

GARY G. HOAG

**EXTRAVAGANT
SOWERS**



10 INSIGHTS FOR ENCOURAGING
CHRISTIAN GENEROSITY

EXTRAVAGANT SOWERS

10 Insights for Encouraging Christian Generosity

Gary G. Hoag



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INTRODUCTION

Steward Leaders of non-profit organizations and churches have a tough job. They are spiritually gifted to lead, and they do that tirelessly. Simultaneously, they are expected by their governing boards to ensure the ministry has adequate resources to meet current and future needs. In a word, they are expected to provide.

Because the job requires the bandwidth of more than one person, Steward Leaders appoint staff to help. Some deliver programs: doing work such as sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, feeding the hungry, teaching students, or caring for the sick. Others help rally support such as intercessory prayer, volunteer service, and financial partnership.

When I started my professional career, I realized that though I could do the program work, my gifts best fit in rallying support. I believed it was my job

to provide for the needs of the ministry. To that end, I employed whatever strategies I could find (most of them secular) for raising money from people to provide for the work of the ministry. At times I found the work rewarding and other times downright dreadful.

In reflecting on this tension, my aha moment was when I came to the realization that it was God's job, not mine, to provide for the needs of the ministry. In texts such as the Sermon on the Mount, I learned that Jesus instructed His disciples not to worry about even their most basic needs—food, drink, and clothing—but taught them to depend on God the Father to provide (cf. Matt. 6:25–34). I also came to understand that God could be trusted to provide for the needs of the ministry I served because it belonged to Him anyway. So what was my job in all this?

I came to see that my role as a Steward Leader was to be a sower: to sow truth in peoples' lives.¹ To show people ways they could participate with God by using the gifts He had given them to serve, by committing

1. See the book I co-authored with R. Scott Rodin, *The Sower: Redefining the Ministry of Raising Kingdom Resources* (Winchester, VA: ECFA Press, 2010). Two other books largely influenced my thinking: Wesley K. Willmer, *God & Your Stuff: The Vital Link Between Your Possessions and Your Soul*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002); Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Spirituality of Fundraising* (New York: Henri Nouwen Society, 2004).

some time for prayer, and by sharing the funds He had entrusted to them as stewards. My job shifted from asking people for money and trying to “close” gifts to telling spiritual truths to stewards which “opened” them to growing as givers. This realization fueled my passion to sow in the hearts of stewards the amazing truth that they have the privilege of participating with God in His work. Simultaneously, I got to pray daily and trust God to provide for my needs and the needs of the ministry.

The Steward Leader in the New Testament who has helped develop my understanding of this is the apostle Paul. He did not try to make the gospel known throughout the ancient world on his own, utilizing the ancient system of raising money. He simply attended to God’s work and rallied stewards to join him. If you count them, Paul had about forty people serving with him, doing work such as preaching and teaching, and about forty partners whose support and aid helped fuel ministry in the ancient world.²

Why highlight Paul as a role model? Two reasons. First, he was a Steward Leader whose job was similar to the complex roles many ministry leaders have

2. Many of these names can be found in Romans 16 and Colossians 4:7–17 among other New Testament passages.

today. He had the privilege of sowing truth in the hearts of many fellow servants and supporters. Second, in his correspondence with the Corinthian church related to taking up a collection for the Jerusalem church, he shared the theology that guided his practice, which can aid us as well.

From my study of Paul's Corinthian correspondence, ten insights emerge for Steward Leaders that desire to encourage Christian generosity. They are for everyone who wishes to sow this profound truth: stewards were made to participate with God in His work with the gifts, goods, and grace they have received from Him.

Ten Insights for Sowers from 1 Corinthians 16:1–4 and 2 Corinthians 8–9

Paul ministered in Corinth and many became Christians there. To encourage and instruct them in the faith, he wrote two letters that have survived to this day and become part of the New Testament: 1 and 2 Corinthians. To mine passages in these ancient letters for insights for modern application is to seek to uncover principles that can be applied in as many different settings as Steward Leaders find them-

selves. Before reading the rest of this book, I invite you to read the two texts, 1 Corinthians 16:1–4 and 2 Corinthians 8–9, from which I have located ten insights for Steward Leaders today.

