

## **The Biggest Giver**

### **Ready:**

“So I will gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well.”

-2 Corinthians 12:15

### **Set**

I have a handful of life principles. One that I see played out over and over again is just how much competition reveals a person's heart. In the heat of competition, true colors are shown. It is hard to hide your heart when you are sweating and giving it your all. Everything seems to come out, and sports have a way of exposing the truth. That can be really good or really bad, depending on what is in your heart.

In 1992, I was doing one of my favorite things: playing lacrosse. FCA assembled a team to compete in an elite-level summer lacrosse tournament in Vail, Colo. Sixteen teams consisting of the best lacrosse players in the world were competing. During the tournament and our team's run to the championship, I became friends with a tough-playing defenseman named Stephen Paletta who had the rare combination of a competitive drive and a caring heart. He was a teammate who cared for others and actively looked for ways to bless people.

Since that tournament 16 years ago, I have become friends with Stephen, a man who recently was tagged as the “Biggest Giver.” He was announced last Sunday as the winner of Oprah Winfrey's ABC reality show “The Big Give” after making it through eight episodes and surviving the competition of nine other big-hearted contestants.

During that lacrosse tournament in '92, God got a hold of Stephen. Even though he already had a big heart, he realized that he still needed God's heart. Reflecting back on that experience, Stephen says it was a miracle in his life. “Those four days changed everything,” he said. “The games were miraculous to say the least, and at that point I said, ‘OK, God, I guess You got me.’”

Since then, Stephen's Christ-like influence has had a major impact in the lives of many athletes and coaches. He is a man who knows what it means to serve with a heart yielded to Christ. He even approached the TV show with that attitude. "I had no idea what I was going to do," he said. "Each morning I'd wake up and I'd just say, 'Alright God, just let me know what I need to know today.' I went into it with a complete servant's heart. I just said, 'God, whatever it is You want me to do with these folks, let it happen. I'm just going to be here to do my very best.' At no time did I really think about the competition. At no time did I think that I could win this thing. I was just very fortunate to be connected to these people in need." During the show, his heart was revealed. Everyone saw how he not only met needs, but cared for others. His love for people naturally flowed from his heart.

To serve others and to give of yourself is true worship. Oswald Chambers once said, "Worship is giving God the best that he has given you. Whenever you get a blessing from God, give it back to Him as a love gift." What Stephen does best is bless others because his heart is full of God's love. On the playing field or off the playing field, he is a walking, talking, living example of Christ. People might define him as the "Biggest Giver," but the Lord defines him simply as an obedient, follower of Christ!

## **Go**

1. Would anyone tag you as someone who has a big heart? Why or why not?
2. What does it mean when Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:15, "So I will gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well"? Why is this natural or unnatural for you?
3. What does it mean to give of yourself on the athletic field—to have a big heart toward teammates and competitors? List some specific ways.
4. What gets in the way of your being able to see other people's needs and hurts? How can you be in a position to serve at a greater level?
5. Why is the heart the main factor of how big someone gives?

## **Workout**

Luke 11:39-41

Acts 4:32

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

1 Timothy 6:18

### **Overtime**

"Lord Jesus, I ask for a big heart so I can be a blessing. You, Lord, get excited when I focus on others and not on myself. When I return to You what You have given to me, You are glorified. Help me to have a heart that is yielded to You. Show me what it means to be rich in good deeds. I want to be able to live as Paul lived, gladly spending everything for others: my money, abilities and blessings. I ask for a big heart, Lord. I desire to be defined simply as an obedient follower of You."

### **Bible Reference:**

1 Timothy 6



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