

MAGNOLIA MINDS: Exchange – Gaining Through Giving Up

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There we were again, wheels spinning in the desert sand, stuck for what felt like the tenth time. We had no cell service, no shade, and no Triple AAA auto to come to our rescue. How exactly did we find ourselves stuck in the middle of nowhere?

I had made the decision to spend my thirteenth birthday on a mission trip to work with the Rendille tribe of northern Kenya. I would learn what I thought I was giving up – money, summer activities, time with friends – would be nothing compared to what I would gain: new friends, unique cultural experiences, and an everlasting perspective. That trip would teach me that as followers of Christ, we often gain the most through giving up.

How do we gain through giving up? We gain through surrender. For the Christ follower, life begins with surrender. We surrender our plans, dreams, desires, and will. In essence, we gain life by surrendering life itself.

Our world tells us to follow our dream to find happiness. Christ lovingly tells us to place our dream in His hands so that He can reveal an even better one. If only it was as easy as surrendering once, at the beginning of our journey, never having to revisit it again. Rather, as missionary Elisabeth Elliot reminds us, “One does not surrender a life in an instant. That which is lifelong can only be surrendered in a lifetime” (Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty*, pg. 91).

This echoes Jesus’ words to His disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it,

but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:24-25 ESV).

How do we gain through giving up? We gain through sacrifice. If surrendering is the laying down of our lives at the feet of Jesus, then sacrifice is the giving up of things for the sake of Jesus. Sometimes we are led to sacrifice what Jesus called earthly treasures, things that "moth and rust destroy where thieves break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19 ESV).

Jesus knew how much we would struggle with our desire for earthly riches. Psychologist Elisabeth Lombardo calls this desire for more the "Treadmill Effect," saying, "We think external things we buy will bring us happiness, but when we get them we wonder, 'What's next?'" This filling of our hands with earthly things keeps us from grasping the abundant life Christ offers us.

While some sacrifices carry an earthly price tag, others come at a much higher cost. Brothers and sisters in Christ all around the world sacrifice much more than their bank accounts. These sacrifices include rights, freedoms, and even families.

We see these sacrifices played out in the life of Petr Jasek, who found himself imprisoned for the faith. After his release, Jasek journaled, "But as I began telling those men about the love of Christ and saw them respond in obedience to God I suddenly realized: what is four months in prison compared to an eternity in Heaven?" (Jasek, Petr: Imprisoned with Isis: Faith in the Face of Evil, pg. 210).

How do we gain through giving up? We gain through serving others. Of all things we could dare to achieve on earth, those that bring the deepest meaning are the ones done for someone else. We gain purpose through helping those around us.

In his book *Raising a Modern Day Knight*, Robert Lewis states, "Nothing grates on a man's spirit quite like irrelevance" (Lewis, pg. 83). It would seem the height of irrelevance would

be dying with the knowledge that my life mattered only to me. If this is true, then living a life of greatness demands that we make a difference in the lives of others.

Jesus taught us this very principle when He said we become great by serving others (Matthew 20:26 ESV). Throughout history, men and women have been memorialized not because of what they did for themselves, but for the contributions they made to society.

As a member of the Civil Air Patrol, Air Force Auxiliary, I have been taught to live by four core values, one of which is serving others. Although our group's main focus is on leadership, I have learned the path to leadership is walked with a servant's heart.

While this applies to serving our fellow citizens, Jesus was teaching this message long before our nation was born. His blessings are not only for us to enjoy. He blesses us to bless others. His giftings are not only for our good. He gives us spiritual gifts so that we can help others.



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The Apostle Peter told the early church, "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10 NIV). Peter understood firsthand the benefit of

serving others. His was a life forever changed by the service of Christ.

How do we gain through giving up? Jim Elliot, well-known missionary to Ecuador, journaled, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose" (pg. 174). Elliot reminds us that most of the things we think we are giving up aren't really ours to keep anyway.

We are simply exchanging the lesser for the greater. When we surrender, we gain life itself. Through sacrifice, we gain eternal treasures. By serving others, we gain meaning and purpose. This begs the question, "Are we really giving anything up?"

Crowe, a member of Broadmoor Church, Madison, is the First Place participant in the 2022 State Speakers Tournament in the Baptist College Division. This is the manuscript of his speech.