

GIVING THAT DELIGHTS  
THE HEART OF THE FATHER

# PLASTIC DONUTS



JEFF ANDERSON

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THE HEART OF GOD

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*To Autumn Joy.  
You are God's special gift to your  
mother and me, and the one God  
would use to teach me about the  
Father's perspective.*

I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

—APOSTLE PAUL, PHILIPPIANS 4:18

# Contents

Introduction	1
1. The Plastic Donut	7
2. What Is Acceptable?	21
3. Does the Amount Matter?	33
4. Rule #1: There Are No Rules	43
5. A Two Percent Perspective	63
6. Because You Can	73
7. All the Difference	91
8. That Chair	105
Postscript	111



# Introduction

**P**lastic Donuts. They're everywhere, but few things are more misunderstood. When they do come up in conversation, it feels awkward, even confusing. It's like something's missing.

Did you know the first murder in recorded history followed some hard feelings between two brothers over Plastic Donuts? That could explain why we hear so many dos and don'ts centered on the subject. The problem is, the rules contradict one another. That's a real tragedy for all of us, because these simple Donuts can bring such joy and delight to the heart of God.

They show up in the stories of some of the biggest



## 2 Plastic Donuts

events in history. A man named Noah gave them after being stranded on an ark. God responded with a rainbow in the sky.

Another man, named Solomon, gave some Donuts, and God visited him in a dream.

A fellow named Cornelius gave them and received a visit from an angel.

Make no mistake. This is important stuff.

I'm Jeff Anderson, and I'll start by sharing a story about a Plastic Donut that was given to me. It was a gift that changed me forever.

For years I had been trying to understand more about giving, and more about God. I had wrestled with the issues, debated, stayed up late to study, even lost sleep. I was given a Plastic Donut just in time, and it opened my eyes to giving from God's perspective.

If you'll stick with me (it's a short book, right?), I trust you'll enjoy the experience. I hope you will learn new things about God. And I hope you will look deeply into yourself—where you will be reminded of the power of a Father's love and the power of your gifts.

With all the different messages spelling out the

rules of giving, wouldn't it be great to finally get some clarity and peace about this issue? I'll make you a promise. When you start to see giving from God's perspective, the lights will come on. You'll see that you really can feel good about your gifts.

And it gets back to a Plastic Donut. A simple, easily dismissed token of love holds the secret to getting your mind and your heart on the same page. Isn't that what you've been looking for?

## RELAX

I'm not a professional fund-raiser, and this isn't a book about pressure or guilt. Rather it's a message about the power of gifts, the way we give, and who we give to.

The Plastic Donut can open your eyes to God in a way that clears up questions and dispels anxiety. What you'll experience brings enormous freedom. You'll feel the weight of uncertainty being lifted from your shoulders, and you'll be challenged by what you learn about your gifts.

Some of the ways we've been encouraged to give are

weak, but some of the ways we've convinced ourselves *not* to give are also questionable. Fair enough?

I was in my twenties when I first heard teachings about money in church. I recall hearing that we should spend less than we earn, avoid debt, and give 10 percent to the church. But there was a problem.

I had lived out these principles since childhood. My parents taught me about tithing. I enjoyed calculating my tithe because I enjoyed counting my money. And I learned to manage my spending and avoid debt mainly because I craved cash more than stuff. I was doing the “right” things. Still, something was missing. I had a growing sense of financial peace, but spiritual peace about giving was lacking.

Was there more to pleasing God with my money than having a budget and a clean tithing record? This question sparked a hunger in me to understand how God views giving and how my giving could actually get His attention.

We've all heard sermons and read statistics about the meager rate of giving, even among churchgoers. Yes, greed and materialism are real forces in our lives. But

don't you think that deep down inside Christians have a desire to give?

Still, the mixed messages we hear on the subject can be frustrating. The appeals, demands, and "answers" will continue to bombard us. There must be a better way.

That's where the Plastic Donut comes in.

ONE

## The Plastic Donut



Autumn Joy toddled across the room and stood at the edge of my laptop-centered view. I was in task mode, typing away while sitting in the living-room recliner. With Shirley Temple curls bouncing around her face, my eighteen-month-old daughter looked up at me. I looked at her. Then she handed me a Plastic Donut from her kitchen play set.

I looked at the Donut and back at my daughter. She stood waiting for a response. So I put the Donut up to my mouth and said with great animation, “Yummm, yummm... Thank you, Autumn! This is *soooo good.*”

Then something beautiful happened. Her big brown eyes widened, and her lips pushed a giant smile

against her puffy cheeks. She stood up on her toes, shrugged her shoulders up to her ears, and let out a high-pitched squeal.

After soaking in the experience for a few seconds, she ran back to her kitchen and brought me a little pink spoon. Again I responded, showing her my pleasure and approval. The cycle continued a few more times as I collected plastic pieces from her kitchen set.