CHAPTER 1

Steward Leaders direct Christians to give when needs arise

*Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.
1 Corinthians 16:1-2*

Most people think that Paul asked the Corinthians to give to help those in need in Jerusalem. Interestingly, Paul did not ask them, he directed them to send aid. In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson succinctly states: “You get the same instructions I gave the churches in Galatia.” This directive came in the form of written instructions that clearly and concisely told the Christians in Corinth to set aside money for struggling saints in Jerusalem. A closer look at these verses reveals Paul’s role

in calling for this collection.

Paul simply communicates the need and instructs people to give. W. Graham Scroggie asserts, “There is nothing here of the frantic and sensational appeals which are today so frequent.”¹ He did not use guilt to motivate them. Paul neither plays his apostolic authority trump card to force them to give, nor does he sheepishly ask them to give. To give or not to give is not the question here. He directs them to give and the basis for his authority in extending these instructions is God’s blessing in their lives. As they prospered, in keeping with their income, they were to share with needy Christians.

Shortly thereafter, Clement of Rome (c. 96 CE) echoed Paul’s perspective providing similar instruction in his letter to the Corinthians regarding aiding needy Christians in Rome: “Let the one who is strong take care of the weak; and let the weak show due respect to the strong. Let the wealthy provide what is needed for the poor, and let the poor offer thanks to God, since he has given him someone to supply his need.”²

1. W. Graham Scroggie, *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1994), 100.

2. *1 Clement* 38.2. Clement, Bishop of Rome urged the Christians in Corinth to live out their faith in words and deeds. Christians with more than

In Paul's communication regarding the collection, he models two activities for future Steward Leaders from Clement of Rome to us today. First, he demonstrates that strategic planning is an important facet of the work. Orchestrating this collection effort required advance communication, a coordinated response in Corinth, and a concerted effort that would link together many churches in other cities to participate.

Second, he showed that the responsibility of the Steward Leader is to sow truth in the lives of those being served. Specifically, he taught what God's people should do in tough times. He did not force them to obey, beg from them, or try to control their response. He merely gave instructions on aiding fellow believers in trouble.

At this point, I want to make a few general statements for global application. In hierarchical societies such as in the East, when leaders give instructions, often indirectly or through a culture broker, followers tend to obey the will of the leadership. In more individualistic societies like the West, it is different. Leaders tend to be more direct and those they serve

enough were to share with those who did not have enough.

are more self-centered. Because hearers do not necessarily follow the instructions of their leaders as readily, Western leaders often employ strategies that go beyond communication to manipulation in order to get the response they seek. Additionally, those in the Global South tend to be more group-oriented and more sensitive to the needs of others, which means they may not follow instructions until everyone is on board as a group.

Why sketch these cultural distinctions? The way in which instructions or directives are given varies in different cultural settings. The point to apply globally is this: when needs surface in the community of faith, Steward Leaders instruct God's people to share as they are able to help those in need. They sow this truth in a manner that is culturally appropriate. In doing so, they connect those who need help with those who can help.

CHAPTER 2

Steward Leaders personally
see to it that giving is
administered with integrity

Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

1 Corinthians 16:3–4

Before the days of online credit card gifts, electronic funds transfers from bank accounts, or even checks in the mail, cash contributions had to be collected and carried by hand. To do this, leaders appointed trusted people, used carefully outlined processes, and demonstrated a willingness to serve to get the job done.

According to Paul, approved leaders would be needed to deliver the collection. They undoubtedly had a reputation of faithfulness to perform tasks in the church in Corinth, which qualified them for the

job. In modern settings, it is critical to have faithful people processing charitable giving. Whether your ministry relies on thousands or millions of dollars of support each year, you must appoint trusted people to administer charitable giving. Don't stop there though.

Steward Leaders should also implement processes for ensuring proper gift administration because, as John Stott put it, “the handling of money is risky business.”¹ In the example of the Corinthian collection, the process for ensuring the faithful handling of the gift was to have more than one person involved. A team effort would ensure that no one person would be put in a place where he or she would be tempted to steal or misappropriate this gift. For the money to make it to Jerusalem, a team would carry the load. Likewise, Steward Leaders today should implement processes and put people with appropriate controls in place to be sure gifts are handled with integrity.

Lastly, Paul models the posture of service for Steward Leaders. He expresses a willingness to help deliver this gift if necessary. He wants the Corinthians to have the opportunity to participate through giving

1. John R.W. Stott, *The Grace of Giving: Ten Principles on Christian Giving* (Chattanooga, TN: Generous Giving, 2003), 9.

and will personally do whatever it takes to facilitate this act of worship.

