



...

WHAT
HAPPENS
WHEN YOU
GIVE

...

THANK YOU.

This is not a booklet with an agenda.

I won't try to get you to give more, take the next financial step, or sell your possessions and give the proceeds to the church.

You've already given, so I want to say thanks.

I want to say thanks because what you've done is a big deal. More important, God sees it as a big deal.

Maybe you acted without as much as a second thought. Or maybe you wrestled many nights over what a financial sacrifice would require of you and your family.

Either way, what you did was give. And what you did was significant.

I hope that what you find on these pages opens your eyes just a bit to why your giving matters.

You won't be asked to give more. You won't be asked to dig deeper. There is no agenda here --- only appreciation and gratitude.

In the next few pages, we'll examine God's response to generosity --- generosity you've already displayed.

Rather than focus on your next step, I want to help you understand the step you've already taken. I want to help you understand what happens when you give.

THANK YOU.

CHAPTER ONE

YOU REALIZED YOUR PURPOSE.

The beginning of human history is recorded in the first few chapters of the Bible. It's the story of a man and a woman, a serpent and a tree.

It's a fast-moving story. In a mere 798 words, we go from absolutely nothing to something out of nothing.

There's suspense, drama, action, adventure, and betrayal. The first man sets out to name the first animal. He meets the first woman, works the first job, and commits the first sin.

Dropped into this narrative is a remarkable principle that shapes the identity of every human being who has ever lived.

God created the tomato plant and the Giant Sequoia tree. He made zebras, eagles, swordfish, and ladybugs. He created the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, and the fish of the sea.

But the pinnacle of His creation was a man and a woman. And the fingerprint placed on those first human beings extends to you today.

You were created in the image of God.

Genesis tells it this way: "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.' . . . So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:26–27 NIV).

It might be tempting to brush past a familiar verse and lose the significance of the message. But don't miss this.

You and I and everyone on the planet --- of every age, every color, and every gender --- were formed in the very image of God.

At the start of the greatest story ever told is one of the greatest truths we could ever hear: You were made in God's likeness.

You differ from every other created being because you were created in the image of the Creator.

What we read in Genesis, before the forbidden fruit and the cowardly lie, the shameful hiding and the cursed leaving, are the first words God said about us.

"You were created to resemble Me."

Sure, sin has messed with the picture. Yes, the image has been distorted. But it's still there. The image has been blurred, but the divine mark exists.

You were created with the potential to exhibit characteristics of the One whose mark we bear.

God is love, so we love.

God is kind, so we show kindness.

God gives, so we are called to be generous.

What does the image of God have to do with Christian generosity? Plenty.

Romans 8:32 describes a generous God who wants to graciously bless His children. James 1:17 reminds us that every good and perfect gift comes from God. John 3:16 teaches us that God gave His only son so that we might have eternal life.

How generous is God? He gave us His only son.

When you were knitted together in your mother's womb, being formed in the image of God, you were wired fearfully and wonderfully for generosity. In a tangible and intentional way, you were made for this. God's generous

nature is imprinted on your soul.

When you see hunger, injustice, or inequality around the world or around the block, the part of you touched, moved, or disturbed by what you see is the part of your heart beating in tune with God's heart. You were wired to care, and it has nothing to do with tax deductions. Because you were formed in the image of God, your heart naturally beats in rhythm with God's heart.

**“YOU WERE
CREATED TO
RESEMBLE
ME.”**

When you gave, you did more than meet the needs of your church. You made a choice to take on the resemblance of the One who first breathed life in you.

When you gave, you fulfilled part of the divine purpose God has for your life—and the divine purpose God has for

the world as a whole. You didn't just respond to a need, --- you did what you were created to do. You didn't just support something --- you took a tangible step to fulfill your created purpose.

The apostle Paul tells us in his letter to Ephesus, "We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do," (Eph. 2:10 NIV). You were made to give.

Don't underestimate the gravity of giving.

God created you to give, and when you gave, your life resounded with the character of God, the character God created you to demonstrate long before the opportunity arose for you to do so. Like a mirror, your actions reflected the very nature of your Creator.

So, thank you for your generosity. Thank you for respond-

ing to a need. Thank you for offering what you had for the sake of something bigger than yourself.

But more than that... thank you for acting in step with the character of God. What God has done and will do in your character and purpose because of your generosity will far outlast what you gave.

WE MAKE A LIVING BY
WHAT WE GET. WE MAKE
A LIFE BY WHAT WE GIVE.
- WINSTON CHURCHILL

CHAPTER TWO

GOD IS PLEASED.

Realizing you are created in the image of God might not be a freeing thought for you because it's possible that your view of God isn't that positive.

Some people think of God as an uninvolved, cosmic ruler who issues written commands and then leaves people to figure out things.

