

The book cover features a textured, light brown background. A large, stylized globe in shades of teal and white is centered in the upper half. Below the globe, two hands are depicted in a dark brown and olive green color, reaching upwards. The text is arranged in several colored boxes: a yellow box at the top right for the editor's name, a large red box in the center for the title, a white box below the title for the subtitle, and a teal box at the bottom left for the foreword author's name.

**EDITED BY
JOSH IRBY**

THE BARNABAS FACTOR

**HOW CROSSCULTURAL PARTNERSHIP
AMPLIFIES GLOBAL MISSION**

**FOREWORD BY
PAUL
BORTHWICK**



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1

THE GENEROSITY FACTOR

Nydia R. García-Schmidt

*Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas
(which means son of encouragement), a Levite,
a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and
brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

ACTS 4:36-37 (ESV)

ON A VISIT TO A SOUTH AMERICAN COUNTRY where I taught on biblical stewardship and generosity, the CFO of a denomination approached me and said apprehensively, “We don’t have money to invest in missions because 70 percent of our finances are going to infrastructure.” He elaborated. A significant portion of the denominational budget went to face legal battles over church property. A typical dispute involved pastors giving the church property to relatives. No wonder the executive was frustrated.

Through my research on generosity, I have found a similar reality in Central America. Churches are hindered from giving toward missions because they are using their financial resources for themselves. I asked an interviewee if he thought the local Indigenous churches had financial resources to support Bible translation. He responded with a story: “In our country we have many rural churches. It is their



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understanding that doing ministry is having church services. And particularly *special* church services. They celebrate the anniversary of the men's group, of the women's group, of the children, the Day of the Pastor, the Day of the Tithe, the anniversary of the church, the anniversary of the benches . . . everything is celebrated! And each time they have a special church service, they hire singers or music groups. These groups cost at least US\$12,000 for two evenings of music. Sometimes they hire three musical groups! For them, this is 'doing church.' Pastors are frustrated, and they come to me for help. I tell them, "This is your fault. This is what you have been teaching them."

In another Central American country I visited, the church (located also in an Indigenous community) had a fundraising program for purchasing chairs. The old plastic chairs were breaking, and sometimes older people were hurt when they fell. They were raising approximately US\$20,000 to buy three hundred chairs. And they were importing them from another country. I was surprised to see this low-income community raising so much money for chairs while not having enough for Bible translation projects. I asked my friend, who was from this country, to give me his insider perspective. He replied, "When pastors from Indigenous communities visit the city, they see the big churches with beautiful buildings and nice ornaments, and they want to bring that model to their churches."

These examples reveal a theology of church resources common among pastors across the globe. Why is it that only 6 percent of the annual global church resources are allocated to foreign missions?¹ Latin American churches have financial resources, but they lack adequate theological training on kingdom resources, resulting in mismanagement of funds or reduced contribution to mission causes.

Additionally, leaders in certain parts of the evangelical church claim a Levitical priesthood role for themselves. Some openly teach

and mandate the church to support them financially. We have heard these statements:

- “Bring your tithes to this church, this is where you receive your spiritual food.”
- “We are the Levites appointed by God.”
- “Don’t worry if you don’t come (to church), just make sure you send your tithes . . .”

In the hierarchical society of Latin America, with a legacy of three hundred years of colonialism, it is not easy to confront leaders. This results in leaders controlling the allocation of funds and enforcement of tithes for themselves. Before long, this distorted belief that pastors are the Levites grants them the right to the church’s money, including the tithe.

What could change this pattern of questionable stewardship and release a flood of resources to God’s mission? Barnabas’s story holds some clues.

