

[+]

M O R E

— or —

L E S S

[-]

Choosing a Lifestyle of
Excessive Generosity

J E F F S H I N A B A R G E R

David©Cook®
transforming lives together

CONTENTS

Foreword / Bob Goff	9
1. More Than Enough	13
2. One Man's Junk	21
3. The Kitchen Pantry	45
4. Good Enough	59
5. Enough Clothing	73
6. Enough Presents	91
7. Enough Transportation	111
8. Enough Time	129
9. Enough Access	147
10. Black & Red	167
11. Enough Gift Cards	183
12. Making Enough More	195
13. Your Enough Experiment	217
14. Draw Your Line	243
Appendix: What Is Enough Clothes?	257

FOREWORD / BOB GOFF

Jeff doesn't just talk about generosity; he lives it. In fact, he and his beautiful wife, Andre, live it like they're made of the stuff. Jeff and Andre have invited me into their lives. Selfishly, I'd like to say I'm one of the very few people who have been invited in because it would make me feel somehow important. But they invite everyone they meet into their lives. Instead of making people feel important, they make everyone feel loved. Where some people act like bouncers when it comes to other people's ideas, Jeff quietly acts like an usher, and in this terrific book he's invited us all to take seats right up front in the orchestra section. He's reminded me once again of what's good in the world and of the simple goodness of giving.

Jeff doesn't set out in this book to convince you that you have much excess stuff in your life—*but he will*. He doesn't try to tell you to let go of the stuff you've accumulated, either—*but you will want to*. What Jeff gently says in this beautifully written book is that we don't just have more stuff than we need; we have more love than we need. In fact, before I turned the last page, I found that I had piles of love hidden everywhere.

Thanks, Jeff, for reminding me where to look.

I've sat with Jeff in the woods in a small cabin where I listened to him talk about big dreams. What is different about Jeff is that his big dreams aren't for him. They are big dreams for other people. And you know what? He makes them happen. You'll see how in this book, and you'll nod your head in agreement like I did—but you won't stop there. You'll go do something about it because love is as contagious as Jeff is.

Among the things I've learned from my time with Jeff in the woods is to be careful who I let into my cabin. Jeff didn't trash the place; instead, he trashed my ideas of creative generosity and how I could go about enacting them. This is the kind of book you'll want to read outside because there will be an explosion of sorts in your life. Some of your ideas of philanthropy will explode. Some of your excuses will explode. Some of your indifference and some of the limits you've put on your love or creativity will explode as well. And if you're like me, you'll find yourself silently mouthing the words "I could do that ..." at the end of many of these chapters. What's even better is that you'll find yourself *doing* those things, not just *thinking* about them any longer. It's for one simple reason—you've found yourself inside the blast radius of Jeff's contagious brand of love.

You'll laugh some and cry some at the stories in this book, but you won't simply agree, because Jeff isn't asking us to just agree with him. Instead, he invites each of us to take the next right step. He doesn't road map the entire journey for us either, but he does offer some pretty good directions.

If love were raindrops, you'd be convinced before you finished this book that Jeff is a tropical storm. I know these things because I've been caught in the squall that surrounds his life, and I've been soaked through with extraordinary love and grace and passion. If you're like me, you'll put down this book and not just want to be more generous; you'll want to be more like Jeff. That's not Jeff's goal of course, but that's what happens when you see love lived out. It's an extravagant love Jeff writes about too. When I got caught in its vortex I found myself wanting to be both at Jeff's side and at the feet of Jesus.

Jeff knows Jesus, and he knows Him well. I don't know this because Jeff told me; I know this because I know Jeff. I've seen him in times of desperate need and in times of utter delight. I've laughed until I've cried as he's told me stories. But none of his stories are about him. They are stories about the needs in the world and the need to help we have in our lives.

Jeff sometimes gets a telltale bird-eating grin on his face, particularly when he's talking about God and how my life would be better if I would shake loose some love. It's almost like Jeff is spinning the dial of the vault in which I keep some of my generosity. In that way, Jeff's not unlike a safecracker listening for tumblers to fall into place. And for me, before I finished the book, they had. Jeff unlocked in me a desire to love God and love people better than I thought I could, with a generosity as creative as it is extravagant.

