

LESSON 4

Creative Giving

AS A GIVER, THERE ARE CREATIVE WAYS TO CONTRIBUTE THAT REVEAL THE LEVEL OF OUR COMMITMENT AND THE DEPTH OF OUR INDIVIDUAL FAITH.

Many people, when challenged on the topic of giving toward our church's financial campaign, have the same reaction: "I've been a believer (or attended ABC Church) for 10 years and I know how to give." While that is probably true with respect to giving out of your income, most contributors have never been informed or challenged in the area of "creative giving." Poor money management aside, the biggest practical hurdle facing most givers is articulated as, "I would like to contribute, but there isn't much left over after the bills."

From tax-beneficial asset contributions, to numerous "why didn't I think of that" ideas, the possibilities for giving beyond your income are far-reaching and can be very impacting. Nurturing a creative giving mindset requires prayer and focus. It often prompts givers to think "outside to offering plate" about how they can support the specific vision set before them.



KEY CONCEPT: We can give assets.

LEADER NOTE: This particular Key Concept may seem less relevant to your teens at present, however please don't skip or marginalize it. Eventually they will all be in a place to wrestle with these questions and opportunities, and our goal is to plant seed that will take root and bear fruit in the years ahead.

Whereas income is generally set and can be difficult to divert in significant fashion, the idea of giving appreciated assets opens a whole new dimension to engaging our financial means in Kingdom work.

In Acts 4, we read that Joseph (also called Barnabas) sold a piece of property and gave the proceeds to the church.ⁱ One can imagine the joy it prompted in both the giver and those who received the gift! The next chapter goes on to describe a similar activity with a very different outcome. While Ananias & Sapphira were equally compelled to sell a property, they chose not to be honest. And while it may be easy focus on the "extreme" consequence of their holding back, the real lesson is the importance of following through, fully and obediently, on what God asks you to do. True surrender, as we studied last week, is never halfway.

Determining how to give in this area requires prayer and planning. God will communicate to each heart that is willing. In fact, praying ahead of time about the possibility of taking action shows a heart that yearns to walk in concert with the leading of the Holy Spirit; not ahead, nor behind, but in step.ⁱⁱ

Due to the complicated nature of tax law and various legal processes, it is imperative that one enlist the right help when engaging in this important type giving. Some of you will already be familiar with such matters and may have a lawyer on retainer for just such an occasion. For others, realize that your church leaders will rarely possess the knowledge and/or professional credential to walk down this road with you. Therefore, ask around! Get recommendations for tax lawyers, financial advisors, estate planners, and so on.

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KEY CONCEPT: We can give possessions.

While some of us have assets, all of us have “stuff.” The key in understanding this area of giving is to realize that something that (a) may have been worth a lot at some point in time or (b) you perceive to be of value may not actually be worth much today as a liquidated source of cash. For this reason, follow guidelines established by your church leaders regarding items that will be accepted as non-liquid contributions. The church may choose sell them outright (via formal auction, specialized dealers, eBay, Craigslist, etc.) or they may opt to employ a firm who offers professional liquidation services.

It may be true that one man's trash is another's treasure, however your church campaign is not a dumping ground for things that didn't move at your last yard sale! Be humble in attitude and honoring of authority in how you approach this exciting opportunity to give of your possessions.

The Apostle John recounts how Mary of Bethany, sister of the recently resurrected Lazarus, relinquished a very expensive bottle of perfume in what Jesus recognized as an overt act of worship. Her decision to anoint her Saviorⁱⁱⁱ with something worth a year's wages reveals two important lessons.

First, that her behavior was not impulsive; rather, it evidenced a premeditated plan to give in a creative way that bestowed great honor and expressed thanksgiving to God. Just like Mary, you may possess things of great value, whether bought or given to you, that God desires to be released as a resource to help propel His work.

Second, others may see your act of worship as foolish or wasteful. Give anyway. Be lavish toward your Savior. Don't let fear of man, nor the reprisal of those not involved in your decision, hold you back from giving what God asks of you.



