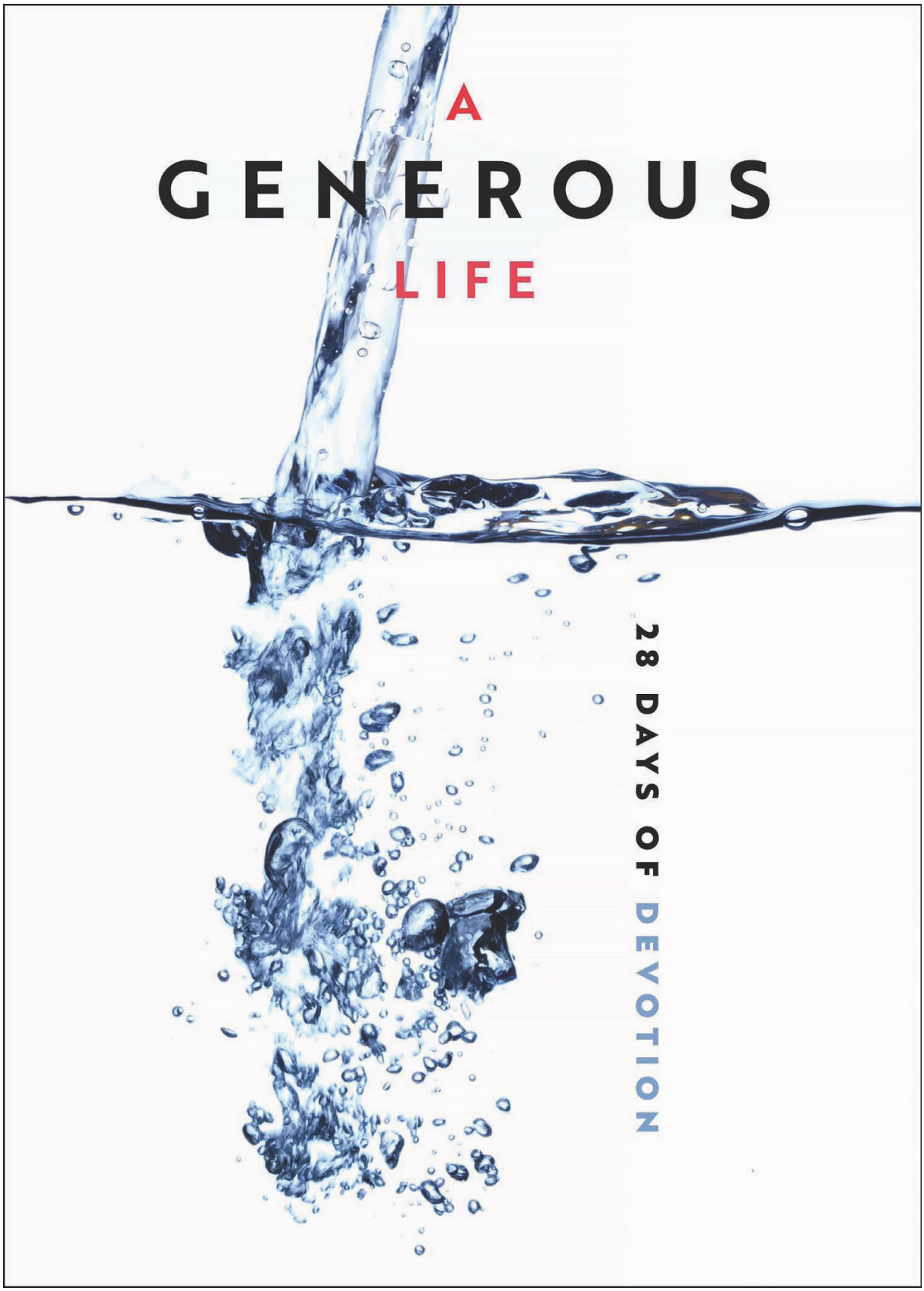
A GENEROUS LIFE



28 DAYS OF DEVOTION

Day 1- Divine Gifts

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27 NRSV)

What does it mean to be created in God's image? What does being made in God's likeness have to do with being generous?

