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## CREATING SPIRITUAL DONORS Understanding the Motivations of Donors

Some year ago, I was doing consulting with a wonderful church in the west coast region of the United States. They had experienced incredible growth in a place where most people would think churches are non-existent. And yet, this church was seeing over 4,000 people in their four weekend services on Saturday night and Sunday morning. The pastor was a very entrepreneurial type guy that over time I learned to truly respect and admire. In fact, I believe he knows how to lead an effective ministry as well as anyone in church ministry. In addition, he has an incredibly contagious personality in and out of the pulpit. You walk away from meeting this guy, not just feeling good about him, but truly feeling better about yourself. He is the classic “lifter,” not a “leaner.”

As I worked with this church I discovered something that is probably not unique to their financial department, but maybe a little more exaggerated. They had fourteen different funds to which their donors could contribute money. Seriously! In addition, to the general fund, which is the unrestricted giving of donors to the church, they had another thirteen funds available. Over time and through a lot of work and consulting, we were able to actually narrow the thirteen funds down to four. Believe me, that was no small task.

I tell you this story to illustrate a very clear principle that all pastors intuitively know, if not intellectually. You may have ten, twelve, maybe fourteen funds to give to at your church, but you really only have two. The two funds are dictated by the way donors think and how they respond to ministry.

### Major Giving Motivators

**The two types of giving to the local church ministry are responsibility and revelatory giving.** The two are totally different beyond just the typical description as either restricted or unrestricted income. They have different motivational factors and are driven out of a different set of needs by the donor.

First, let’s look at responsibility giving and how it is defined. When you are in a traditional family, everyone has certain responsibilities around the home. It may be to dust, mop, take out the trash, wash the dishes, wash the clothes. We all know what it is like to “pitch in” and take care of business around the home. We also know that unless these typical responsibilities are taken care of, the “extras” don’t really matter. For example, if my responsibility is to make sure the cars are gassed up and properly maintained, then every week I have to make sure those things are done properly and in a timely manner. If I go out and buy new twenty-two inch rims and low profile tires, that is over and above the general maintaining of the vehicle. It is a lot more fun, but it is not necessary to the general maintenance of the car. So, if I’m “tricking out” the car but not fueling the car, after awhile we are going to have issues in the home. Responsibility says that before I buy the rims, I better buy gas. That, and believe this about men, is a sign of maturity.

Now, how does that apply to the church and giving? **Responsibility giving in the local church is a sign of maturity in a Christian.** Responsibility giving is when I give my tithes and offerings to the ministry without any kind of designation of the funds. It is like taking care of the little things around the house. Therefore, the church can use those funds anywhere they see fit to use them. More importantly, this is the point. **The driver**

**for the donor giving to the general fund of the local church is simply their maturity in Christ.** As they take ownership of their faith in Christ, their maturity is expressed through their giving. They give because they know it is commanded of them to give to the work of ministry. And, that method of giving is most often referred to as tithes and offerings. I don't have to pray about this kind of giving. I don't need to fast. I don't need to wonder if this is the right thing to do. I do it as the revealed will of God for the financing of the work of ministry through the local church. And the expression of this kind of giving is a reflection of a mature heart for the Kingdom.

Therefore, I don't have to like everything that is going on in the church to tithe or give to the general fund. I may not like the pastor's tie or robe. I may not like the songs we sung that morning or the message the pastor preached. I give because I know that God has called me as a faithful steward to give tithes and offerings to what Malachi calls "the storehouse." And, I don't have to like everything that's going on in the church. I give because I am called to be a mature steward of that which God has given to me.

I do not concern myself with how the church will spend it or where they spend it. As a mature believer in Christ, I just give it and then it becomes the church's responsibility to be a good and faithful steward of that gift. Things that I may dislike about the church don't stop me from giving to the church.