At the beginning of Acts, we see a radical generosity spreading in the context of a spiritual revival, as evidenced by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4), unity (Acts 2:1), conversions (Acts 2:41), and preaching and instruction of the Word (Acts 2:14-42). These revivals produced not only fear (in the Lord), miracles, and wonders, but also unity and togetherness, including in their resources. No one considered their possessions as their own (Acts 2:44), but rather, they belonged to the community. Many generous givers sold their properties and shared them with those in need. Two chapters later, in Acts 4:32, Luke repeats that believers were of one mind and one heart, and no one claimed anything they possessed as personal. Everything belonged to the community. Once again, Luke describes members of the community selling their land and houses so that no one would be

in need. If Luke had a highlighter, we would see it clearly underlining this point.

Barnabas is introduced into this context. In Acts 4:36-27, we read that a certain man, by the name of Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, and whom the apostles called Barnabas, sold a field and had placed the money at the apostles' feet. Luke, the author of both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, does not elaborate on what this selling meant for Barnabas personally. Perhaps he had more properties. He is, however, careful to note what Barnabas does with the money. He does not take his financial gift to the temple. He places the gift at the apostles' feet, a symbol of trust. The location of his gift is important because Luke also describes Barnabas as a *Levite*. Why is that noteworthy? By recounting the generosity of a Levite who had, in centuries past, depended on the Levitical system to be sustained, Luke declares that a new era has begun. In this era, all believers are priests, and all are called to give generously to meet the needs of the proclamation ministry.

These themes of generosity, trust, priesthood, and proclamation in Barnabas's introduction are relevant to mission partnerships today. God's people are to give generously to his mission. Sharing financial resources supports sharing the good news. To appreciate the importance of Barnabas's generosity and its relevance today, we must look back briefly at the history of the Levitical priesthood system in the Old Testament and its fulfillment in the New Testament.

LEVITES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT— A PROVISIONAL ARRANGEMENT

Levites were members of the tribe of Levi, the third son of Jacob and Leah. Moses, son of Amram, was from the tribe of Levi and appointed by God to deliver his people from the oppression of Egypt (Ex 2:1). In



Exodus 19:6, when God makes a covenant with Israel, God intends for all the nation to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.

However, after the incident at Mount Sinai when the newly instituted nation made a golden calf, Moses confronts their idolatry and stands at the gate of the camp, the place where justice was dealt. Moses challenges the people to make a decision, whether to stand for the Lord or to continue in their idolatry. “Whoever is for the LORD, come to me. And all the Levites rallied to him” (Ex 32:26). Only the tribe of Levi immediately declared allegiance to God after the golden calf incident. God had said to the entire nation of Israel that they would be a “kingdom of priests,” but here the nation had failed in their assigned responsibility by violating the covenant and mimicking the pagan actions of the other nations. In this sinful incident of creating a golden calf, the nation had broken the covenant and had placed their trust in this man-made idol. It was time to confront and ask the nation to make a decision.

Who was for the Lord? The biblical account tells us it was the Levites. By gathering around Moses, the Levites declared their allegiance to the Lord. Moses then instructs the Levites to “strap a sword to [their] side” and to go through the camp and kill whoever was against God (Ex 32:27). Three thousand men were killed by the hand of the Levites. Immediately after this, Moses declares that these Levites would be “set apart” because they had the courage to go against their own sons and brothers (Ex 32:29). From here on, the Levites would have a special place in the nation.

God’s original purpose was that all the nation would be a kingdom of priests (Ex 19:6). But the kingdom of priests, who had promised to be a holy nation, broke the covenant when they misused the financial resources of the community to build a golden calf. The Levites, who resisted the sinful act, served the nation in upholding all the functions of the tabernacle, the holiest functions in the nation. Specific



instructions were then given to the nation on how they would support the Levites with material goods.

In Numbers 18:20-21, God instructs Moses on how the Levites would be financially supported through the tithes of Israel:

The LORD said to Aaron, “You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites.

“I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting.”

Under the law of Moses, the Israelites were required to give a tenth of their produce to the Levites who, unlike the other tribes, had not received land. The Levites, along with the orphans, widows, and sojourners, were to depend on the Israelite families. Every three years, households were directed to set apart a portion of their harvest and were to make a formal contribution to the Levites, widows, orphans, and sojourners. Careful attention was given to not neglect the Levites: “Do not neglect the Levites living in your towns, for they have no allotment or inheritance of their own” (Deut 14:27).