While donors have their own personal reasons for giving, there are some common themes:

- A young couple eagerly participates in a Habitat build once a month: "We wanted to give back."
- A successful businesswoman talks about a major gift to her church: "I'm paying it forward."
- A skilled and committed teacher explains why he works hard, more than fifty hours every week with middle schoolers: "I wanted to respond to the blessings I received."

The writer of 1 John put it clearly, "We love because God first loved us" (4:19 CEB). In keeping with that sentiment, the first chapter of Genesis would suggest that we give because God first gave to us.

To be human, made in God's image, is a wonderfully positive identity! However, to be made to love and give like God seems counter to the chronic cynicism of our society and even sometimes our own self-image. But this is how the Bible begins: "In the beginning God ..." and within the first chapter, "Let us make humankind in our image ..." (Genesis 1:1, 26 NET).

All creation is given. Light, water, air, and land. The birds and fish and animals. The seas and mountains, valleys and rivers. Our bodies and minds, hearts and souls. They are all a Divine Gift.

And in some mysterious way, we were put here to tend and care for this incredible world, made in the image of God. We give because God first gave to us.

~Franklin "Zip" Long

Reflection

When you look in the mirror, can you say, "I am born in the image of God, created to be loving and generous"? What are the greatest gifts in your life? What abilities, talents, relationships, and accomplishments have come your way?

Challenge

Place a sticky note on your mirror and every morning say to yourself, "I am born in the image of God, created to be loving and generous."

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Day 2- What Makes You Happy?

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal." (Matthew 6:19-20 NIV)

The happiest individuals are often the most generous. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught the most valuable rituals for those who would follow his Word. He makes a special point to encourage those within earshot to "store up for yourselves treasures in heaven." As a young boy, I often pictured a pile of gold coins neatly stacked in rows in one of the many rooms promised to us there in heaven. However, as I began to discover the joy of giving, that imaginary pile diminished and was replaced with the images of those that I had assisted along the way.

One of the most generous couples I have ever known was not wealthy by the standards of our country. However, throughout their lives, they sacrificed what they had in order to help others. They were also one of the happiest couples I have ever known despite hardships including separation during time of war, battles with cancer, struggles of raising children, and continuing health care issues as senior adults.

I could not help but ask them, with all they had been through in life, what made them so happy as a couple, and as individuals? Their reply revealed an understanding of Jesus' words to the crowds in the Sermon on the Mount. Simply put: the joy of giving to others united them in their faith, with each other, and also with God. Their happiness was rooted in their faith, as well as a conscious decision to place their treasure and their hearts in service to others.

Our culture seems obsessed with a search for happiness, yet many overlook the simplest path to personal satisfaction. By living and giving to others, we are able to fulfill the meaning of Jesus' lesson. When you give joyfully, you receive more than you ever give away. Generosity is the key to happiness here on earth and storing our treasures in heaven.

~Rhodes Logan

Reflection

Can you think of a time when you experienced great joy in giving to someone else or doing something for someone else?

Challenge

In your journal, make a list of the happiest people you know. Choose a few, and ask them the question, "What makes you happy?"

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Day 3- Eyes Wide Open

Pray diligently. Stay alert, with your eyes wide open in gratitude. Don't forget to pray for us, that God will open doors for telling the mystery of Christ, even while I'm locked up in this jail. Pray that every time I open my mouth I'll be able to make Christ plain as day to them. (Colossians 4:2-4 MSG)

The Village Inn in Malawi, Africa, provided attacking wolf spiders, bats, bed bugs, holes in the ceilings, broken bathroom fixtures, and all the cold water you could use—free of charge. Most of us on the mission team "stayed alert with eyes wide open," but certainly not in gratitude. Our eyes were wide open in worry and fear and discomfort.

As we gathered for breakfast, in the midst of complaining, we heard the quiet voice of Emily, a Malawian traveling with us, say, "I saw the face of God in my motel room." Having never slept in a bed before, Emily's eyes were "wide open in gratitude."