For Autumn, this exercise in giving gifts kept bringing her back to Daddy. For me, it kept me looking for my child to return to my side. I was moved by the exchange. I loved the interaction and connection. I was so pleased.

The whole experience wasn't about the Donut (and believe me, I like donuts). If one of Autumn's older brothers had brought me a Plastic Donut, it wouldn't have been the same. Somehow this gift was exactly right coming from my daughter, even if it was just a toy.

### THE AHA MOMENT

I didn't see it coming, but at that moment it occurred to me: this is how our giving must feel from God's per-

spective. Our gifts to Him are like Plastic Donuts. God does not need our gifts or our money. But like a child's gift that moves her father, our gifts can really get God's attention.

For my daughter, the feedback from our interaction inspired continued giving. If I had not paid attention to her or had withheld my delight, she would have stopped.

She was learning about the power of a pleasing gift and learning about connecting with me as her father. Meanwhile, I was learning about God and how to better connect with Him as my Father.

For years I had thought a lot about the receivers of my gifts: my church, my neighbor, my chosen charities. And I had studied the benefits that come to me as a giver. But I hadn't given much thought to my gift from God's viewpoint. Could it be that God desires a similar Plastic-Donut experience when I give to Him?

And what about the thrill my daughter received when she saw the joy on my face? I had never before pictured the act of giving as something that elicits such delightful reactions. Had I been missing opportunities to connect with God in deeper ways?

Suddenly I could see giving from a different perspective.

## QUESTIONS. YES, WE HAVE QUESTIONS

We like to give and receive gifts. We have a desire to honor God and would like to understand what God's Word says about giving. The problem is, our noisy culture keeps providing more "answers" to our questions that fail to clear up the confusion.

I want to know the truth. I want some clarity and confidence in what I believe and how I live. How about you?

Here's a sampling of the questions about giving we hear most often:

- What's the "right" amount to give?
- Does the tithe still apply to modern-era people?
- Is the first 10 percent required, and everything else is a freewill offering?
- What should be our motivation in giving?



- Does it even matter what we give as long as we have good hearts?

Have you ever played a new board game when you were still unclear about the rules? It's awkward. You don't know when you're making the right moves. That's how giving feels for so many people.

There has to be some clarity in the Bible that brings us a better feeling about giving—a feeling like the deep connection my daughter and I felt when I received that Plastic Donut. Would God really have left us to our own devices to figure this thing out?

## WAY TOO MANY VOICES

After spending many years far from God, a young man rediscovers his faith. He visits a large church in his city. In a message on giving, the pastor rejects the concept of tithing. He says it doesn't apply today—just like animal sacrifices and other areas of the Old Testament law. Instead, this pastor refers to something called “grace giving.” The young man appreciates learning something new, and this teaching makes sense to him.

A few weeks later, he visits another church in the same city. The pastor there is starting a series on tithing. He has reached the part where he's asking for tithing commitments. This seems to make sense, but it contradicts the teaching of the other pastor. The young man leaves church that day wondering what the Bible really does say about giving.

Some leaders use New Testament teachings to prove the Old Testament no longer applies. Others find verses in the New Testament that they say prove certain Old Testament rules still apply. Some teachers encourage giving based on the prosperity they say will follow. Others caution against “robbing God”—to avoid the curses that they say would follow. And some teachers combine these two views as one, while still others reject both.

### **NO BASHING ALLOWED**

It's fun to point out inconsistencies, but let's cut our church and ministry leaders some slack. Pastors and Bible teachers are not the only ones struggling to land on

a unified, authoritative approach. Those who come with questions also tend to provide answers.

The senior-adult Sunday school class members have strong opinions about how young people *should* give. Meanwhile, the young folks have their own ideas about what giving should look like for them. Blogs and chat rooms have “answers” too. Like armchair quarterbacks breaking down Sunday’s game, plenty of commentators weigh in on matters of where, why, and how much we should give.

I imagine in the midst of all this you have heard some troubling things. There are enough financial scandals on record to cast doubt on church and ministry giving. Calling out those who were responsible for misusing donated funds can make us feel better about a subject we don’t fully understand. But never lose sight of this: “the church”—meaning pastors, speakers, evangelists, ministry leaders, name your favorite target—is not corrupt. Church leaders are seeking answers to questions about giving just like the rest of us. And it’s their job to be as clear as they can on a very dicey subject.

It would be wrong to use the misdeeds or the manipulative tactics of a very few as an excuse to ignore our own unresolved questions about giving. Remember, we all need personal clarity from Scripture when a question arises.

### SILENCE CAN BE A PROBLEM TOO

Sometimes the *lack* of talk about giving is the problem.

Put yourself in your pastor's shoes. Can you imagine standing in the pulpit and bringing up the subject of money? The best-intentioned leader (you're the pastor, remember?) would struggle with the challenge of teaching on this topic without appearing to have a conflict of interest.