Some people imagine a hard-to-impress deity, always finding fault with their thoughts or behaviors.

Some think of a God who answers prayers, but only the prayers of others.

I've always found it interesting that one of the most often used images of God in Scripture is that of a father.

Repeatedly on the pages of Scripture, He says, "I am your Heavenly Father, and you are my child."

For some people, the image of God as a father isn't a good one because their human father was absent. Because of their past, the fatherly language in Scripture is an obstacle.

Still, we know how fathers *should* be. You know a father *should* unconditionally love his children. You know a father *should be* involved, and you know a father *should* provide.

All human disappointment aside, the Bible is clear. God is a perfect and loving Heavenly Father.

The Old Testament prophet Hosea says the fatherless find mercy in God. In Psalm 27:10, King David writes, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up."

The Old Testament was primarily written in the Hebrew

language, and one biblical word used for "Father" is the word "Abba." This word is best translated as "Daddy" or "Papa." The Bible doesn't describe a distant, uninvolved Father, but a loving Father who desires a relationship with His children.

The New Testament continues with the metaphor: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are... Beloved, we are God's children now" (I John 3:1-3).

The Gospel of John describes the kind of relationship followers of Jesus have with God: "Yet to all who received Jesus, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God --- children born not of natural

WHEN OUR
HEART IS
MOVED,
GOD IS
SATISFIED.

descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:12-13).

God is our perfect Heavenly Father, and we are His children.

Sometimes, the most popular ideas about God are the most inaccurate. When Jesus walked the Earth, He spent much of His ministry in direct opposition to the expectations of the elite. Instead of catering to the religious leaders, He did what few expected and reached out to a woman most would have overlooked.

In Luke 21, Jesus looks up from his teaching to see the rich putting their gifts into the Temple treasury. He notices a poor widow put in two very small copper coins and says, "I tell you the truth... this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on" (Luke 21:1-4).

Here was a woman of little value in her time and culture. She had no man to take care of her or provide for her. By all accounts, her donation wouldn't seem to make a difference.

In one of the other Gospels, we are told that her coins are worth a fraction of the least valuable coin in circulation at the time --- representing a mere six minutes of an average daily wage.

But her small gift caught the attention of Jesus. This humble donation is the contribution that influenced eternity, not the donation of the rich who make a spectacle of their actions to impress people.

Jesus looked to this woman and praised her for her generosity. Although the amount of her donation was not significant by worldly standards, Jesus knew that it was a true sacrifice.

You see, generosity is more than an action. It's an attitude. Jesus wants us to give lovingly, cheerfully, and wilfully --- not out of compulsion or obligation, but out of love and appreciation of God's grace.

Maybe you think your donations are minuscule in the grand scheme of things. Maybe you're living paycheck to paycheck and struggling to scrape together any excess. Perhaps you think your contribution won't count for much. If so, please know that your heavenly Father thinks differently. God sees much more than the amount we give; He sees the spirit in which it's given.

Because God doesn't love the rich any more than He loves the poor, a large financial gift won't tip the scales of *God's* favor in *your* favor. No, the Bible is clear we can do nothing to earn the favor of God. He already loves us. Our heavenly Father doesn't love His children because of

what they do; He loves His children because they are His children.

Your relationship with God the Father doesn't depend on what you do, nor does it depend on what you can offer Him. It stands on nothing but God's unfaltering affection for and devotion to us.

When you give with the right motives, God is pleased. When you act in generosity, God is happy. Like a proud father who delights in the unselfish behavior of his children, God smiles when we share.

When you give your best and give with the right motives, God is pleased. He delights in your generosity because He created you to be generous.

REMEMBER THIS -- A FARMER
WHO PLANTS ONLY A FEW
SEEDS WILL GET A SMALL
CROP. BUT THE ONE WHO
PLANTS GENEROUSLY WILL
GET A GENEROUS CROP.
- II COR. 9:6

CHAPTER THREE

GOD PROVIDES FOR YOU.

There's math --- addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.

There's advanced math --- algebra, trigonometry, and calculus.

Then, there's supernatural math --- the kind of math that doesn't add or make sense, but that unbelievably works, every time.

The Bible is full of stories of supernatural math.

The apostle Paul wrote a letter to a group of Christians living in the first-century city of Philippi. In the first part of his letter, Paul thanked the Philippians for their generosity and their partnership.

Although he wrote from a Roman jail cell, he reminded these Christians that God has a purpose and a plan. He

told them that everything that had happened so far had happened to further the Gospel. He told them that contentment is one of the keys to fulfillment and then reminded them that God would meet their needs. Paul told this gracious church, which had supported the cause of the church in another city, that God would supernaturally meet their needs.