This is a book of extremes: extreme love, extreme grace, and extreme faith. Jeff is one of those guys all of us hope to have in our lives but few of us do. You're about to meet a guy who will

mess with your notions of love and generosity as much as he messed with mine. Let me warn you in advance: your closets, your cabinets, your love, and your pride are not safe around Jeff. That's because Jeff is going to mess with how you use your time, how you spend your money, and what you do with your stuff. Jeff isn't trying to get us to reevaluate our lives; instead he's asked us to value them more. To value what we can give from our excess and what might be possible if we served ourselves up to the world with a large scoop of whimsy.

I'm no meteorologist, but like you, I can smell rain in the wind a long way off, and I could smell this book coming from Jeff for a while. Jeff has given all of us something really beautiful in this book. Jeff hasn't just sprinkled a couple of good ideas in these pages; instead, it's a gully washer of love, creativity, and engagement that a parched world desperately needs. You're about to get caught in the terrific hurricane of kindness that surrounds a guy who loves people well. Buckle up, friends: you are about to get Jeff'ed.

[1]

MORE THAN ENOUGH

An individual has not begun to live until he can rise above the narrow horizons of his particular individualist concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.

—*Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*

Things came to a head the day we moved into East Atlanta Village.

This neighborhood in Atlanta is a quickly developing area of the city, consisting of a mix of everything from tattoo artists to college students to African-American leaders who have lived in the community for fifty years. It has a community-operated bike shop and eclectic bars featuring the best up-and-coming young musicians, and the contrast of brand-new craftsman-style homes and homes that were hand-painted in the 1950s. It's a wonderful, diverse place to live.

My wife and I, as we considered moving into the city of Atlanta, loved the vibe of being in the village. We also liked the idea that we would live close to great places to eat and hang out.

[13]

We stepped up from a two-bedroom to a three-bedroom home with a great yard for our dog, Max. We knew this was going to be the place where we started a family. We believed that this would be the place where our lives would progress in ways we had not experienced previously.

We just didn't expect what would happen next.

Some neighborhoods have welcoming committees. Others have the unofficial but genetically friendly neighbor who brings over cookies or a bottle of wine when she notices someone moving into the vacant house on the street. When we moved into our house, it was only a few hours before a man rang the doorbell.

This was our neighborhood welcoming committee of one.

He had one of those smiles that implied he had some hard stories to tell. His teeth were a little crooked, yet very white. He wore a Cincinnati Reds hat sitting cocked to one side. He was about forty-five years old and not afraid to talk to anyone. I quickly learned to recognize the particular way he rang the doorbell: much longer than the average person. My new neighbor's name was Clarence, and as I learned that day, he was always "looking for work." I also learned that Clarence worked hard. He focused on one project at a time much better than I ever could. He was a proud worker and enjoyed telling us about all the ways he made our neighborhood a better place, specifically by painting the neighbor's house by himself. You can't miss it: an electric blue house at the corner of my street. That house seems a perfect representation of Clarence: exposed and visible for all to see, because Clarence had no home.

Clarence belonged to a sociological category taught about in the issues-focused classes offered at my liberal-arts college. Clarence was one of the hundreds and thousands counted and written about in statistical articles I had read in newspapers, magazines, and online numerous times. Discussing ethics and studying statistics may spark an intellectual motivation to do the right thing, but meeting a person who was my literal neighbor took doing the right thing to a new level. It's not that I'd never met a homeless person before. I'd served in soup kitchens, fixed up overnight shelters, the usual right things to do. But this was different. Clarence pushed me over the edge. He was my neighbor. I couldn't get away from him. And I liked him. His constant smirk of a smile got under my skin and into my heart.

I enjoyed a complicated friendship with Clarence from the beginning. Our relationship introduced a barrage of new questions for my life: *how do I love my neighbor when my neighbor has no front door or even walls?* My previous worldview assumed my neighbor would live in the same context as me: in a home. I thought the fabric on our couch or our dinner choices might be different, but I never really imagined my neighbor without a refrigerator or a shower. Loving your neighbor is a great virtue in life, but this neighbor brought new complications to mine.