The congregation expects the lights to work and the building to be clean. Just imagine wrestling with the additional needs for expanded facilities or more staff while at the same time faithfully supporting projects for missions and the poor. Is it any wonder pastors are tempted to avoid a deep discussion of the subject of money?

Churches and faith-based charities have a God-

given passion for their particular causes. Bold appeals for monetary support are expected—and scriptural. Let's give pastors and ministry leaders a break and recognize that the disconnect we feel about giving could be caused by our lack of a clear, biblical perspective on the topic. How many years (okay, centuries) have we been wondering about these things?

If you've received this book from your pastor or a ministry leader, you know they want to bring light to the subject. Here's an opportunity to get on the same page and pray for all our eyes to be opened.

## EXPECT GOOD THINGS

I have sought clarity on giving for decades, and I have benefitted from lessons taught from various perspectives. In my work with church and ministry leaders, I see how giving matters to their organizations. I've experienced this personally while serving on finance committees and on the elder board of my church.

I have talked about giving with the homeless at a downtown shelter. And I've discussed the topic with the

affluent while dining on steak and lobster. I have talked with my grandfather about giving and have shared the same concepts with a class of fourth-grade students.

While Christians have debated these issues and reached a number of different conclusions, I am convinced that the Plastic Donut is a metaphor for giving that cuts through the noise and offers clarity. It captures an approach to giving that discards pat answers while uncovering truths that can be trusted and helpful for everyone. Even better, when your questions about giving can be answered with confidence, your connection with your heavenly Father will grow stronger.

## MONEY ON MY MIND

As a kid, I cared a great deal about money. One Christmas I received a small red safe to use for storing my cash. I uncovered the safe a few years ago while helping my mom clean out her attic. I could still remember the combination: 30 on the left dial, 110 on the right!

Saving money was gratifying to me. I often wanted

to buy things, but then I would change my mind due to a stronger desire to keep the cash. I was frugal but also selfish. This sometimes comes with the territory of being a saver. Savers like to accumulate. Spenders like to release. Both have to confront their respective tendencies in order to give in ways that God designed.

As a child, I put 10 percent of my earnings in the colored envelopes at church. I never thought about giving less than that. But neither did I think about giving more. This hard-and-fast standard created a tension in my heart, one that would play out in my mind for years. When the subject of giving comes up, a similar tension may arise in you.

I went to college and majored in accounting, thinking it would be a way to keep close tabs on this thing called money. After graduating, I obtained my CPA license, but it wasn't long before I grew less interested in tracking other people's money and decided to go into business to make my own money.

Along the way, I continued to wrestle with one particular money matter: giving.

## THINGS ARE LOOKING UP

As a money counter who needed to know the price of everything, I especially wanted to know the price of this spiritual practice called giving. I had questions such as, “How much should I give?” and “Is there a biblical giving standard?”

Back to that occasion when I first heard money addressed in church as a legitimate topic for discussion. I was sitting in a Sunday school class with my new bride. Later, as we walked to our car after church, she turned to me and said, “I believe someday you will be involved in a ministry like this.” Neither of us knew how prophetic her words were. At the time, all I knew was that I couldn’t get thoughts about giving off my mind.

After my accounting career, I enjoyed five years as a full-time stock trader. Some of my life’s most powerful lessons were learned during that period. There were some dark days during my trading journey, mostly because I was accustomed to thinking like the crowd. But when I learned to think *against the crowd*, things changed for the better. When the crowd was buying, it



was often time to sell. When the crowd was selling, it was often time to buy.

This against-the-grain thinking can be helpful when you are trying to understand giving. After the Plastic Donut encounter with my daughter, my views on giving changed. I saw more clearly why the joy of giving can seem so elusive. It's hard to experience it without looking up to the Father.

Often, instead of looking up with my gift, I was looking down. Instead of pondering God's reaction to my giving, I was occupied with my own feelings on the subject. Instead of giving to the One unseen, I'd been giving to what I could see.

The Donut experience gave me a fresh perspective that connected with my study of Scripture and started to make sense. Along the way I found simple truths and simple answers to my questions.

## REACHING FOR THE RESET BUTTON

Let's see how feelings about giving can shift from guilt and confusion to being a foundational part of our deeper

connection to God our Father. We all want our gifts to matter to God, and we might even dare to believe they can bring a smile to His face. So let's step out from the crowd and away from the noise. Let's think against the grain of the prevailing approaches. Let's reach for the reset button and discover new answers to our questions.

- How does God respond to my gifts?
- Does God really care about what I give?
- Does He like some gifts and dislike others?

I'm ready if you are. Let's find out together.

## — — — — — **Thoughts on Giving**

Have you ever received a gift from a child  
that touched your heart?

Do you think it's possible that God takes  
delight in our gifts—just as an earthly  
father reacts to a child's simple, heart-  
felt gift?



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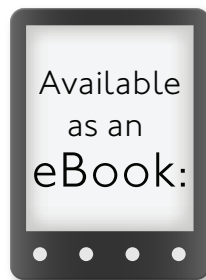
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