I believe there is a clear connection between our generosity and God's provision. It's supernatural math.

Throughout the Bible, you'll see that God's way is different. But not only is it different, God's way is better.

A generous heart with the favor of God is better than great wealth without his involvement. Of your income, 90% with God's blessing goes further than 100% of your income without God. It's supernatural math.

I know what the spreadsheets say. I know how the formulas work. I know what messages the media send you. Despite all that, the Bible's alternate worldview on this is just as true today as it was in the first century.

"And my God," Paul writes, "will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19 NIV). True back then... still true.

Romans 8:32 states, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all --- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" God, our loving Heavenly Father, wants to bless us. He wants to meet our needs.

In the Lord's Prayer --- one of the most famous prayers --- Jesus teaches his followers how to pray. In that model prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray for "our daily bread."

Daily bread.

One day's worth of bread.

That word picture would have instantly transported a first-century Jewish audience back to the days of Moses.

The dominant story that takes up much of the Old Testament is that of the Hebrew people as they are led from captivity in Egypt to freedom in their awaited Promised Land. Their story is one of evolution --- leaving their lifestyle as slaves to become a called-out and set-apart nation destined to reflect the character of God.

For forty years they wandered in a desert, in a purgatory of sorts, no longer slaves but not ready for the responsibility of nation status. And one of the first lessons they learned was of God's provision.

Maybe the desert sun got to them. Whatever the cause,

not long into their exodus, the Hebrew people started to reimagine what life was really like for them under Egyptian rule.

At least we were fed. At least we were satisfied. At least we didn't have to wonder where our next meal was coming from.

Moses heard their complaints. And so did God. And in answer to their grumbling, God sent a solution to satisfy their aching bellies and their restless souls.

Every morning, God promised, there would be manna to eat. And with His provision came instructions. *Only take as much as you need... for the day. No more. No less. No hoarding. No planning. No stockpiling. Simply trust that I will do what I said I would do.*

You aren't the first to wonder whether God will provide.

You aren't the first to try to put a little aside, justifying your fearfulness that God can't be taken at His word. The Hebrews learned this lesson in the beginning. "Before you become great, before you have more than you know what to do with, before you risk forgetting who it was that got you out of Egypt to begin with, remember this. I will provide."

God always provides --- for the Ancient Hebrews, and for us. He offers daily bread.

The blessings of God are not limited to the financial realm. Some people incorrectly teach this principle and reduce God to a slot machine. Giving is not a formula to corner God into giving you a new car. If you put money in the offering plate, God doesn't promise to surprise you with a forgotten rebate of that amount later in the week. God's blessings don't work that way.

A \$100 contribution might not result in a \$100 blessing,

but I do know this --- you will be blessed in some way. And just because those blessings might not be financial doesn't mean they are unimportant. If the best things in life can't be bought with money, perhaps the most important blessings from God are not financial.

Blessings aren't even limited to your life on Earth. God says that we can store treasures in heaven. The Bible tells us that our giving can literally affect eternity.

Generosity doesn't just position us to receive God's blessings on Earth. It will matter in 500 years.

CHAPTER FOUR

YOU GAIN PERSPECTIVE.

Regret.

It is a word you hate to hear, and a word you hate even more to feel. You don't have to have too tainted a past for this word to evoke some emotion in you. We all have felt it in some way or another. And I bet we all have felt it with money.

If you've ever bought anything after watching a late-night infomercial, you've felt regret. If you have ever been sucked into a promotional sale, a tempting exclusive offer, you have felt regret. The product didn't do what it promised to do. Your expectations were shattered.

Maybe regret came when you got your credit card statement in the mail. Maybe you experienced it whenever you opened your closet and saw the unworn item or opened your garage and saw the still-packaged product.

Some of us might have even lost some sleep over the things we bought and later regretted. But if I had to guess, I would say you have never lost a night's sleep over something you have given.

You don't hear people say things such as, "I wish we hadn't decided to sponsor that child in Kenya," or "I wish we hadn't given so much to the building campaign," or "I wish we hadn't offered to support her mission trip," or "I wish we hadn't signed up to help provide Christmas presents for children in need." We don't say those things because we don't think those things.

DEEP DOWN,
YOU KNOW
GENEROSITY
IS WORTH IT.

Buying something sometimes leads to regret. Sacrificing rarely does.

Even though our media-saturated culture tells us we need more, we know fulfill-

ment isn't found installing a new dishwasher or buying a new car. Talk to people who have returned from a mission trip, who received a handwritten note of thanks from a child half a world away because they had new clothes to replace the threadbare ones they had before, and those people hardly have words for the sense of fulfillment they feel welling up inside.

