

GIVING: Are You Trustworthy in God's Eyes?

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Let's discuss the highest level of generosity—extravagant giving. Anybody can be involved in obedience giving, thank God. It's the only place to start on the journey, but it's still just the start.

When you begin to graduate through your spiritual journey to reach the highest level, not only are you blessed by Him but you also get closer to Him. You receive an understanding of the Holy Spirit and the gifts and develop greater gifts. When you give, you experience a supernatural release in your life that empowers you to impact all around you for generations to come—for the sake of the gospel—and it's unmistakable.

I must be entirely honest about this level. You will probably only meet a handful of people in your whole life who live as humble, openhanded, extravagant givers. When they say, "Hey, that guy right there will give you the shirt off his back," they're talking about an extravagant giver, who will probably give you shirts for 20 other people too.

That's where I want the church to be. I want to see people go out and live extravagantly generous lives. That's why I often tell people in the church I pastor, "If you go to a restaurant and you are not a decent tipper, do not tell them you go to Global Vision because we are a generous people, hoping to become more extravagantly generous every year—and 'take hold of that which is truly life.'"

Intersection of Sacrifice and Extravagance

Whenever we eat out, my wife Tai and I have a practice of asking the Holy Spirit how much to tip the wait staff, and we always let it become an exercise in biblical generosity. While I don't necessarily consider generous tipping an example of extravagant giving (though it can be), it is at the very least a clear way for tithers to move into the sacrificial level with greater spontaneity in the spirit. The primary reason folks don't tip well is because they want to keep more of their money for themselves rather than be a blessing to someone else. It really is that simple.

We all need to navigate that sacrificial crossroads along our journey, and tipping big is an easy place to start—as is spontaneously giving to a friend in need or a hurting stranger at an intersection, homeless or not. Once you get into the practice of sacrificial giving on these personal levels, it becomes far easier to get sacrificial at the church level, and you'll begin to look for opportunities to give extravagantly. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 25: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me," (v. 40, ESV). There could hardly be a clearer command to be generous with strangers.

Julian and the Waitress

I recall the first time we took Julian to dinner with us. "Jules," as I call him, is one of our associate producers at Locke Media and a young man who is wise beyond his years. I felt led to use this as a teaching moment for him, just as I have for all our own kids. The lesson has profoundly affected each of them on their own generosity journeys, so I try to continue that teaching model whenever the opportunity presents itself. Jules is now a dear friend and a generous one at that.

When the waitress came to serve us, she apparently knew we were pastors, as she started spilling out about stuff she was

going through. Her stories told me enough to know she was hurting for help, but the Holy Spirit told me even more, so I was excited about how this would affect Jules.

I asked her, "What's the biggest tip you've ever received?" She said, "Eighty-five bucks." I then asked, "What are you and your family in need of?" It turned out she lived with her parents, who were very sick, so you can imagine. I then asked, "What do you need right now?" She struggled to share that she had some school bills due, and they added up to about \$500.

You must realize that is a lot of money for someone working tables and putting up with mean-spirited people who yell at her because the tea wasn't right or belittle her while complaining, "You didn't make my steak right!" (She's not even the one who cooks the steak.) Even more, you never know what your waitress is going through. She may be going through a divorce. She may have just lost a baby. But she is still out there working her fingers to the bone trying to keep her head above the misery just so you can make her feel like garbage and give her a \$5 tip.

I said, "Well, ma'am, we want to bless you, so we're going to pray about what the Lord wants us to give you." When Tai confirmed what I was thinking, we knew it was God's number for her.

When I preach in other cities, I occasionally receive love offerings that give me this sort of liberty, and I had just returned from one of those meetings, so the timing was perfect. Once she saw that I gave her a \$1,500 tip, the young woman threw the menu up in front of her face, fell out in the booth behind her like she was slain in the Holy Ghost, and—with a restaurant full of people wondering what the commotion was all about—screamed, "Hooh, Lord Jesus! Hoooooh!" As we walked out, I looked Jules square in the face and said, "That's what I live for. To make people shout 'Lord Jesus!' That's what I live for."