With one doorbell ring, all the ways I looked at my day-to-day life changed. Suddenly I began to see my life through Clarence's eyes. What he saw looking through my front door was abundance. I have not one but two living areas that anyone can actually see from the front door. If I lived in New Orleans they would refer to

my home as a shotgun house—a straight hallway from the front door to the back. I have air-conditioning for those hot days in Atlanta. I have a toilet and shower in each of my two bathrooms, and I even have a washer and dryer for my clothes. And speaking of clothes, my wife and I each have our own walk-in closet filled with them. I have a shed, and my shed is full of tools. My shed holds a bike that I can choose to ride if it is a nice day, and a lawn mower with an extra gallon of gas, just in case. I easily have more than enough. Clarence didn't have to say a thing to me. Just having this new relationship in my life changed the way that I looked at the world.

My material excess and his material need made for a confusing symbiotic relationship. At the start, our relationship felt oppressively lopsided, as it was entirely dependent upon whether I granted his regular requests for money, work, or food. I decided to feed him or give him money for the work he did in our yard. It was always my decision. This raised a number of questions for me: *is this how a relationship should be? Is it really all about me and what Clarence can do for me? What can I learn from him? What would I gain by knowing him?* I didn't really have the answers, but I didn't give up. He kept ringing my doorbell, and I kept opening the door.

After many months of intense conversations on our front porch, during which I learned more about Clarence while laughing together and working together, I realized that our relationship had transitioned. Once he asked to use my phone, so I showed him my iPhone. "Your i-what?" he responded. He didn't know how to

use it, but after a quick lesson and placing his call, he told me I needed to get a real phone because the sound was too quiet.

As he left a voicemail, I overheard him say, “Now you have my number. Just call me back, and my friend Jeff will find me.” It was a strange moment for me as I realized that in that moment I became both his personal assistant and his friend.

Somehow we reached a new level of dignity in our relationship. He found in me a sense of community, as if I had a small glimpse of understanding into the life that he lived. We both knew there was no way that I could fully grasp what it would feel like not to have a physical place to sit down and process the day. But there was also an understanding that he could never fully understand the things that I have been given. Our worlds were far apart, yet we lived in the same square mile. We became friends, and our individual lives transitioned to a deeper collaboration and understanding.

Most of the things I learned from Clarence grew out of the extreme frustration rooted in our extreme differences. He didn't see the world the same way I did, and it was tough. The selfish way that I see the world was always called into question when I was with Clarence. Every time I heard his long doorbell ring, it was like an alarm sounding his need. Without Clarence I wouldn't think about how people on the street feel when it rains. Without Clarence I wouldn't know that not all homeless people are looking for handouts. Without Clarence I wouldn't think about how the changing seasons and temperatures influence the living conditions of the impoverished. Without Clarence I wouldn't understand

what it means to love my neighbor. Without Clarence I wouldn't understand that I have more than enough.

I wish everyone had the opportunity to know someone like Clarence. When we become friends with people who have more or less than we do, like Clarence, it causes us to live differently.

It causes us to see more. It causes us to think about living with less.

At one level, this book is a way for me to share my journey of learning from people like Clarence and to introduce other friends walking a similar path. On this path, we've encountered people and places and situations that stop us in our tracks and cause us to rethink the way we live our lives. We've met people we have begun to love, places that desperately need the light of hope, and situations that beg for solutions. This journey forced us to make distinct and necessary changes in our own lives. Every story that you read is one that has caused me to change. I hope these stories do the same for you. Together we will ask questions, make hypotheses, and embark on some new experiments.

This is my story of change.

The reason I am writing is to share my experiences with you. To share with you a new understanding of what is enough in this life. I have more than enough, and I believe many people, possibly even you, have more than enough as well. Questions are the root of everything great I have done in life. The most creative ideas ever experienced are often conceptualized by asking simple questions. So that is where we need to start this journey: with a question.

I invite you to join me in a series of social experiments that challenge us to ask *what is enough?* in life. This question may begin to challenge the way you see the world today. That's okay. When we choose to draw a line in every aspect of our lives, we choose what is enough. We are given the opportunity to define what is enough. There is great tension in walking this line of more or less, but this tension creates great opportunities. Living on less creates the potential to do much more for others.

May we be known by the problems we solve.

It all starts with one question that changes everything: *what is enough?*

- *Visual Moment*

Watch the full story of Jeff and Clarence:

www.moreorlessbook.com/#videos