Yet, the prophet Isaiah spoke of the reinstatement of the original plan, the priesthood of all believers. “And you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God” (Is 61:6).

JESUS AND HIS REBUKE TO RELIGIOUS LEADERS

During Jesus’ ministry, he rebuked the religious leaders, many of whom were Levites or temple priests, for using the law to serve their own status and wealth rather than to advance God’s justice, mercy, and faithfulness. In Matthew 23, Jesus addresses the practices of those religious leaders and their habit of teaching one thing while neglecting their own practices—“they say, but they don’t”:



So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But *do not do what they do*, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garment long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called "Rabbi" by others. (Mt 23:3-7, emphasis mine)

Jesus' warning therefore denounced the behavior of the religious leaders who were not capable of living out biblical principles. The religious leaders wanted status, recognition, and visibility in the community, but they had failed to practice their own teachings. Jesus went on to pronounce seven woes. The fourth woe addressed the payment of tithes. Paying tithes was a strict practice in the Talmud, yet Jesus was correcting the order of priority. In Jesus' teachings, tithing was a secondary matter. More important was to show a passion for justice, to demonstrate faith and trueheartedness. In this, Jesus expressed that the religious leaders were not allowing others to enter God's kingdom because tithing had supplanted justice, mercy, and faithfulness.² Barnabas, a Levite, understood this. Barnabas knew the truth, and he gave his resources to the extension of God's kingdom because the message of the apostles upholds justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Luke further illustrates the nature of true generosity in the story of the widow's offering. Unlike the Old Testament system, where giving was obligatory and structured, Jesus highlights that giving is measured by the heart's sacrificial commitment:



As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. “Truly I tell you,” 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.” (Lk 21:1-4)

Luke recognizes that generosity has two sides. Some give from their wealth, while others give from poverty. Jesus highlights the importance of sacrificial giving. In mission partnerships, we tend to focus on large donors. However, sacrificial giving holds greater value in God’s economy. It remains a mystery, yet it is the truth. In God’s economy, those who give from poverty give more. In nations with less developed local economies, let us honor those who give from their poverty, not just those who might contribute the largest donations.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

One of the purposes of the New Testament is to show the fulfillment of the prophecies. The Old Testament required Levites to uphold the sanctity of God’s presence with them. Levites were instituted because Israel failed to keep the covenant established at Mount Sinai. Yet this Levitical system was a shadow of what would be revealed through Christ’s sacrifice. Jesus’ sacrifice put an end to the Levitical priesthood and reinstated God’s original purpose—the priesthood of all believers. The apostle Peter said, “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5). Peter continues, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet 2:9). John also affirms the priesthood of all believers in Revelation 1:5-6: “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has



made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever.” The New Testament repeatedly stresses the priesthood of all believers.

Yet priests must direct their worship and generosity correctly. When I teach seminars on generosity in Exodus, I highlight two specific moments of generosity. The more familiar of the two is the funding of the tabernacle, which was done according to God’s instructions (Ex 25 and 35). The people’s hearts were moved, their spirits were stirred, and they brought their contributions. But this was not the nation’s first act of generosity. The people’s offerings—the “rings of gold that were in their ears” (Ex 32:3 ESV)—funded the golden calf. Israel’s first act of generosity was a *misguided* one.

At this point in the seminar, I ask if anyone has an idol in their home. They look bewildered as they imagine a golden calf in their living room. Then I ask them to pause and reflect on how their “golden earrings”—their financial resources—are used. I ask them to look in their closets, in their garage, and their investment portfolios and ask, “Do we see the fruit of generosity or greed?” If they find greed, then they have built an idol right in the middle of their homes—and hearts (Col 3:5). This never fails to produce looks of embarrassment. They recognize that their earthly treasures have chained their hearts. It is no wonder we don’t have resources. Golden calves demand resources.