In the ancient world, leaders would promise people honor and glory to receive gifts from them, but Paul does not go there. He does not offer perks for their participation. In so doing, he sets aside the rules of benefaction that governed giving in antiquity, and instead, subverts the system. He did what secular leaders in his day would not think of doing. He humbly offers up himself in sacred service not seeking anything in return.

As a Steward Leader, you would be wise to take the posture of the humble servant in administering charitable giving, regardless of what the culture around you dictates. Mother Teresa captured this idea in her own words: “If sometimes our poor people have had to die of starvation, it is not because God didn’t care for them, but because you and I didn’t give, were not instruments of love in the hands of God, to give them that bread, to give them that clothing; because we did not recognize him, when once more Christ came in distressing disguise—in the hungry man, in the lonely man, in the homeless child, and seeking

for shelter.”² What a remarkable humble servant! She, who rallied millions to awareness and care for the poor, led by example.

2. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, *Gift for God: Prayers and Meditations* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 24.

CHAPTER 3

Sacrificial giving is the result of God's work, not the Steward Leader's work

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very 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 Lord's people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

2 Corinthians 8:1–7

In this excerpt from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, it is clear that the Corinthian church had not completed the task of taking up a collection for the church in Jerusalem. Interestingly, Paul does not remind them of how much is still needed. Why? I think because it was not about the money. On the contrary, he tells a story about sacrificial givers and describes sacrificial giving not from a financial perspective, but from a spiritual angle.

The story is about the Macedonians. While little is known about their suffering, we know this about them: they gave joyfully of their own free will at a level that was unpredictably generous. Why? It was not tied to how Paul wrote his appeal letter. Their deep desire to give sacrificially and share in this service to those in need flowed out of God's work in their lives, not Paul's.

Steward Leaders often read this passage as encouraging friendly competition or as condoning arm-twisting tactics to motivate giving. A closer look at the culture does reveal that competition between cities would help them gain prominence in the ancient world. However, if that was Paul's motive he probably would have etched an inscription in Corinth, noting the amount of their giving, for the

purpose of coercing them to participate.

Paul does not try to manipulate them in sharing about the Macedonians, because it is not about competition. He uses them as an example to teach the Corinthians about giving. Paul celebrates the only kind of giving Jesus celebrated: sacrificial giving (cf. Mark 12:41–44). He then moves the conversation from the financial to the spiritual.

At this point, ministry leaders often ask: “Then how do you ask people to give?” Since giving shifts from a financial conversation to a spiritual one, my general rule is to move from: “Will you make a gift to this ministry project?” to “Will you ask God what sacrificial giving looks like for you?” The former question seeks to close people, to get them to give to you. The latter question opens people to give to God and follow His leading for the handling of the resources in their stewardship.

Think of it this way: as a Steward Leader, you cannot ask someone to give what they do not own; you can only challenge them to be stewards who are faithful to follow the Master’s instructions. In taking this position toward those you serve, you will follow Paul’s example and help them grow in the grace of giving.

CHAPTER 4

Sometimes Steward Leaders follow up with people and remind them to give

And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.

2 Corinthians 8:10–11

People often need to be reminded to fulfill giving commitments. This was true in the ancient world and is evident today. Though the text does not explain why they had not completed the collection, Paul's advice in his second letter is simply to get it done.

Reminding people is hard work, because you are repeating your efforts. Leaders often ask themselves: Why did they not respond to my instructions the first

time? Did they miss the message? Do I need to use bold letters, underlining, and a P.S. next time? These questions point leaders down the path of mistakenly thinking that generosity flows as a result of their work rather than God's work, and that encouraging generosity is about employing tactics that control outcomes when it should be about addressing heart attitudes. Changes at the heart level take time; that's why grace must be extended to all.

Often the lack of participation in giving or failure to complete financial commitments is because people have not planned for it. Dan Busby believes, "Giving doesn't just happen. Most of us don't give as much as we should because we don't plan our giving. You may need to make some tough financial decisions in order to have the freedom to give more. You may need to reduce your debt load or opt for a simpler lifestyle. You might need a budget. It will certainly mean having a priority list, planning, and keeping records. Remember, you are handling God's money."¹ Most would agree that many in the modern world have not been taught how to be faithful managers of God's money. Teaching and modeling stewardship princi-

1. Dan Busby, *Giving from the Heart: A Legacy that Lasts Forever* (Winchester, VA: Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, 2008), 3.

ples are part of the role of the Steward Leader and, again, this takes time. According to the research of Bruce Longenecker on the collection for the church in Jerusalem, it took more than five years (c. 53–58 CE).² This work requires grace and patience.

