



When Giving Got Out of Control

If you want some excellent examples of generous giving, you need only look in the Bible itself. In two different passages we witness some extraordinary and compelling giving stories. One is in the Old Testament and the other is in the New Testament. One involved people who were rich, and the other involved people who were poor. One was for a building program and the other was for benevolent needs. Quite a contrast in many ways, but the outcome in both stories was identical – their giving got out of control.

In the first out-of-control story Moses has come down from Mt. Sinai, his face literally aglow, and reports to the children of Israel that God wants them to build a tabernacle for Him to dwell in. It is important to keep in mind that even though the Israelites were slaves in Egypt for millennia, when they did finally leave that country, they left incredibly wealthy. (See Exodus 12:35-36).

In the second out-of-control story the Macedonian Christians are in the midst of enduring both extended and extreme poverty – themselves barely surviving. Yet, they hear from Paul that the Christians in Jerusalem are facing even more desperate conditions than they are.

Here are the stories. I have highlighted some key words in the texts for you to notice.

Out-of-Control Story #1

(Exodus 35:20-36:7) Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel departed from Moses' presence. Everyone whose **heart stirred** him and everyone whose **spirit moved** him came *and* brought the LORD'S contribution for the work of the tent

of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments. Then all whose **hearts moved** them, both men and women, came *and* brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and bracelets, all articles of gold; so *did* every man who presented an offering of gold to the LORD. Every man, who had in his possession blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine linen and goats' *hair* and rams' skins dyed red and porpoise skins, brought them. Everyone who could make a contribution of silver and bronze brought the LORD'S contribution; and every man who had in his possession acacia wood for any work of the service brought it. All the skilled women spun with their hands, and brought what they had spun, *in* blue and purple *and* scarlet *material* and *in* fine linen. All the women whose **heart stirred** with a skill spun the goats' *hair*. The rulers brought the onyx stones and the stones for setting for the ephod and for the breastpiece; and the spice and the oil for the light and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. The Israelites, all the men and women, whose **heart moved** them to bring *material* for all the work, which the LORD had

commanded through Moses to be done, brought a freewill offering to the LORD. Then Moses said to the sons of Israel, “See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And He has **filled him with the Spirit of God**, in wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge and in all craftsmanship; to make designs for working in gold and in silver and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings and in the carving of wood, so as to perform in every inventive work. **He also has put in his heart to teach**, both he and Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. **He has filled them with skill to perform every work** of an engraver and of a designer and of an embroiderer, in blue and in purple *and* in scarlet *material*, and in fine linen, and of a weaver, as performers of every work and makers of designs.”

Now Bezalel and Oholiab, and every skillful person in whom the Lord has put skill and understanding to know how to perform all the work in the construction of the sanctuary, shall perform in accordance with all that the Lord has commanded. Then Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every skillful person in whom the Lord had put skill, everyone whose **heart stirred** him, to come to the work to perform it. They received from Moses all the contributions which the sons of Israel had brought to perform the work in the construction of the sanctuary. And they **still continued bringing to him freewill offerings every morning**. And all the skillful men who were performing all the work of the sanctuary came, each from the work which he was performing, and they said to Moses, “The people are **bringing much more than enough** for the construction work which the Lord commanded us to perform.” Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: “No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.” And so **the people were restrained from bringing more**, because

what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.

Out-of-Control Story #2

(II Corinthians 8:1-5), “And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their **overflowing joy** and their extreme poverty welled up in **rich generosity**. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even **beyond their ability**. Entirely on their own, **they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing** in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but **they gave themselves first to the Lord** and then to us in keeping with God’s will.

These two stories are extraordinary examples of what happens when God’s people get out of control in their motivation to give. I think it would be quite instructive for us to go behind this explosion of generosity to determine what prompted this kind of out-of-control giving in these two circumstances. I have identified four lessons we can learn from these two stories.

Lesson #1:

Giving will get out of control when God’s people catch a bigger vision

Both these visions for doing something greater than themselves began with strong leaders who had a clear vision and were able to effectively articulate that vision and the plan to achieve it – Moses had the blueprints for the tabernacle and Paul intended to personally deliver the benevolent support to the believers in Jerusalem.

I think Will Rogers understood the need for a good plan to accompany a good vision when he stated, “A vision without a plan is a hallucination.” Or, as the old proverb says, “A vision without a plan is just a dream. A plan without a vision is just drudgery. But a vision with a plan can change the world.” Both leaders had a vision and a plan.

I have a friend who repeats often, “You’re getting what you’re getting because you’re doing what you’re doing.” In other words more of the same leads to more of the same. This is where most believers find themselves in their giving journeys.

In both these stories, God’s people were challenged to embrace a vision that was substantially bigger and more challenging than anything they could envision themselves and they embraced the vision and exceeded all expectation in supporting it as a result.