Giving does that. It offers something no commercial --- however cleverly it is done --- can truly offer. And if we are honest, I think we would admit that it surprises us because it differs so much from what the world tells us should be the case.

Give, and you feel fuller. Sacrifice, and you feel more satisfied.

Using resources for a cause greater than us gives us a perspective few other things will. A perspective we need. A

perspective at odds with much of our world. It shouts that there is more to life than having and attaining. It whispers of the lasting value in selflessness, in forgoing, in doing without, and doing so with a purpose.

Jesus said it this way: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21 NIV). I think Jesus understood what seems like a paradox to us. There is a treasure to be found when we empty ourselves. And this treasure lasts. This treasure will change how you see the world and change how you encounter the world. Empty yourself to be refreshed and refilled.

Maybe giving is new to you, or maybe you have had this habit for as long as you can remember. Whatever your experience, I encourage you to allow your heart to be involved in the process. Allow your treasure to be found in sacrifice.

Shift your perspective from trying to acquire more for yourself to providing more for those who are in need.

A change in perspective is no small thing. A change in perspective can change your life.

I can remember a time growing up when all I wanted was

FOR YOU KNOW THE GRACE
OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,
THAT THOUGH HE WAS RICH,
YET FOR YOUR SAKE HE
BECAME POOR (2 COR. 8:9).

CHAPTER FIVE

YOU PARTNER WITH GOD.

to be an adult --- to have more freedom and more control over my life. I bet you've had those moments, too. And I bet, like me, you can't help laughing when you think back on them.

Life now isn't exactly like you imagined it to be. You are busy. You have more freedom, but you also have exponentially more responsibility. Most days, it feels as if you are simply trying to keep your head above water.

Although living this way can feel overwhelming and exhausting, it doesn't take long before we get caught up in a "just trying to get through the day" mentality.

Our perspective shrinks. Our worlds contract. And although somewhere in the back of our minds we know there is a bigger picture, we just don't have the energy to find it.

Allow me to turn your eyes toward a picture and a

perspective of which we can't afford to lose sight.

The church.

What we are doing at this church matters, and your partnership matters. When you gave, you didn't just give money to cover expenses; you helped fund a mission with eternal sacrifice. Every penny given to this church is an investment in eternity. Possessions and earthly investments will be lost in the end, but what we do here matters forever.

And because you are a part of *this* church, it means you are a part of *the* Church.

The *global* Church.

We don't always hear the stories of what the Christians in China are accomplishing in their underground churches—

meeting in the dark and in secret, under threat of persecution by the government. We don't always hear the stories of reconciliation happening among warring tribes in Africa, started and maintained because the Gospel of Jesus was the impetus toward making amends. We don't hear the stories of life change from countries whose names we can barely pronounce and whose challenges we could never imagine.

But when you give, you give to these believers. You give to their cause. You give for their sake. You give with the same mission in mind they have. We are a part of a global community—a community united in common purpose and unified mission. And as small as the world can sometimes feel, as big as our problems can sometimes lead us to believe they are, when we give, we are patiently and persistently called out of ourselves for the sake of a bigger calling that involves the world.

The danger for us, in our comfortable lives and agree-

able culture, is to forget there is a bigger story unfolding around us. Although we know giving is important, we often give in a vacuum, only reaping the benefits when it produces tangible results. But what we can't afford to forget, what the Church around the planet cannot afford for us to forget, is that when we give, a body of believers of all races, colors, and creeds is strengthened.

We are part of something big, even when our lives feel small...even when our giving feels small. We are part of something the world needs more than it needs anything else. Not because of what we bring to the table, but because of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

For reasons we might never understand, God chose to use the avenue of the Church to accomplish His mission in the world.

In the book of Matthew, Jesus says it this way: "Now I say

to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it" (Matt. 16:18, NLT).

In other words, God made an intentional decision to trust us --- His Church --- to carry out His plan to redeem the world. He chose us to carry and communicate His message of grace.

Because of your generosity, the Gospel will go further.

Denominations aside. Cultures aside. Locations aside. We share the call for something bigger. We have a common mission and a united calling. Your willingness to give advances this.

And although God does not need us --- He did not need us to start His Church, and He does not need us to sustain His Church --- He has issued an invitation to participate

with Him in His purposes.

You didn't *have* to give. You *were allowed* to give. You were allowed to step outside your world for a minute to appreciate the greater mission for the world. You were able to exist outside your perspective to witness a larger one. You responded to an invitation, and the Church is richer for it.

So, when your days seem too full, your schedule too busy, and your perspective too nearsighted, remember that your act of generosity, your remarkable willingness of heart, has further implications than you might ever realize.

God sees. God knows. And He is glorified. The Church is furthered. The mission is advanced. And you were a part of it.

THANK YOU.