Paul demonstrates grace and patience in offering his judgment rather than exercising his authority. He wants their response to come from a willing heart, showing that he cares more about their spiritual growth than the money. He knows that if generosity will happen, it will flow from God's work in their lives; thus, his gracious tone toward the Corinthians echoes his words to the Galatians, which were to “remember the poor” (cf. Gal. 2:10).

2. Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 338–44.

CHAPTER 5

Acceptable giving is tied to what stewards have, not what they don't have

For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

2 Corinthians 8:12

Notice that Paul does not make a specific solicitation. Instead, he provides clear instruction on acceptable giving. Steward Leaders would be wise to follow his example. Paul invites the Corinthians to take the inward journey of taking inventory of all God has given them, and then to embark on an outward journey of freely blessing others from what they have.

Why is this so important? It may have been the cause for their delay in completing the collection. We don't know for sure. What we do know is that Paul addresses a common question givers ask them-

selves: How much should I give?

C.S. Lewis says, “I do not believe one can settle on how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare.”¹ In a word, Lewis would say Christians should give sacrificially.

Ultimately, Paul wants the Corinthians to be found faithful in using God’s resources in their stewardship. He shows Steward Leaders the kinds of conversations to have with givers: point them to think about giving from what they have.

To move beyond superficial talk to topics like this, you must be committed to such a course for your own life. If you find this teaching difficult, take a few minutes before reading on. Maybe even take inventory yourself. How are you using the gifts and goods in your stewardship? I have found this exercise leads to my own ongoing transformation, and actually positions me to help others on the journey.

1. Lesly Walmsley, ed., “Social Morality” in *C.S. Lewis Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 318.

CHAPTER 6

Steward leaders describe Christian giving as sharing that leads to equality

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.”

2 Corinthians 8:13–15

Paul cites the manna account from Exodus to share the purpose for the redistribution of resources: so that everyone has enough. When God’s people were somewhere between the bondage of Egypt and the freedom of the Promised Land, they needed food to eat. God provided manna six days a week, and double what they needed the day before the Sabbath, so they could rest that day but still have

enough to eat. He was their faithful Provider, but His provision came with a test.

They were not to store up more than they needed each day. If they did, it would spoil. In doing so, they would also demonstrate, vertically speaking, a lack of trust in God to provide the next day, and horizontally speaking, a lack of concern for their neighbor who invariably did not get enough because of their hoarding.

The goal of gathering and redistributing manna was to be sure everyone had enough. Those who gathered much got to share with those who gathered little so everyone had enough. In Paul's thinking, Christian giving happens when those with more than enough share with Christians who have less than enough. The goal is for everyone to have enough.

Paul is graciously teaching the Corinthians and us to have concern for others. To teach this, we must first live it. Personally, I have found that I have been guilty of sinning both vertically and horizontally. For much of my life, I hoarded more than enough money and possessions rather than sharing them with Christians who had less than enough. This showed both a disregard for God's teachings and lack of concern for brothers and sisters in Christ in need around the

world. In obedience to God, my wife and I decided to quit storing up treasures on earth; instead, we share them with needy Christians and trust God to provide for our daily and future needs. It's amazing to see Him provide. In letting go, the paradox is that we take hold of the life that is real life (cf. 1 Tim. 6:17–19).

Want to join us? To help others to grow in Christian generosity, let it start with you. Martin Luther says: “A man is generous because he trusts God and never doubts that he will always have enough. In contrast, a man is covetous and anxious because he does not trust God. Now faith is the master workman and the motivating force behind the good works of generosity, just as it is in all the other commandments.”¹ Are you anxious? Covetous? We were. We still are sometimes. Friends, encouraging Christian generosity is ultimately about growing in faith and humbly pointing others down the same path.

1. Martin Luther, *Treatise on Good Works 3* in *Selected Writings of Martin Luther: 1529–1546*, ed. Theodore Gerhardt Tappert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1967), 191.

CHAPTER 7

Steward Leaders must administrate gifts honorably before God and man

We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.

2 Corinthians 8:20–21

We return to the topic of gift administration with a fresh twist. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul sketched internal processes for taking up the collection. Here Paul appears to share the rationale for such controls: so that the administration of the collection can stand the test of external scrutiny. It must be handled right before God and man.