I obviously can't always do that, but that's what made it an extravagant act for me at that moment. I have needs like everyone else, and God meets them. So, when I have the means to bless someone extravagantly, I'm going to do it even if it leaves my pockets empty. To walk in biblical generosity, you have to believe in God's promises, and I do—every single one of them. How about you?

One Master

Giving sacrificially or extravagantly takes a dramatic shift in where you see yourself in the kingdom. If you're seeking "first the kingdom of God" as Jesus commands us, you will only store your treasure in heaven, and that requires obedience to His Word when it comes to your money. In this case, He's specifically referring to obedience to His commands on giving at all three levels.

If we try to keep our extra money for our own extravagances or "lay it up" somewhere else in this world, the money becomes our master. But if we give it to those in need as commanded, we are storing it up in heaven and proving God to be our Master (Matt. 6:24). If you're earthly minded, you may never have contemplated what it means to store "treasure in heaven," but those who are kingdom minded—heavenly minded—can't stop thinking about it. The thought of storing more treasure in heaven with God as our Master consumes us. And according to Jesus, we're all 100% consumed by one of two masters: God or money. You simply can't have it both ways.

For me, money is the biggest demotivator on the planet. You ask anybody who works for me. When Wayne, our producer/director, is leading our negotiations at Locke Media, whether it be for a film or a book deal or any of the other gospel media we produce, there's always a point where money becomes the primary topic. We've been in phone conferences and Zoom meetings with major distributors and publishers, and as soon as they start talking money to grease the wheels and win

me over, he knows to shut it down. More than once I've heard him say, "Hey, can we not talk about our profit potential? We're just looking to reach the largest audience possible, and money simply will not move Pastor Locke." With a chuckle he'll add, "Really, you're about to lose him." And he's right. I never had to ask him to say that because he's been with me for a very long time, and he knows that money will never move me—only God.

Words + Action = Gaudium Deo!

Recently our church family took an opportunity for extravagant giving. We collected offerings, but not for our expenses—I never ask for offerings to cover those because I trust God will provide. Instead, we are sowing into the ministry of Pastor Israel Pochtar, who is doing incredible work in Israel and beyond. His church is at the forefront of mass evangelism in Israel, and it's truly inspiring to witness how God is working through their humanitarian efforts and spreading the Gospel.

I was there during Pentecost and saw firsthand the number of people coming to faith in the Messiah. It was a beautiful experience. My first trip to Israel deeply impacted me, and it's the only place I've never lived that I'm homesick for every day. There's something profound about being there, and I want you to feel the same spirit of generosity that God has stirred in me.

I had been preparing our congregation for this. We dedicated the entire in-house and online offering to Pastor Israel and his ministry. My wife and I had been saving for this moment, and we gave one of the largest gifts we've ever given. We encouraged everyone to join us in giving faithfully.

Christianity isn't a get-rich-quick scheme. Never has been. Sowing into what God cares about is always a wise decision. And always has been. Today, we're praying and sowing into

Israel—both the nation and the person. We're giving generously, and we won't apologize for it because we believe it's what God wants us to do.

Yes, we have significant needs as a church. We're currently involved in six lawsuits, with four stemming from the days we kept our church open during the COVID-19 situation. We've spent over \$600,000 in legal fees, but God has been with us and we're winning those battles. The enemy tries to distract and unsettle us, but I'm not worried. Our church is in the best position it's ever been in during our 19 years. Despite our needs, God has impressed upon me to bless His people, and I believe He will lift the lid on our blessings when we are faithful.

We took the opportunity to bless Israel Pochtar's ministry. Every penny, nickel, dime, dollar and check—both in person and online—went directly to Israel. Through the generosity of our congregation, we were able to give \$200,000 to Pastor Pochtar. This is not the first time we've given such a large sum, and it won't be the last!

I am convinced that God will honor us as a church and as individuals for standing with His people and giving generously. Let's partner with God today and stand with His heart. Amen.

Pastor Greg Locke is the founding and lead pastor of Global Vision Bible Church in Mount Juliet, Tennessee. He is also the founder of Locke Media and Global Vision Press. Locke has authored four #1 best-selling books, including the three-book *Spiritual Warfare* series. His newest book, *The Generosity Journey*, is available now on . He and his wife, Taisha, share six kids and one very blessed grandchild.