



## The Size Of Our Heart

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*“As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. “I tell you the truth,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.” (Luke 21)*

All gifts are not given with a giving heart. When I spoke with a woman who works with extremely wealthy philanthropists and commended their generosity, her response startled me, “Generosity has little to do with it,” she said. “To truly be generous you would have to need what you’re giving away. The numbers these people give away may seem large to you and me, but for many of them it’s nothing but the froth coming off the top. They don’t feel it at all. In fact, the majority are doing it for social reasons more than for charitable reasons.”

The text I quoted above confronts charitable giving with the question, “Am I giving toward a need or out of a need to be recognized?” A subsequent question is, “Do I give because I should, or because it is the pulse of my heart to feel for others and do what I can to help?” There is a vast difference between the motivations of obligation and compassion.

We all know someone like the woman who gave what little she had—a mother, an aunt or uncle, or a grandmother who simply lives to help others. These individuals don’t make themselves out to be martyrs when they do something for others, but rather radiate a sheer and translucent joy when given the opportunity to do something for someone else. They live to give. They possess giving hearts. I have a daughter with such a soul, and she has become an object lesson to me on the natural impulse and inclination of generosity.

Years ago I found a purse that she had misplaced and had been missing for quite some time. The purse contained her babysitting and allowance earnings. There was around \$200 in it—quite a sum for a 14-year-old. Wanting to use the serendipitous find as a money-management lesson, I sat down with Sophia and suggested making a plan of what she wanted to do with the money. I thought it would be a great opportunity for me to teach some money-life lessons, but it ended up that I was the student in this instance.

She started by peeling off \$90 and said, “I’d like to send this much to flood victims. Now how much do I have left?”

With that first portion I had anticipated her wanting to save the money in the bank or to spend on clothes. I smiled and answered, “A little over half is what you have left.”

That act of charity was so effortless for her—instinctual and without hesitation. The gesture was unimpeded by the fears and cynical rationale we adults learn to excuse our apathy. She surmised that there was nothing she

needed as badly as the flood victims needed. I was taken aback by the amount calculated by nothing but heart. I had expected her to mention something in the 10% to 20% range for giving—but not 45%. I inquired further about her designs on the remaining balance. “Do you want to save any?”

“Yeah,” she responded. “How about I save half of what is left, and spend the other half?”

Her spending plan was one that flowed organically from a giving heart—one that had not yet learned to cling to money. I also loved the order of her approach to managing money: give-save-spend.

Observing Sophia’s generous inclination, I sensed that if we, as parents, nurture a giving heart in our children, greed has very little opening to enter into their lives. The joy of a giving heart so radically transcends the transitory thrills of self-consumption that it becomes a letdown to overindulge on oneself. Generosity is the great buzz of the true life—and the greater the sacrifice, the greater the buzz.

### *Enough For Me*

For almost three decades I have lived in Rochester, Minn., which is home to the famed Mayo Clinic—a base for some of the best and brightest physicians and surgeons in the world. When I first moved here, my pastor told me of his admiration of a parishioner in our church who at that time was regarded as the top-rated surgeon in the world in his particular discipline. The pastor shared with me how deeply involved this man was in reaching out to the needy and the world community. He shared the remarkable fact with me that annually this man gave away 90% of his income.

Here was a man—the absolute best at what he did in all the world, and possessing the potential to earn millions annually in private practice—opting instead for the pay scale offered at the Mayo Clinic, and then giving 90% of that portion away.

At that time, I was just getting started, and living in what some call a “starter neighborhood.” The physician lived just a few blocks away in the same neighborhood. I drove a five-year-old car. He drove one slightly older. I remember how humbled I felt by this extraordinary example of how a person can choose to live. What level of influence would be brought to bear upon our culture if more of us set an example in that general direction?

We have an annual publishing of the 1,000 richest people in America, which is always received with great anticipation. The interest in the Forbes list of the richest Americans is staggering. Old issues are for sale on eBay. Americans don’t just want to know the numbers, they want to see the inside of these people’s homes, their hometowns and their family life status. They want a way to measure success—and material assets fill the bill. Will there ever be a publishing of the 1,000 most generous or the 1,000 most socially conscious and merciful? If there have been such listings, they certainly don’t garner acclaim like the roll call for the wealthy.

Boldergiving.org and Generousgiving.org are groups encouraging the idea of radical generosity, challenging wealthy individuals to give away as much as 90% and live on the rest. For those who are not ready to take the radical 90% plunge, they demonstrate how to live well while giving away 50%. They share stories of people who have done so. These stories are inspiring and radically liberating. I encourage you to visit their sites and read the stories.

The testimonies of people who made a radical decision to give reveal how money let go of them when they let go of money. One of the steps that these groups encourage people to take is to calculate their surplus. How do people know what they are capable of giving if they do not know their surplus?

Our lives in North America are replete with surplus. Yet we are exhorted by the investment industry to act and think as if we are always just a hop and a skip away from pushing a shopping cart through the streets. Consider the fact that most of us not only have filled garages and closets but also many stuffed storage facilities—and are paying monthly to store things we don't use. We all have some degree of surplus.

The idea of calculating our surplus is a noble one. The “pulse” of the giving heart is in asking, “What do I possess that I do not need as badly as someone else might need it?” But we are only exercising “marginal generosity” when we give away our surplus. It is when we give away that which we may need later on that we are truly living out generosity. That is when true liberation from money's grip takes place. It lets go when we let go.

A giving heart is a distributing heart. A heart first gathers blood and then keeps it moving. This movement—known as a pulse—is what keeps us alive, both in a physical and a deeper sense. In the intersection of our spiritual lives and our money, it helps to understand our responsibility as stewards, which is to maintain a giving pulse, to constantly distribute. This gives our lives a transcendent vitality.

The bacteria of money anxiety and anxious gathering permeating our culture flourishes in ponds, but cannot flourish in water that flows. The messages about never having enough are abundant, but ironically, so are the messages about spending to satisfy some inner need for importance and significance. We are torn between messages to spend to be somebody and to save to avoid being a nobody later in life. If you and I decide to be a person that lives to give, we will clearly be in the minority. The world not only needs your giving heart, it needs your daily example of what generosity means.[]

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