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New Book Challenges Readers to a Life of Excessive Generosity Author Jeff Shinabarger Shows How Excess Can Be Turned into a Force for Good

Most Americans are blessed with plenty of stuff—more than enough. It’s time to re-evaluate what is enough, acknowledge the excess, and figure out what to do with it, says author Jeff Shinabarger. In his new book, *More or Less: Choosing a Lifestyle of Excessive Generosity* (David C Cook, \$17.99 trade paper, March 1, 2013), he shows how that excess can be marshaled into a force for good.

“Anything more than enough is excess. It’s that thing that we could give away today, and it wouldn’t change a single aspect of our tomorrow,” says Shinabarger, founder of Plywood People, a community of social entrepreneurs experimenting with new ways to help others through sustainable problem solving.. To show how living on less creates the potential to do more for others, he challenges readers to undertake a series of social experiments that illuminate the question of what is enough.

Shinabarger believes that people desire to be more generous. His theory is that when we recognize that we have more than enough, our portfolio of generosity will increase. In *More or Less*, he shows how to combat a culture that inflates our idea of what we need. The result is a cultural shift from feeding unnecessary desires to addressing issues of suffering in the world.

He illustrates the excess in our lives in eye-opening ways. In one “Enough Experiment” he and his wife vowed to create meals from food on hand at their house. They were able to go for seven weeks, making three meals a day. “Most of the world can’t eat one meal today, while I could eat 147 meals just on the food sitting in my kitchen,” he says.

Shinabarger introduces readers to remarkable projects that began when someone found a way to use excess or waste to fill an urgent need, such as [Beltline Bike](#), [Meals with a Mission](#), and [Global Soap Project](#). Some of his own creative generosity projects include raising funds to build wells for clean water in Rwanda, using discarded billboards to start a shop that employs refugees to create messenger bags and other products, and [GiftCardGiver.com](#), where people can turn in gift cards with any amount left on them to be distributed to charities. Through his work on GiftCardGiver.com and other projects, Shinabarger has identified six principles that inspired him to write *More or Less*:

- Out of our excess, we can address issues of need and suffering.
- We will be known by the problems we solve.
- Influence is gained by doing something.
- When you have a good idea, people tell you and then tell others.
- Every social innovation must learn to scale for maximum results.
- Every great idea needs a team of people to help it come to life

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It can be difficult to see how well-off we are. More than three billion people in the world live on less than \$2.50 a day, but that is just another statistic unless we engage with the living, breathing people who make up that number. “When we don’t have a name and a face confronting us every day, we won’t see things differently,” Shinabarger says.

The story of Shinabarger’s friendship with Clarence, a homeless man in his neighborhood, frames the book. As he views his life through Clarence’s eyes, he sees abundance. “When we become friends with people who have less than we do, it causes us to live differently,” he writes. “It wasn’t that I’d never met a homeless person before. Clarence pushed me over the edge. He was my neighbor. How do I love my neighbor when my neighbor has no front door or walls?”

More or Less presents a clear-eyed vision for how things can be made better for people in need, and a blunt challenge to each of us: “I believe there is a problem in this world that you were called to solve. It is your responsibility to find that problem and make it right,” Shinabarger says. Each chapter of the book includes a specific, practical project readers can undertake, and tips on how to develop other “Enough Experiments.”

“We will either be consumed by culture or we will choose to define enough by our conscience,” Shinabarger writes. “The good life is not found in luxury. It is found in a life that enhances the life of another human.”

Jeff Shinabarger is a social entrepreneur, experience designer, cofounder of the Q event, and creative director at Catalyst. He is also the founder of Plywood People, an innovative community addressing social needs through creative services. He’s been featured in national media such as CNN, NPR, and *Relevant Magazine* and has been interviewed by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*, among others. He and his family live in East Atlanta Village.

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by Jeff Shinabarger

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