Now, there is a second way of giving to the church and I call it "revelatory giving." The reason for that terminology is simply that, in most cases, people pray and ask God what it is He wants to do through them. This is "over and above" giving or more commonly called, sacrificial giving. This type of giving is done in addition to your responsibility giving. And while I may not like the songs or sermon, I will keep giving to the general fund of the church. When it comes to revelatory giving, a "little pebble" can knock contributors off this entire giving path. I may show up for a Tuesday night men's meeting and there's a sign on the door that says, "Men's Meeting Moved To Saturday Morning." Not only has the church wasted my time, but also the first thought that runs through my mind is "will these guys ever get it together." And, a little pebble like this can immediately affect my over and above giving. While it doesn't affect my tithes and offerings, it can affect my sacrificial giving. And, that's what it is. Revelatory giving is "over and above" giving that is typically measured by some sacrifice in my life. Sacrifice meaning it will change my lifestyle to give in this manner.

While responsibility giving is a measurement of my maturity in Christ, **revelatory or sacrificial giving is a measurement of my belief in the future of the church ministry.** I hope you got that. I give sacrificially to building programs, missions trips, benevolent ventures because I believe the church has a great future. As I take ownership of my future, it is expressed through sacrificial giving. That is why with top financial donors when challenged to give to major church projects or ministry initiatives, they do not think in terms of giving but rather, investing. And investing is always done on the basis of future potential. If a major donor is continually knocked off the donor path by "little pebbles," his belief in the future of the ministry begins to fade. As the vision for the future begins to fade in the life of donors, the passion begins to leak out of their financial commitment to that future.

Did you get the difference? Responsibility giving is driven out of the fact that I am a mature Christian. Therefore, it is incumbent upon me to give to the general fund of the church. The scriptures command it. But, revelatory or sacrificial giving is driven out of my belief in the future of the church. "I will sacrifice for my church because I believe the future of the ministry is great. Therefore, it is worthy of my investment."

New church projects, like buildings and ministry initiatives, must be approached with this clear definition in mind. Just because some one is a faithful tither doesn't necessarily mean they will show up when you call them to sacrificial giving. As a mature believer, they tithe. No matter what. But, if they don't believe the church has a great future, they will not show up when you call them to sacrificial giving.

Just because a person has a lot of wealth doesn't necessarily mean they will or will not show up for your next project. *Financial maturity does not equal spiritual maturity.* So, they may show up for your project but they may not give to the general fund of the church. I know this drives pastors crazy. As a consultant, I was working with a church in the Midwest and after the campaign was completed we did a financial analysis of

the results. The results showed that the largest gift came from a family that was not even among the Top 100 donors to the general fund. The pastor went ballistic when he saw this in the report. I had to remind him that financial maturity doesn't equal spiritual maturity. So, when this family saw the opportunity to give to the relocation of the church they were ready and eager to support the effort. Why? Because they believed in the future of the church. They believed that the church had an incredible vision and it drove them to support the vision passionately. Not based on maturity, based on belief in the future of the ministry. In fact, we later discovered that they were new Christians and had not developed the spiritual discipline of tithing and giving. In essence, they were still immature Christians that had been blessed with a lot of wealth and loved their new church. Therefore, when the opportunity was presented they gave passionately to the future of the ministry.

When you are thinking about your next church project or initiative, remember that donors are driven in their sacrificial giving by the vision of the church. Your stewardship campaign should be driven by vision, not by finances. Great visions do not have to lack funds, even in a downturn economy. Remember, great vision, cast by a great communicator, will always trump by economics. People are not moved by great projects, but rather they are moved by great visions. So, the vision must be understandable, meaningful, and repeatable. In today's business world, they talk about the portability of vision. That simply means that it communicates in every environment. Whether you are talking to your top donors or communicating with a single mom raising three kids by herself, the vision must be understandable and meaningful. It must be communicated in a creative and strategic way that allows everyone to "find his or her place in the dream." That is the kind of vision that evokes passion in followers. The best vision casters never have a problem creating vision carriers. They never have a problem funding the future of the ministry because they know how to paint a compelling future where the donor sees himself or herself clearly as part of it. Passion is created when a donor sees himself or herself clearly as an instrument to be used in the development of the church's future. That passion will drive them to sacrifice for that future.