In the ancient world, those who handled collections, such as tax collectors and civic leaders, commonly shaved off a portion for themselves.

Showing favoritism and taking bribes were also common practices. None of this was to happen with the administration of this collection.

Today, inviting external examination of gift administration and overall financial management takes the form of a financial audit. Most non-profit organizations and churches hire an outside firm to do an audit on an annual basis. If the ministry you serve does not do an annual audit, it should. Not because you do not trust your staff, but to build trust with your constituents that your institutional stewardship has integrity.

Additionally, numerous organizations in North America voluntarily welcome the scrutiny of their processes and controls by the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability. This extra set of eyes helps not only affirm activities are being done in a law-abiding manner before men, but also ensures they are God-honoring.

Stewards Leaders should discuss this topic with the board to which they report. Statements like this one from Bob Snyder represent the fruit of such conversations. His board reads a series of eight statements every meeting to reaffirm their commitments, and one relates to stewardship: “We believe those

resources God has made available to this ministry should be used in such a way that under the scrutiny of God and others we can be confident that they have been used for the best and highest purposes and projects within the scope of the ministry.”¹

Boards and Steward Leaders bless the organizations they serve in following Paul’s example and enacting such measures as drafting stewardship statements, submitting to the scrutiny of auditors, and welcoming the oversight of the ECFA. Consequently, they may not be immune from problems, but they will ensure that gift administration is governed in a manner that is right before God and man.

1. Does your organization have a guiding principle on stewardship?

This statement is one of the eight Guiding Principles of International Health Services. For more info about IHS, visit www.internationalhealthservices.org.

CHAPTER 8

Steward Leaders teach the spiritual implications of earthly giving

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

2 Corinthians 9:6

The law of the harvest says: what you sow, you reap. Paul adds: “if you sow sparingly, you will reap sparingly.” He echoes the thinking of the Teacher in Ecclesiastes 11:6, “Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.” In using this motif, Paul is not talking about farming; he is teaching the Corinthians that there is a spiritual use for the earthly resources in their possession.

Few modern leaders talk about the spiritual implications for earthly giving better than Randy

Alcorn. He sums it up in this way. “Our perspective on and handling of money is a litmus test of our true character. It is an index of our spiritual life. Our stewardship of money tells a deep and consequential story. It forms our biography. In a sense, how we relate to money and possessions is the story of our lives.”¹ What story would your handling of money tell? Would it say you believed life consisted in the abundance of possessions? Would it declare you gave out of a sense of duty or to get something in return? Or would it show you are living this life to prepare for eternity?

For Steward Leaders, there’s a pitfall here. Do not sow truth in hearts because it is a strategy that works to increase giving by a certain percentage annually. One ministry leader I know took this approach. Rather than try to impart stewardship principles, he decided to just buy copies of Randy Alcorn’s book, *The Treasure Principle*, and give it to his congregation. Did it bear fruit? Sure, because he sowed seed, but much more fruit could have come had he sowed truth in the lives of his people day and night.

Andy Stanley likewise raises our sights heaven-

1. Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1989), 21–22.

ward. “What is given away cannot be taken away. Money invested in God’s kingdom is immediately out of reach of the most turbulent of economic conditions. It is the most secure of all investments.”² Steward Leaders who sow truths that teach the spiritual implications of earthly giving transform the thinking and living of those they serve. You should, too, but don’t do it because it’s a strategy that works. Do it because it positions people to experience the journey of generosity that is both life changing and eternity shaping.

2. Andy Stanley, *Fields of Gold* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2004), 115.

CHAPTER 9

God loves cheerful givers
who realize He provides the
resources for giving

*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. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.
2 Corinthians 9:7–8*

Paul teaches that giving decisions are between you and God, and they are something you must determine in your heart. He also expresses that reluctance should not characterize your giving and compulsion should not influence it. The reason Paul says giving is a spiritual decision between you and God is because God owns everything, has entrusted stuff to you as a steward, and your orders for their use should come from God alone.

Reluctance and compulsion were realities in the

ancient realm of giving. There were responsibilities and expectations tied to being rich. Your duty was to give to the people of your city, and in return they would provide you with honor and service in reciprocity. Also, if those above you in the hierarchy of authority compelled you to give something, you had to give it whether you wanted to or not. Understanding this is significant before reading this text because Paul has again subverted the system. Rather than pulling rank on them and compelling them to give, which they would have done reluctantly, he leaves the giving decision where it belongs—between them and God.