In that moment, I knew. Here was a child of God, created in the image of God with a loving and generous spirit. With her "eyes wide open in gratitude," Emily made "Christ plain as day" to us. Emily's gratitude taught me a critical lesson. We are all born in the image of a loving and generous God. However, we choose daily whether to live out of this loving and generous spirit. Often, we choose to live out of a resentful and bitter spirit instead. And in making our choice, we either make Christ plain or not.

~Scott McKenzie

Reflection

Can you think of someone recently who made Christ plain to you with a loving and generous spirit? Can you think of a time when you had the opportunity to either respond with eyes wide open in gratitude or eyes wide open in bitterness or fear? What did you choose? What were the results?

Challenge

Today, live with eyes wide open in gratitude. Look and search diligently for the face of God. Look for ways to be grateful, and you just might be surprised ... even if you are staying in The Village Inn.

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Day 4- And Who Is the Master?

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." (Matthew 6:24 CEB)

On a fishing trip several years ago, I was determined to be the master of the fish. I had decided that catching more fish than my colleagues would absolutely make my day. With an idea of what bait would work best, I sought out that one big catch (and I kept my plan to myself).

I cast the lure perfectly into a small cove and began to work the big topwater plug back to my boat. Suddenly, there was a big explosion, and the fight was on. This was The One. Exactly what I needed. Finally, I got the fish to the boat. I had conquered that fish! And then, as I swung it around to disengage the hook, the fish flopped violently and drove the rear treble hook deep into my exposed thigh. Each time it flopped, blood would run and the pain shot up my leg. What was I, Master of the Fish, to do?

Quickly I realized that I could not control the hook as long as the fish was attached. So I unhooked the fish and discarded it. I could finally take care of the mess I was in. With a lot of gritting of my teeth, I removed the hook and fell back on the boat, exhausted and defeated.

In my furious pursuit to get the fish, the fish wound up getting me! The world is constantly promising us that if we can only get more money, more fame, or more control, then we will be free. These things then quickly become our master. It is only when we learn how to disengage from our stuff that we become truly free to serve the One who created us. Generosity gives freedom and new life. Unhook yourself today!

~J. Clif Christopher

Reflection

Do you ever have moments where you wonder, "Am I master of all my stuff, or is my stuff the master of me?" Can you write about it?

Challenge

In your journal, create a personal inventory of people and things you hold dear. Now ask yourself and make a note of anything or anyone who has you hooked. Revisit this list during the week, asking for God's guidance and wisdom.

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Day 5- A Whole and Lasting Life

"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life." (John 3:16 MSG)

Our youth pastor, Aaron, loved to share stories about his four-year-old son, Colton. Colton loved to do whatever his daddy was doing, no matter what it was. Maybe it was picking out pajamas for his little sister, putting pepperoni on the pizza, or even cleaning the house. Aaron said, "All I have to do is say, 'Colton, I'm going to clean up the family room. Want to help me?' If he thinks it's something I want to do, and there is a way he can help, he's all in."

I asked him, "Why do you think that works?" His answer was simple. He said, "Because he's a child, and I'm his father ... he wants to be a part of whatever I am doing."

As I let that statement sink in, I experienced a holy moment. As Aaron's child, Colton inherently knew that he wanted to do whatever his father was doing.

Wanting to be just like our Father is what generosity is all about. As children of God, we love our Father and want to be a part of whatever God is doing.

God is always up to something big in the world.

God is always casting compelling visions about the way it could and should work.

God is always reaching out to the world with extravagant love, forgiveness, and grace.

God is always giving.

Our Father invites us to be a part of all of it and to enjoy a "whole and lasting life."

~Herb Buwalda

Reflection

How have you experienced God's love and generosity? Can you think of a time when you were loving and giving? What was that like?

Challenge

Today, look for opportunities to be loving and giving to at least one person you meet. For example, spend time with someone you might normally walk past or ask someone whom you would normally ignore to share their story with you.

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Day 6- Shark Tank

The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the LORD. David the king also rejoiced greatly. (1 Chronicles 29:9 NIV)

On the hit television show *Shark Tank*, aspiring entrepreneurs who believe they have great ideas make presentations to a panel of investors (sharks) who then choose whether to invest as business partners. If a deal is struck, the sharks come alongside the entrepreneurs and invest their own time, talent, and financial resources in hopes of a great return on their investment.

