

## Stewardship February 2007

### All We Can Spare

Now that we are already a month into a new year, how are your New Year's resolutions going? Resolutions can provide great inspiration and concrete goals to pursue. They can also be like a heavy burden and a constant reminder of how we are not measuring up, if we aren't following through. Goal setting is good; resolving to do better or feel better or even look better can trigger positive lifestyle changes. But what happens when goals are not met and resolves go unfulfilled?

Setting "giving" goals is certainly a good thing. Resolving to give a certain percentage or increase our giving can be a positive for many reasons. But giving back to God is more than a number or a goal or even a resolve. C. S. Lewis once said this about giving: "I do not believe we can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare."

When we think in terms what we "ought" to give, we can actually limit ourselves to thinking it is "enough." But when we think of giving more than we can spare, we begin to get at the heart of giving. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (6:21).

What if each of us resolved to give more than we can spare in 2007? What might happen?

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### How to Battle Birthday Extravagance

From Nathan Dungan, president and founder of Share Save Spend™ and his web site [sharesavespend.com](http://sharesavespend.com)

If you've attended a child's birthday party of late, my hunch is you've already figured out that birthday celebrations aren't what they used to be.

Whether it is a toddler's first birthday or a teenage girl's 16th, the annual extravagance that is now heaped upon millions of children in America is no less than remarkable.

For a little sample of the change, let me suggest a semi-tortuous must-see television program. First, search your local cable listings to find out when MTV's "My Super Sweet 16" is airing. Next, carve out 30 minutes and force yourself to watch the whole episode. Finally, be prepared to pick your jaw up off the floor at the end of the show.

Without giving too much away, most parties on the show are exponentially more expensive than any wedding you've ever attended. And to top it off, the grand finale is the barely-of-legal-driving-age child being "surprised" with a \$50,000+ new vehicle.

While this over-the-top birthday extravagance is certainly atypical for most youth, it does put pressure on kids of average means to upscale their party. On a recent "Super Sweet 16" episode, a few young teens screamed into the camera "my party seems so lame compared to this one." Whenever I mention the MTV program during one of my presentations, I inevitably get groans from the adults in the crowd. But their groans of disapproval don't jive with the current reality. If I had a nickel every time a parent told me their child attended yet another out-of-control birthday celebration, I'd have a tidy sum.

One of the most egregious birthday scenarios was relayed to me by Rick, a Chicago father who's 10 year-old son Jack attended a birthday party of a school friend.

"When the party was over, I went to pick up Jack at his friend's house and I couldn't believe my eyes." said Rick. "The parting gift for each child attending the party was a brand-new bicycle," said an exasperated Rick.

Stunned, I asked him how he handled the situation.

"I gave my son two options," said Rick. "He could either return the bike to his friend or he could pick his favorite youth charity and we would drop the bike off on the way home. He chose the latter."

If your child has adequate amounts of stuff, consider taking a different path for their birthday. Jessie and Jason did just that for their daughter's 5th -- and golden -- birthday party. Here's how:

1. On the invitations, they specified only one gift with a cap of \$15.
2. The invitation also mentioned that half of the presents would be donated to a local charity for low-income single mothers and their children.
3. Before the party they took Anna to the charity to learn more about the kids she would be helping.
4. After the party, Anna and her parents delivered the presents to the charity.