

When Giving Got Out of Control

Introduction: Today, I'd like to draw our attention to two extraordinary and compelling examples of generous giving that are found right in the Bible itself. One of these stories is in the Old Testament and the other is in the New Testament. One involved people who were very rich, and the other involved people who were very 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 of these stories was identical – giving got out of control.

In our first out-of-control story Moses has come down from Mt. Sinai, his face literally aglow. He 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 centuries, when they did finally leave that country, they left incredibly wealthy. Exodus 12:35-36 tells us, “Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.”

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

Let me take the time to honor the Lord by reading to you these stories from His Word. You can follow along as I read what is happening to the giving of His people in these two stories.

Here is the first out-of-control giving story found in Exodus 35 and 36.

“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.... 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.... **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...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... 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.”

Our second out-of-control giving story can be found in II Corinthians 8:1-5. Paul is writing to the Corinthians about the believers’ in Macedonia response to hearing about the extreme poverty among the believers in Jerusalem.

“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 excitement and motivation to give. I think it would be extremely instructive for us today to drill down into these two explosions of generosity to identify what really prompted this kind of out-of-control giving. As we do, we are going to discover four foundational cornerstones that were present bringing about the out-of-control generosity in these two stories.

**Here is Foundational Cornerstone #1:
“Giving will get out of control when...
God’s people catch a bigger vision.”**

In both cases the people’s enhanced vision 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 impoverished 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 these two leaders had a vision and a plan and they presented them both persuasively.

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, sadly, is where most believers find themselves in their giving journeys. They get comfortable at some level of giving and they stop letting God challenge them and stretch them to even greater levels of generosity. Consequently, they

continue to get what they're getting spiritually because they continue giving what they're giving financially.

In both these stories, God's people were challenged to embrace a vision that was substantially grander and more challenging than anything they had envisioned themselves to accomplish and once they fully embraced that vision, their resultant giving exceeded all expectations.

**Foundational Cornerstone #2 is this:
"Giving will get out of control when...
God's people surrender themselves to the Lord."**

The most obvious statement confirming this foundational cornerstone is when Paul says that the Macedonians *first* gave themselves to the Lord. Any outbreak of generosity will always begin with God's people fully surrendering themselves to Him.

I use the word "surrender" here and not "submit" for good reason. Let me give you a brief grammar lesson. The word "submit" means "to give **in**." We submit to the authorities over us (government, police, husbands, etc.) not necessarily because we like what they are doing or even agree with their actions, but because we are commanded to submit – to give in – to respectfully yield to their authority. We have all at some point in time reluctantly submitted to someone who we did not agree with simply because they had the authority.

The word "surrender," on the other hand, means "to give **up**." In surrender, there is no objection, no resistance, no biting our lip, no holding our tongue or reluctantly obeying. We completely surrender our will, our opinions, and our self-interests. This is what Paul is saying the Macedonians did - they "first gave themselves up to the Lord." They gladly and willingly surrendered to Him what little they had in material possessions. They freely surrendered their personal agenda for what they may have wanted to do with their meager possessions – like maybe having another meal – to God's agenda of helping other believers who were facing an even greater financial crisis than they were.

Listen, when God's people are willing to finally and fully give **up** to God instead of merely give **in** to God out of respect and duty, out-of-control giving will be poised to erupt.

**Foundational Cornerstone #3 is this:
"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, secular, materialistic age, an explosion of generosity will be poised to happen.

Sadly, many church leaders have mistakenly guided their people to look at their calculators to determine their **required** level of giving instead of properly directing them to look to the Holy Spirit for His **desired** level of giving. Mathematically **required** giving inhibits out-of-control giving. Holy Spirit **desired** giving fuels 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 by faith at levels far beyond anything we have experienced previously.

I learned this life-changing lesson of Holy Spirit led giving many years ago from a young, ten-year-old boy named Jimmy Mitchell. One Sunday before church, I was standing up at the pulpit getting my sermon notes ready and Jimmy came running into the auditorium. He ran up to me with a dollar bill in his hand and said, "Jay, look what I've got." I said, "Jimmy, that's great. Where did you get it?" He told me that after he mowed his yard, he decided to go ahead and mow old Mrs. Brown's yard next door. "After I finished, she came out and gave me this dollar."