Notice also that the Israelites’ misguided generosity was encouraged by Aaron. One of their leaders led them against their covenant with God (Ex 19) and away from trust in God. We must be on the watch for leaders like Aaron who do not follow God’s instructions, especially when money is in view. Are we giving as an act of worship toward God or something else? Have we built golden calves with the resources from the church? Have we turned away from the instructions given by God? Even our generosity has to be filtered by

the truth. Even our leaders must be held accountable to their role before God.

APPLYING BARNABAS'S GENEROSITY

The challenges to generosity for missions are rooted in our theological understanding. For leaders to claim their Levitical role obscures and obstructs the priesthood of all believers. This claim centralizes financial resources where they do not belong. When Barnabas gave, he realized he would not hold on to his Levitical heritage. He participated in giving, and the disciples were trustworthy, not greedy. Are leaders in the church setting an example of kingdom-focused generosity? Or do they expect others to give while they are exempt? What if leaders in the church learned from Barnabas, selling their possessions and giving them to proclamation needs? What if leaders trusted missionaries and ministry people and found ways to balance church needs with proclamation needs?

What would a renewed understanding of global resourcing look like—one that encourages organizations to look beyond their own logos and actively partner with others whose vision and mission align? How can we create channels for resources to flow in ways that prioritize broader, collective needs rather than simply denominational or organizational priorities? Are we creating the spiritual environments that Luke highlights, where the outpouring of the Spirit and devoted teaching of the Word produced a profound sense of community and selfless giving so central to the early church?

As crosscultural mission partnerships continue to grow globally, the disparity of resources will be more obvious. One organization with a historical donor base will be better resourced while another, whose strategy might be more effective, will be under-resourced. What prevents us from sharing resources with our partners? It is hard to lay down money for the sake of the mission even if that



money was generously given to us. It is possible for us to judge an Indigenous pastor for buying new chairs for their church building while simultaneously buying superfluous *buildings* for our organizations. Barnabas's act of giving up control of his resources should challenge us.

We should also be challenged by the generosity of less-resourced partners. Recently, the organization I serve with received an unexpected yet generous gift from an Indigenous community. Members from four churches, grateful to have God's Word in their own language, came together to present their offering and "lay their treasure" before us. They expressed deep gratitude for the years of service invested among them and, moved by gratitude, desired that others might receive God's Word in their language. Their gift was no small offering—it represented nearly two years of field labor—yet they gave it freely and with joy. Like Barnabas, they gave generously.

We have a lot to learn from Barnabas, a Levite, who sold what he had and gave it away. When we learn from him, the 6 percent given to global missions will increase because church leaders will allow the generosity of church members to flow outside of their church structures. Anniversary celebrations will be carefully stewarded. Denominations will give greater attention to God dwelling not in a temple but in us, and eager to dwell in those waiting to hear his message.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. The chapter emphasizes the New Testament concept of the "priesthood of all believers," contrasting it with the Old Testament Levitical system. How does this understanding affect our approach to giving in the church? How can leaders encourage participation in giving from everyone, rather than creating a hierarchy of givers and recipients?



2. The story of the golden calf illustrates “misguided generosity.” How can we discern whether our giving is directed toward God’s purposes or toward idols or other misguided priorities? What practical steps can we take to examine our hearts and motivations for giving, both personally and within our church communities?
3. Barnabas exemplifies giving to a cause he trusted. He believed in the message and also in the disciples. How can these two relationships (disciples receiving and Barnabas giving) be critical to understand in our faith communities? Additionally, how can someone discern God’s leading in selling a property, or land, to lay down these resources to the proclamation needs?
4. The conclusion raises questions about leaders setting an example of kingdom-focused generosity. How can church leaders model sacrificial giving and encourage a culture of generosity that extends beyond the needs of the local church? What does it look like for leaders to “trust missionaries and ministry people” and balance church needs with proclamation needs?

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