It doesn't mean they don't have questions. And the more capacity they have for giving to the project, the more questions they will have. Not because they don't trust the leadership but because they have more at stake financially. They clearly have a different set of questions and you will need to meet with them to make sure that all "pebbles" have been removed from their sacrificial giving path.

### **How To Clear The Sacrificial Path**

**Here are a few principles that will help as you clear the "pebbles" off the path of the future for your next project:**

1. Cast a portable vision among the various segments and targeted audiences of your church. And, you will need to cast it more often than you think. Cast it in such a way that they can easily find where they fit in the ministry's future.
2. Create vision carriers to help you in transmitting the vision among the various targeted audiences. Equip your top leaders to talk about the vision the way you talk about it. Help them to feel, hear, and see the vision the way God has given it to you. Let them sense what it is that keeps you up at night and wakes you up in the morning.
3. Ask your vision carriers (leaders) to "own" the vision with you. They will only own the vision as they feel responsibility for it and should that responsibility.
4. Let your vision carriers feel the responsibility of carrying the message to the appropriate targeted audiences. All leaders in the church have a sphere of influence. They are the E. F. Hutton of that group. When they speak, everyone in their sphere of influence listens. Ask them to take ownership of the vision and communicate with those within their sphere of influence.
5. Make the vision portable. Vision should create passion, but not within just one constituency of the church. Allow the vision to have life and create passion in followers of all the targeted audiences of the church. How will this project affect the future of our children? Our students? Our college/career group? Our parents? Our empty nesters? Our music and arts department? Our education department? However it is that you tease out the segments of your church, you should have a clear message for them that creates passion and ultimately drives them to wholehearted sacrifice.

6. Allow them the opportunity to ask questions about the project. You can only deal with the issues that you know exists. Remember, the goal is to remove the “pebbles” so that the sacrificial path is clear and leads to wholehearted giving.
7. Attach them to a spiritual process, not a financial one. The financial process leads to availability giving. I look at my checkbook and see what I have after paying the bills and then I give accordingly. The spiritual process allows them to partner with God and ask the question, “God, what is it you want to do through me to advance the vision at my church?” Good question. With availability giving, the question is, “What can I do?” Not so good. With sacrificial giving, the question should be, “God, what do you want to do through me?” It doesn’t matter how much you have accumulated in this life, God’s financial pile is bigger than yours. I would rather have God resourcing my gift than me.
8. Keep them informed of any changes or updates in the ministry project or initiative. Rick Warren has been saying it for years, “people tend to be down on what they are not up on.” Make sure your people have the right information, not parking lot information. You know what I’m talking about!
9. Call your people to a spiritual commitment. Once they have settled the stewardship/ownership issues in their life, they have heard the voice of God, they are ready to respond to the voice of God, and they are believing for God to do a miracle through them, call the people to a season of commitment. In other words, allow God to “close the deal.”
10. Follow up with your donors after they have made the commitment. Don’t assume little “pebbles” will not get back in their path. Make sure they are informed of any changes to the project and the progress of the project. Help them to finish the race and feel good about what God has done through them and the church.

These are difficult economic waters that we are called to navigate these days. It is important we know these principles, but more importantly, to use them as we call those that God has given us charge over to responsibility and sacrificial giving. The rewards will be incredible as the people of God walk in faithfulness and sacrifice. It will create incredible energy and passion in them for the things that God is calling the church to do.

**Leadership will sustain the church’s future.** We must continually raise up new leaders and equip existing leaders. **Stewardship will fuel the church’s future.** Money provides ministries, which are facilitated in buildings, and those buildings are used to reach people that are distant from God and disciple those that belong to Him. We must do both effectively as church leaders. We must raise leaders and dollars. When we do, the church is well led and well fueled to pursue her God-given dreams.

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