On this note I like to remind Steward Leaders that not only should we not care how much a person gives, we cannot care. If we do, even a little bit, we show that our interaction with them is merely compelling them to our ends. By letting go of the controls, Paul graciously invites the Corinthians and us to discover that God is able to provide resources for giving time and time again.

I think we never look more like Christ than when we give from cheerful hearts. Francisco Fernández Carvajal notes, “Our gifts have to spring from a compassionate heart, one that is filled with love for

God and other people. Over and above the material value of our gifts we need to keep in mind the importance of our interior disposition. The spirit of true charity is intimately interconnected with a joyful heart.”¹ Are you encouraging people to give from a heart of love or have you been using coercive tactics to pressure people to give to help you meet your goals? What would an audit of your conversations and your communications reveal?

1. Francisco Fernández Carvajal, Volume 5 of *In Conversations with God*, 425.

CHAPTER 10

Christian giving meets needs and the expressions of thanks bring glory to God

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

2 Corinthians 9:10–12

Paul teaches us the two outcomes of Christian giving. Those in need are satisfied, and this service results in expressions of thanks to God.

This entire passage reflects the opposite of what the realm of giving was like in the ancient world and what our modern culture pressures us to believe about

giving. In Paul's day, the cultural norms dictated that the rich were to do good deeds for those who could give something in return, such as service. Resources were deemed scarce and the rich were literally taught not to give to the destitute because they could not reciprocate. Paul turns these cultural norms upside down, or perhaps, puts them right side up.

Paul calls the Corinthians to give on every occasion, with an abundance mentality based on the reality that God is their Provider. He also does not promise them glory for their giving, as God will be glorified and thanked for their participation. The Corinthians can imitate God's generosity by sharing His resources freely with others. Steward Leaders who understand this unleash heaven!

Are your development programs promoting an abundance or scarcity mentality? Are you telling stories of sacrificial giving and sowing truth in the lives of people like Paul did with the Corinthians? Need to revisit what you are doing and make some changes? If so, start today.

CONCLUSION

Four Rules from George Mueller

In this book I have tried to explain in twenty minutes what took me twenty years to discern: just as God's ownership of everything changes how Christians approach giving, understanding that God provides everything changes our role in asking. We do not have to provide for the ministries we serve. While trusting God to provide, we get to proclaim this profound truth in word and deed: that stewards were made to participate with God in His work with the gifts, goods, and grace that they have received from Him.

As Paul mentioned the Macedonians to inspire the Corinthians, I conclude with a story to inspire you. In the 1800s in Bristol, England, there lived a humble man, George Mueller, who wanted to care for poor orphans. After studying the word of God,

he chose four rules to guide his steward leadership.¹

1. Not to receive any fixed salary, both because in the collecting of it there was often much that was at variance with the freewill offering with which God's service is to be maintained, and in the receiving of it a danger of placing more dependence on human sources of income than in the living God Himself.

2. Never to ask any human for help, however great the need, but to make his wants known to the God who has promised to care for His servants and to hear their prayers.

3. To take this command (Luke 12:33) literally, "Sell that thou hast and give alms," and never to save up money, but to spend all God entrusted to him on God's poor, on the work of His kingdom.

4. Also to take Romans 8:8 literally, "Owe no man anything," never to buy on credit or be in debt, but to trust God to provide. While this mode of living was not easy at first, the rewards outweighed the hard-

1. Andrew Murray, *George Mueller and the Secret of His Power in Prayer* (Portland: The Prayer Foundation, 2002), 2.

ships. [He] testifies it was most blessed in bringing the soul to rest in God, and drawing it into closer union with Himself.

Essentially, these rules positioned him to depend on God in good times and bad, to use what he had to attend to God's work while always sharing any surplus on God's poor, and he avoided debt while trusting God to provide.

Did his ministry flourish? It did in a manner that can only be attributed to the provision of God. Research reveals he received more than \$7,200,000 in gifts through prayer, personally cared for more than 10,000 orphans, and rallied hundreds to participate with him in God's work in establishing 117 schools that educated more than 120,000 children in the Christian faith. Like Paul, he taught and modeled what he learned from God's word: to attend to God's work while trusting God to provide the resources and rallying others to join him.

If your soul is not at rest, might it be because you are trying to provide for the ministry you serve? Perhaps God is calling you, like Mueller, to experience "a closer union with Himself" by growing in faith to help others grow. That is where this journey

has led and continues to lead me.



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