



TRANSFORMATIONAL STEWARDSHIP

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WHEN YOU REALLY LOVE

In Proverbs 30:18-19 (NASB), Agur observes, *There are three things which are too wonderful for me, Four which I do not understand: The way of an eagle in the sky, The way of a serpent on a rock, The way of a ship in the middle of the sea, And the way of a man with a maid.* It is that last thing he mentions that I want to focus on. I expect that all of us have experienced or observed what strange and wonderful things happen to a young man when he really loves a maid. Considering the surprising effects of love on a young man's behavior may give us some insight into how we will respond when we are truly in love.

When You Really Love... Money is No Object

When you really love, you can't spend enough on the object of your love. One of the most amazing things that happens to a young man who is really in love is this: no matter how frugal or tight-fisted he may have been in the past, he is suddenly anxious to give something, anything, everything he has to express his undying love for her. This behavior is quite characteristic of how love is expressed. Remember in John 3:16 (NASB) it says, *For God so loved...He gave (emphasis added).* Likewise when we love so much, we cannot help ourselves. We are uncontrollably compelled to give to the one we love.

Remember the story of Mary?

While [Jesus] was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came [Mary] with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head. But some were indignantly remarking to one another, 'Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.' And they were scolding her. But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me.' Mark 14:3-6

To fully appreciate the magnitude of Mary's gift, we must understand that *three hundred denarii* was worth about a year's wages. What she was pouring out on Jesus was no small financial expression of her love. To those watching Mary's extravagant expression of love, it seemed like a silly and ridiculous waste of a valuable resource. But Mary didn't care. She deeply loved Jesus, so the more extravagant the gift, the more appropriate her expression of overwhelming love. For Mary, her extravagant gift was entirely appropriate. You see, when you really love, money is no object.

When You Really Love... Giving is a Delight

Consider your response if your son or grandson were to come to you and say, "If you really loved me, you would buy me a new bike!" Because you do love him, you might go ahead and buy him the bike, and you might even be glad to do it. But the gift would not be nearly as much of an expression of your love for him as it could have been since it didn't grow out of your deep desire to express that love to him. It was instead his idea for how you could show your love to him.

Likewise, our gifts seem to lose some significance if God has to tell us the amount we must give to show we really love Him. Many churches actually teach giving more like it is "membership dues" rather than a loving gift. They teach, "Pay your tithe." It can feel much more like paying a bill instead of making a joyful gift to express our profound love for the One who saved us from death!

When a person really loves, he doesn't ask, "What is my duty?" He asks, "What is my privilege?" His giving is motivated by his overflowing love, not out of some sense of debt-payment or obligation. How loved would you feel if your spouse said to you, "Just tell me how much I have to spend on you so you will know I love you?" Talk about pouring cold water on the relationship. As one wife told her husband, "If I have to tell you what to do, then it doesn't count."

This is precisely the point Paul is making in II Corinthians 9:7 (NIV): *Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* God wants your giving to flow from *your* heart—a genuine and extravagant expression of your overflowing love relationship to Him. God wants your gifts to Him to be *your* idea, motivated by *your* love, and in the size and the amount that *you* choose, not some amount dictated by Him to you. If God has to tell you what to give, does it count? Interesting thought, isn't it? If your gifts to Him are done *reluctantly or under compulsion*, where is the love expression? God loves to receive gifts from joy-filled givers who are giving because they *really* love Him. You see, when you really love, giving is a delight.

When You Really Love... No Sacrifice is Too Great

I once heard the story of an elderly couple who had been married for over 50 years. The wife had developed Alzheimer's disease and was placed in a nursing home. Every day her husband would go to the nursing home and spend the entire day by her side, even though she no longer knew who he was. He did this for years. Their children finally came to him and asked, "Dad, Mom doesn't even know who you are, so why do you come here every day and spend the entire day with her?" He looked down with a smile and said, "I come every day because I still know her."

When a person really loves, no sacrifice is too great. In the great love chapter of I Corinthians 13, Paul says, *And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing* (I Corinthians 13:3, NASB). Sacrifice without love *profits me nothing*. Might it be that love without sacrifice also profits me nothing? Remember when David wanted to offer a sacrifice to the Lord, and Araunah offered to give him the land, the oxen, and all he needed for the sacrifice? David refused his gifts and insisted that he buy from Araunah what he needed because, *I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God which cost me nothing* (II Samuel 24:24). How can you fully express your love if you are not making a meaningful sacrifice to express it?

If we were to sacrifice *everything* to the Lord, we would have only *matched* what He sacrificed for us. How do you respond to that unconditional, sacrificial expression of love? He sacrificed it all because He really loves us, and He wants us to voluntarily, joyfully, and extravagantly sacrifice for Him because we really love Him. Our gifts to the Lord are not some effort to try to win His favor or to repay what we owe Him for what He has done for us. Our giving to the Lord is entirely an expression of our unspeakable gratitude for what He has already given to us. We give because of what we have already received, not because of what we hope to someday receive.

I am routinely moved to tears when we sing the song, *Here I Am to Worship*. It is the one line that is repeated over and over again that gets to me. It says, "I'll never know how much it cost, to see my sin upon that cross." And each time this line is repeated I feel myself being more overcome by it. Because *I will never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross*. How could Jesus love me that much? How can I ever in any appropriate way express how much I love Him for what He has done for me? You see, when you really love, no sacrifice is too great.

Do you really love Jesus? If so, money will be no object, giving will be a delight, and no sacrifice will be too great. May these three qualities be true of us as we joyfully, eagerly, and extravagantly give to the love of our life—Jesus.

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E. G. "Jay" Link has a unique combination of being an ordained minister with a Master Divinity degree in Biblical Theology and a professional Stewardship planning coach who for over 40 years has been working with very affluent Christian families to enable them to optimize their Kingdom impact with all that the Lord has entrusted to them to manage. After retiring from his personal practice, he then served for five years as Director of Taylor University's Stewardship Planning Ministry, which he launched for them. Most recently, Jay founded Transformational Stewardship to serve Christian ministries, colleges, and churches to better minister to their highest capacity families. He has written six books, hundreds of articles and has provided an extensive training curriculum for hundreds of professional financial and legal advisors in how to provide stewardship planning services for their clients.