trusting that the *Law of Resupply* exists. In other words, we need to be fearlessly distributing what is already on our “gift card” before God is going to reload it for us for additional giving. This is one of the most powerful giving concepts in the entire Bible. We can expect to experience the *Law of Resupply*.

We Can Expect to be Provoking

Unfortunately, the word “provoke” in our culture almost always carries with it a negative connotation. If someone “provokes” us, it is never a good thing. However, the New Testament uses the word in both a negative and a positive way. The word itself simply means to “stimulate or incite” someone to a response. For example, Paul tells fathers not to “*provoke your children to wrath*” (Ephesians 6:4). Hebrews 10:24 uses it in a positive light. It says, “*And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works....*” This verse tells us that we should be provoking (stimulating or inciting) other believers to join us in our giving adventures – provoking them to excel in “*good works.*”

I have discovered that the single greatest motivator for encouraging others to give is to hear the stories of those who are doing it – who have already stepped out in faith and are doing some extraordinary and extravagant things with their giving – and have actually lived to tell about it!

Let me encourage those of you who are already extravagant givers to not mistakenly believe that by sharing your exciting giving stories with others that you will somehow “lose your heavenly reward” for doing so. If you are sharing your giving stories to stimulate and incite others to give more and not doing

it to draw attention or praise to yourself, you are doing a very good thing. Share your exciting and often amazing giving adventures with others. Share how it tested your faith. Share the joy you have found in your giving. Invite and incite others to “come on in, the water is fine!”

I was at a conference a few years ago and a young man shared that at the previous year’s conference he had been deeply challenged by the giving stories he heard. He told us that he wanted to experience the hand of God working through him like those he heard sharing their amazing giving stories.

So now, a year later, he was asked to share his giving story that was the direct result of him being provoked to give the year before. He shared that one day he was walking down the street and he saw an extremely needy man crouched down on the sidewalk, just trying to stay warm. He walked over to the man and offered to take him to a restaurant for dinner. After dinner, he then took him to a clothing store and bought him a completely new set of clothes, a new coat and even new shoes. He then took him to a local hotel and told him that he could spend the night at the hotel, take a hot shower, sleep in a warm bed and enjoy a hot breakfast in the morning.

Then he went a little crazy according to his wife. This good Samaritan then told the hotel clerk that the man could stay at the hotel longer if he needed to and the clerk should put whatever room charges the poor man incurred on his credit card. He prayed a blessing over the poor man and left. I sat there listening, absolutely dumbfounded. This young man’s compelling story of generosity simultaneously shamed and inspired me. It shamed me because even though God had given me hundreds of identical opportunities to be generous to a poor stranger, I had never even considered doing anything like what he did. It also inspired me because I wanted to experience the overwhelming joy that this young man had received from this selfless act of kindness. His giving story provoked me to get even more attuned to what God might want me to do with what He had me managing. You see, an expectant giver should always be attempting to provoke others to “*love and good works.*”

We Can Expect to be Rewarded

One of the most overlooked teachings on giving in the New Testament is on its rewards. The New Testament is abundantly clear that we can expect to be rewarded by God in both this life and the next for what we faithfully deploy as He directs.

Consider just a couple verses:

1 Timothy 6:19, “*Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*”

Matthew 6:20, “*But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...*”

Notice, who are we told to be storing up our treasures for. Not for God? Not for others? “*For ourselves!*” We get back in *heaven* what we give up on *earth*! What an incredible deal! You see, we don’t really ever

give anything away, we just send it on ahead. Even while our earthly balance sheet is being reduced by our giving, our heavenly balance sheet is being increased by the same amount. And now instead of only enjoying our stuff for a short time here on earth, we will instead get to enjoy it forever in eternity.

Here is the startling reality. *Whatever we give away, we do not give up.* When we give something away, we are guaranteed to have it for eternity! Absolutely incredible!

Now, contrast this “treasures in heaven” mindset with the mindset of the rich farmer in Luke 12 who decided that he was going to store up “for himself” treasures on earth instead of in heaven. God declares this man to be a “fool.” He had the right idea, storing up treasure for himself. However, he chose the wrong location to store his treasures. You see, where we choose to store our treasures makes all the difference in whether we will be viewed by God as a wise man or a fool.

But not only is there an eternal reward in our giving, there are also temporal rewards as well, Jesus is quoted by Paul in Acts 20:35 that “It is more blessed to give than it is to receive.” In other words, the giver gets back more than he gives. Solomon in Proverbs 11:25 confirms this as well, “A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.” The giver is prospered as he gives what he has away.