Lesson #2:

Giving will get out of control when God’s people surrender themselves to the Lord

The most obvious statement of this lesson is when Paul says that the Macedonians *first* gave themselves to the Lord. The beginning of any outbreak of generosity will begin when God’s people surrender to Him.

I use the word surrender and not submit for good reason. To submit means to give **in**. We submit to the authorities over us (government, employers, husbands, etc.) not necessarily because we like what they are doing or agree with their actions, but because we are commanded to submit – to give in – to respectfully yield.

Surrender, on the other hand, is to give **up**. In this case, there is no objection, no resistance, no biting our lip, no holding our tongue and reluctantly obeying. We completely surrender our will, our opinion, and our self-interests. This is what I believe Paul is getting at when he says that the Macedonians first gave themselves to the Lord. They gladly and willingly surrendered what little they had in material possessions to God. They surrendered their personal agenda for what they wanted to do with those possessions (like having another meal) to God’s agenda of helping other believers who were even more needy than they were.

When God’s people finally and fully surrender (give **up**) to God instead of just submit (give **in**) to

God out of respect and duty, out-of-control giving will be positioned to happen.

Lesson #3:

Giving will get out of control when God’s people attune their hearts to the voice of the Holy Spirit

We see this repeatedly mentioned in the story of the Israelites. It says the spirit moved them, their heart(s) were stirred and the people were filled with the spirit of God.

When God’s people tune their “inner radio” to the right frequency – the frequency of God’s voice instead of the frequency of this present age, an eruption of generosity is poised to happen.

Sadly, many pastors, ministers, and church leaders have guided their people to look at their calculators to determine their **required** level of giving instead of directing them to look to the Holy Spirit for His **desired** level of giving. The former inhibits out-of-control giving.

Paul is quite clear on the basis for Christian giving in II Corinthians 9:7 (just one chapter after his report of the Macedonian’s out-of-control giving). He says, “Each one should do as God has purposed in his heart...” Here Paul is offering us a **procedure** for determining our giving and not a **percentage** for determining our giving. He is telling us to tune into the guidance of the Holy Spirit who can stir and move our hearts and fill us with an eagerness to give at levels far beyond anything we have experienced previously.

Lesson #4:

Giving will get out of control when God’s people experience joy in giving

Both stories abound with comments about the extraordinary levels of joy His people experienced as their giving got out of control. They had overflowing joy. The people were bringing much more than enough. They were restrained from bringing more. They urgently pleaded for the privilege of sharing. They gave beyond their ability.

Wouldn't you love to be part of a worship service one day where the leaders of the church get up at the offering time and tell the congregation that they are not going to take up an offering because they already have more than enough to perform the work that the church is doing? It would be a modern day manifestation of out-of-control giving.

If you read the rest of II Corinthians 9:7 you will see this fourth lesson emphasized. Paul concludes his giving instructions that we should give, "...not grudgingly, nor under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." The Greek word for "cheerful" could also be translated "hilarious." When the act of giving itself brings us out-of-control joy, out-of-control giving is on the verge of breaking out.

How can we increase our joy in giving? One way would be for when we give to actually be able to see the results of our giving – the lives that will be changed or the work that will be done. I have heard of surveys that indicate that of all the giving that Christians do, church giving gives them the least amount of joy. One reason is because the church has done such an inadequate job of connecting their members to the impact their weekly giving is having in the lives of people locally and internationally. Their giving simply goes in the plate, never to be seen or heard about again. Yet, these same folks derive great joy in supporting a needy child in a third-world country. Why? It is because they are connected to the recipient and to the outcome.

Wouldn't it be inspiring if each week just prior to the offering, your church would show a short one minute video of someone who has been impacted by the ministry of your church – a person who got saved – a marriage that was rescued – someone who

was helped to overcome an addiction – a child who was impacted by a VBS program – a tribe in a foreign country that now has the Word of God in their language, etc. because of the ministry of the church? You could call this little video vignette the "Money Clip." Wouldn't that make giving more meaningful and much more joyous for everyone?

Connecting giving to specific outcomes opens the door for greatly increased joy in giving. And the more "hilarious" we become in our giving the more likely we are to start giving like the Israelites in Exodus 35-36 and the Macedonians in II Corinthians 8.

If you want to experience out-of-control giving, (1.) embrace a bigger vision, (2.) totally surrender to the Lord, (3.) listen to the Holy Spirit, and (4.) make your giving a joyous experience. Then, look out!



The author, E. G. "Jay" Link, is both an ordained minister and the President/ CEO of Kardia, Inc., a firm that specializes in assisting wealthy Christian families with the stewardship of all of their life resources. He is the author of three books,

Spiritual Thoughts on Material Things: Thirty Days of Food for Thought, To Whom Much is Given: Navigating the Ten Life Dilemmas Affluent Christians Face and Family Wealth Counseling: Getting to the Heart of the Matter." Mr. Link may be reached via email at jlink@KardiaPlanning.com.