He went on to say, "Jay, I'd like to give some of it to the Lord." I replied, "Jimmy, I know the Lord would be so pleased that you would want to share some of that dollar with Him. How much do you think you would like to give?"

Even after three decades, I still remember what he said to me like it was yesterday. He looked down at the dollar and then gazed into my eyes, looked back down at the dollar, looked up again at me and said, "Do you think He would mind if I kept a dime?"

His words still ring in my mind, "Do you think He would mind if I kept a dime?" Can you imagine what would happen to the Kingdom of God, to your home church if all of us here today were to begin listening and giving like Jimmy Mitchell?

When God's people attune their hearts to the voice of the Holy Spirit, out-of-control giving is ready to explode.

**Here is Foundational Cornerstone #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 God's 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 some Sunday 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 today because they already have more than enough to perform the work that the church is doing? This would be a modern day manifestation of out-of-control giving.

If you finish reading the rest of II Corinthians 9:7 you will see this fourth cornerstone emphasized. Paul concludes his giving instructions that we should give, "...not grudgingly, nor under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." This Greek word "cheerful" that Paul uses here could just as easily be translated "hilarious." "for God loves a hilarious giver!" When the act of giving itself brings us out-of-control joy, out-of-control giving is poised for a supernatural outbreak.

The more “hilarious” our giving becomes, the more likely we are to start giving like the Israelites and the Macedonians.

Conclusion: Now allow me to make one intensively practical application for all sitting in this room to conclude our consideration of these two scriptures. And I want to do so by making a very bold statement that you may surprise and trouble you.

Here is the statement: “Your clients will never experience out-of-control giving until you do!” Let me say it again. “Your clients will never experience out-of-control giving until you do!”

You cannot take a client somewhere that you have never been before. A greedy man cannot challenge another greedy man to be generous. A selfish man cannot encourage another selfish man to give freely. A legalistic giver cannot motivate another legalistic giver to explode his giving.

We as advisors cannot motivate our clients to experience the joy of out-of-control giving until we are personally experiencing the joy of out-of-control giving in our own lives.

A few years ago in a presentation I heard Ron Blue share a story of an advisor who had a wealthy client who had just sold a \$1.5 million asset. Ron was rejoicing that the advisor had actually asked the client about tithing on the sale of the asset and the client actually did it – he gave \$150,000 away.

But when Ron shared that story my first thought was, “Why didn’t the advisor challenge the wealthy client to give it all away?” He likely didn’t need this asset to maintain his lifestyle. It was surplus wealth. Why didn’t he challenge him to get out-of-control in his giving?

I think the reason the advisor didn’t challenge him to give more than a tithe was because the advisor wasn’t any more than a tither himself – and he could only take his client to where he was in his own giving journey.

There is no way to know and even if there was I wouldn’t want to know, but I would dare say with relative certainty that the majority of advisors in this room are not currently giving even 10% of their AGI annually to the Lord, much less some multiple of that.

Listen, until generosity becomes a **personal passion**, it will never become a **professional passion**. As Pogo the cartoon character said, “We have seen the enemy, and He is us.”

If you are not impressed with the generosity of your clients and you don’t know what to do about it, look in the mirror and you will be looking at both the problem and the solution to your clients’ lack of joyful out-of-control generosity.

Let me conclude with a personal, charitable giving challenge for you today. Prove to yourself that you are serious about this area of charitable giving: Make a commitment to double your personal giving this year. Whatever you gave last year, double it this year.

If we are going to see an explosion of charitable giving in this country it must begin right here and right now. We all need to “Catch a Bigger Vision:” “Surrender Ourselves to the Lord:” “Attune our Hearts to the Voice of the Holy Spirit:” and “Experience joy in Generous Giving.” Then look out. Kingdom funding will explode!