

# Feeling Burned Out?

How to generously give away your time, talent, and treasure without going bankrupt  
*Sherry Surratt*



I walked out of the door so exhausted I barely felt able to open the car door. Spending an hour and a half with one- and two-year-olds was exhausting enough, but packing up the furniture and toys into the moveable crates of the church plant we were a part of was almost too much to do after the last child left. As I trudged to my car, I asked myself the question, *Do I really enjoy this?*

The answer was yes. I loved working with the kids, and I knew every children's ministry volunteer was really needed. But listing those reasons didn't make the ache go out of my arms and legs. I began to think ahead to the next day at work and found myself wishing for more time in my weekend. I still had laundry that needed to be done. I had emails to catch up on and a writing assignment I hadn't finished, and I still had grocery shopping that needed to be done for the week. All of a sudden, my "why I shouldn't volunteer" list began to look a lot longer than "why I should."

Ever been there? Of course you have. When you give, whether it's your time, skills, or money, there's a cost involved. As I drove home, a war waged inside me. I didn't want to be a what-is-in-it-for-me girl when it came to my generosity. I wanted to make a difference. I wanted to be a God-use-me-up daughter of the King.

But I also didn't want to be that overcommitted person who only half gives to her family and herself and then faces the nagging guilt that it's just not enough.

## Asking Critical Questions

I ask myself the same questions you do. What makes sense in my life? What about balance? What should the reality of it look like for me? We read articles about the importance of living a life with margin and balance and developing the ability to say no without guilt. And we know that makes sense. But when is it right to say yes?

I go back often to the widow in Mark 12 who gave her last few coins in the temple offering. As a child hearing this story in Sunday school, I remember wondering if this woman was very bright. I knew society at that time was very hard on single women. They couldn't just run out and get a high-paying job and there wasn't a social security check coming in the mail. The Bible says it was "everything she had to live on," but yet she gave it away. What sense did that make? She needed that money for survival. But it didn't appear that she stopped to ask herself, *Is this the right time? Can I afford this? Should I wait until I have enough and then give?* She just gave. And Jesus called it good.

Don't get me wrong. This isn't a point-my-finger-in-your-face, shame-on-you diatribe about overspending yourself. This is something I really struggle with, and I've been asking myself some questions and inviting God to help me with the answers.

### **What's My Season?**

Yes, we all know there are seasons of life and you have to move within the confines of them—we started hearing this with our first job, our first child. I know this in my head, but have I *really* invested time with God asking him what he wants for me in this particular season of my life? We think of seasons as confining, but they should be celebrated and explored.

When your children are little, you may not be able to give big sums of money to missions projects, but you can give time where it makes the most sense. A mom of little ones is often the best one to give her time connecting, networking, and encouraging other moms of little ones because she understands their needs. A mom of elementary-age kids finds her life all-consumed with teacher meetings and field trips, but she also has the greatest opportunity to refine her organizational and multitasking skills that she can share with others, encouraging them along the way. An empty nester sometimes has more room in the budget to bless others with (isn't it amazing how much less you spend on groceries after your teenage son no longer eats you out of the house?), along with expertise and a unique perspective to share that comes out of her life experience. This could take the form of mentoring or just being a prayer partner or encourager.

The great thing about a season is that it has a beginning and an end. Whatever side looks greener may come your way as the season changes, and whatever is tiresome about the season you are currently in will surely come to a close. I'm learning to ask God, *How can I use what I have, right now in this present season, to be your servant?* In the moments when I feel I have nothing to give or I can't afford to give it, I've learned those are the moments I need to lean in hard to what God is trying to tell me.

### **What Brings Me Life?**

I tend to be a yes-girl. Every good opportunity that tugs at me, or if someone asks me to join in, I often feel the best answer is yes. But it's not. There are so many things that need to be done in the world of ministry, but they don't all need to be done by me. But it is important to say yes to the opportunities where I can honestly make a difference—and to the opportunities God has really gifted me to do.

If I don't guard my choices carefully, I can get in the way of those who *are* gifted and *can* make a difference. I can also get in the way of who God really designed me to be. He didn't create me to be good at everything—and when I try to be, I'm working outside the flow God called me to, the flow that brings me life. When I step outside of this, I notice that sense of being overwhelmed and that gnawing, anxious feeling. Instead of bringing me life, those opportunities suck it right out of me.

But there are also occasions that scream urgent need, like setting up and tearing down the children's ministry rooms in a mobile-church location. There are no specific skills required, but it does require hard work and commitment. Should you say yes, even if it's not something that brings you particular joy? I've learned to ask myself is the question, *Does doing this bring a sense of fulfillment that speaks life to my heart?* For me in this particular instance, the answer is yes. It wears me out and I leave exhausted, but I also know in a small way I made a difference.

### **Whose Voice Am I Listening To?**

I can sometimes feel pressured to volunteer or give money out of a need to please others. Someone presents a compelling opportunity, either for financial support or for manpower, and I often feel compelled to be the answer. Wouldn't God want me to respond if it's for something good? Maybe yes and maybe no. If I'm responding because I want to make someone happy or make their job easier, this might not be where I should say yes.

I'm still learning that my pride can be a very loud, misleading voice. I have to work at separating it from what God is trying to say to me. There have been times when I have felt overextended either financially or with my time, and I've had to go back and examine the real reason I stepped into the opportunity in the first place. Sometimes that journey has led me straight to the source of the problem: my pride. I wanted to be the answer—to be the solution to the compelling need. The reality is I can't be, and when I try to be, I end up frustrating myself and others.

Is it possible to spend yourself out, sharing your time, talent, and treasure without going bankrupt? I think it is. Slow down enough to really consider your season. Ask God what is reasonable for you, and how you can uniquely invest what you have today. Learn what you are good at and what brings you joy. Share it freely and trust that God will cover your time and finances with his protective hand. And most importantly of all, learn to recognize the voice of the one who knows you best.



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