DISCUSSION: Make a list below of items that you own, that would be willing to pray about surrendering (music, technology, sports memorabilia, jewelry, and so on).

LEADER NOTE: As minors and young adults, most of your class are not going to possess a significant collection of much. Help them connect the dots to the principle, if not the practical. They can, however, certainly be a catalyst for discussion within their families. (See the “Application” at the close of the lesson.)

Even if this be the case, they can still go through the exercise, as most of them will have something they would rather not give up – maybe a stuffed animal from their childhood, who knows? Remind them to make it personal; in other words, you are not looking for a general list of things that may or may not be in someone's direct possession. They don't necessarily need to share it with the group, however it can be a great source of encouragement to each other to be full of faith.

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As the same time, this is not a contest of who has more stuff to give! Pride needs to be checked at the foot of the cross. What they own isn't theirs to begin with, so speaking of things they can give should not be boasted about, nor should it stir envy or covetousness.



KEY CONCEPT: We can give sacrifices.

Picture, if you will, the end product of most Biblical sacrifices: a pile of ash! At its simplest, a sacrifice is offered fully and is not picked back up off the altar. The message is quite clear: your offering is about to be “consumed” by a holy God who knows the motivation behind the gift and who responds accordingly.^{iv}

Furthermore, true sacrifice comes at a cost. King David summed it up this way: “I will not sacrifice ... that which costs me nothing.”^v So the real question is not if we bring a sacrifice, but rather when we do, at what cost will it be to our comfort, convenience, or control? And what is the state of our heart in the process?

We don't have to dig very deep to recognize that taking up our cross^{vi} runs at odds with our natural bent. For most present-age American churchgoers, the suggestion of “going without” runs counter to decades of materialistic conditioning fueled by self-gratifying consumer culture. How great the glory to the Father, then, when we give something up – be it entirely, or for a season – and redirect funds otherwise spent on ourselves toward the campaign or ministry vision set before us!

Our perceived “need” for – and if we're honest, maybe even the “right” to – entertainment, comforts, delicacies, privileges, and so on, heavily influences our decision-making and our spending. Esteemed as they are, such items hold the potential to reign as idols in our lives. If it “can't be lived without,” then it should be at the top of your list to be laid on the altar.

For most of us, a dramatic shift in this area means less clutter, less distraction, and less spending. It translates into fewer unhealthy, unholy demands on our time and resources – the majority of which are self-induced in the first place.



DISCUSSION:

a) How would your life look different if you boldly sacrificed a specific or routine purchase, habit, convenience, trip, activity, or agenda?

(b) What did you gain, when Christ sacrificed?

LEADER NOTE: In contrast to a “list” answer above, the responses to this question should reveal the fruit of a life that pursues, and is satisfied with, “less.”

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SUGGESTED ANSWERS:

- Greater peace/contentment
- Greater level of awareness + faster/more willing response to needs
- Clearer vision/hearing from God, and about His agenda
- Heightened sense of expectation/anticipation/excitement regarding what God is doing & leading you to do

LEADER SUMMARY: The winners are those who are being “transformed by the renewing of their minds.” (Rom 12:2) The enemy of our souls is the loser; when we submit ourselves to God, we remove fuel from the flame that he stokes around us, and he goes hungry. (James 4:7, 1 Pet 5:8)

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PERSONAL / HOUSEHOLD APPLICATION

DISCUSS

How do you define giving? How have you challenged yourself beyond giving money?

DECIDE

Re-evaluate your hold on material things, as well as the priorities that consume your time and money. Purpose to move forward in humility in faith, in a new direction.

DO!

Establish an “altar” in your heart upon which you are willing to lay anything that may come before your God and His priorities. Be proactive in prayer and then follow through, by faith not works, on the things God asks you to do and to give, for His use and to His glory.

i	Acts 4:36-37
ii	Gal 5:25
iii	John 12:1-8
iv	Gen 4:3-7
v	2 Sam 24:24
vi	Luke 9:23