It is clear, we should expect to be rewarded for our giving. It is part of God’s stewardship “deal.” God says, “You take care of others and I’ll take care of you!”

Giving is the one area of our lives where we should have exceedingly high expectations! We can expect to be resupplied for more giving; we can expect to be provoking others to greater giving; and we can expect to be rewarded for our faithful deployment of His material resources.

If we will focus on incorporating all six of these Better Way Giving characteristics into our everyday lives, we can undoubtedly expect to someday hear from the Owner, “Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” May we all learn to both live and give with this ultimate day in mind!

Discussion Questions

1. What is your initial reaction to this lesson?
2. What most amazes you about the whole idea of the Law of Resupply?
3. How does fear override faith and render the Law of Resupply inoperable in our lives?
4. Respond to R.G.Letourneau's comment, "I shovel it out and God shovels it back, but God has a bigger shovel."
5. What is the triggering activity for the Law of Resupply to kick in? Have you ever experienced the Law of Resupply operating in your life and giving?
6. How can you share your giving stories with others so they will become excited to experience what you have experienced in your giving?
7. Share what has been the most over-the-top giving story of your life.
8. How do you respond to the statement, "Whatever we give away, we do not give up" – that they are returned to us as our reward for our faithful deployment of them here on earth?
9. What made the rich farmer a "fool"? What do we need to do to be sure we will not, like him, someday be considered a "fool" as well?
10. How do you respond to the idea from God that, "You take care of others and I'll take care of you!" What is for us the upside and the downside of this being true?
11. Share what is going to change in how you think and how you give because of what you have learned in this lesson?

BETTER WAY GIVING ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Circle the number that best represents where you are in this area of your giving.
(1 not at all: 5 I am doing it perfectly)

1. Better Way Giving Characteristic #1: A Motivated Giver
 - a. My giving is motivated by *God's unconditional love* 1 2 3 4 5
 - b. My giving is motivated by *Jesus' amazing grace* 1 2 3 4 5
 - c. My giving is motivated by the *Holy Spirit's guiding freedom* 1 2 3 4 5
2. Better Way Giving Characteristic #2: A Joyful Giver
 - a. I have surrendered *myself* and *my stuff* to the Lord 1 2 3 4 5
 - b. I have surrendered *my security* to the Lord 1 2 3 4 5
 - c. I am an *intentional* giver. 1 2 3 4 5
(I am proactive in how and where I deploy God's funds)
 - d. I am a *passionate* giver 1 2 3 4 5
(I give to organizations and causes that I really care about)
 - e. I am a *confident* giver 1 2 3 4 5
(I know where the funds are going and I track the outcomes)
3. Better Way Giving Characteristic #3: A Reliable Giver
 - a. I am a *committed* giver (Giving is one of my top priorities) 1 2 3 4 5
 - b. I am a *consistent* giver (Giving is a regular practice) 1 2 3 4 5
 - c. I am a *progressive* giver 1 2 3 4 5
(As my income goes up, my giving-to-living ratio does too)
4. Better Way Giving Characteristic #4: An Extravagant Giver
 - a. When I give it commonly exceeds what is *expected* 1 2 3 4 5
 - b. When I give it commonly exceeds what is *affordable* 1 2 3 4 5
 - c. When I give it commonly exceeds what is *needed* 1 2 3 4 5
5. Better Way Giving Characteristic #5: A Selfless Giver
 - a. I consciously and intentionally avoid all praise for my giving 1 2 3 4 5
 - b. I never have any hope or expectation of being praised for my giving 1 2 3 4 5
 - c. I gladly deflect any and all praise for what the Lord directs me to give 1 2 3 4 5
6. Better Way Giving Characteristic #6: An Expectant Giver
 - a. When I give I expect to be resupplied to do more giving 1 2 3 4 5
 - b. When I give I expect to provoke others to get more excited and involved in giving 1 2 3 4 5
 - c. When I give I expect to be rewarded by God in both this life and the next for giving 1 2 3 4 5

Your Score: How far are you in your giving journey?

80 - 100 Great job! You are really living out the life of a giver on a daily basis.

50 - 79 You are heading in the right direction in your giving, but you still have lots of room to grow.

30 - 49 You have begun your giving journey, but you will want to get more intentional, making it a central part of your Christian walk.

0 - 29 You need to start learning how to give. You need to move from being only a casual giver to where all the fun in giving is.