In the chapters leading up to the verse above, we learn that God had given Solomon the massive responsibility to build the first permanent temple. However willing Solomon was, he was also young and inexperienced. Much like the investors on *Shark Tank*, David came alongside the young Solomon, counseling him to be strong and courageous. David helped him by providing the plans, pouring in his own financial resources, and encouraging Solomon to begin the work. David took it a step further by calling the leaders of Israel together and making his own presentation, explaining the importance of the project and challenging them to invest their time, talents, and financial resources. In response to their leader's generous investments, the people of Israel rejoiced and joined in to finish the temple. Early acts of selfless leadership and generosity can be offerings God uses to lead others to join in.

God is still at work, calling modern-day Solomons to tasks that are much greater than they can accomplish on their own.

~Joe Park

Reflection

Is there a leader or ministry that needs someone with your time, talent, or financial resources to come alongside them to accomplish something great for God? Is God calling you to be a "shark" and inspire others to do the same? Are you willing to pray for and follow God's leading?

Challenge

Pray and ask God to show you where your leadership, your time, your money, and/or your wisdom might inspire others to join in what God is already doing.

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Day 7- The Myth of Scarcity

God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:8 NRSV)

A few years ago, when my youngest daughter was about ten, we went to see a movie as a family. The theater had a self-serve concession area with candy bins. My daughter loves sour gummies, so I filled a bag with an appropriate amount of candy for her, then added some extra because I like them too. We settled into our seats and as the movie started, I put my hand out for a sour gummy. My daughter looked right at me, clasped the bag and pulled it away. You can imagine my response. I was incensed! I paid for the treat, and I had purchased extra expressly for her to share. The moment was such a transparent analogy, hitting me like a ton of bricks: I do this every day with God. God provides me with blessings abundant. Enough. And yet I approach life with a scarcity mind-set, as if I might run out of _____ (fill in the blank: time, money, ideas, energy, love).

Lynne Twist, in her book *The Soul of Money*, reminds us we live in a culture held hostage by the myth of scarcity.* She describes that when we wake up in the morning, our first thought is "I didn't get enough sleep." When we crawl into bed at night, our last thought is, "I didn't get enough done today," and everything in between is a litany of scarcity. She points out that the antidote to scarcity is not abundance as we might assume. In our desire for abundance, we find ourselves captive to a constant cycle of needing more. The antidote for scarcity? Sufficiency. Isn't that what we find in God's abundance? God who provides enough ... enough manna, enough grace, enough blessings ... enough of everything so that we may share abundantly.

An inconsequential moment in a movie theater has become a tangible reminder for me about the notion of sufficiency and generosity. In God's image, we were all born to be generous, but often the myth of scarcity compels us to hold tight to our stuff, like my daughter to her candy.

~Lisa Greenwood

Reflection

How do you demonstrate the myth of scarcity in your life? In what ways have you experienced God's sufficient blessings?

Challenge

Given the ways that God has blessed you with enough, how will you act on Paul's invitation to share abundantly in every good work? Make a list in your journal.

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*Lynne Twist, *The Soul of Money: Reclaiming the Wealth of Our Inner Resources*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 44.

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Day 8- Gratitude in All Seasons

I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:12-13 NRSV)

There are many Americans who know the words "I can do all things ..." not because they heard them read from a church pulpit, but because they have seen them written on the shoes of NBA All-Star Stephen Curry. Curry has been writing some variation of that Bible verse on his sneakers before each game since his college days, and he continues to use it for motivation and inspiration.

But as Curry found out the hard way after his Golden State Warriors blew a 3–1 series lead and lost the 2016 NBA title to Cleveland, the words of Philippians 4:13 do not ensure winning an NBA championship every season! What, then, of the promise that we can do ALL things through Christ? Paul's own life and circumstances provide the key to understanding his message.

Paul truly knew hardship: he endured whippings, beatings, shipwrecks, and a stoning, as well as hunger and thirst; he wrote this letter from a prison cell. Yet, at the same time, he learned to be grateful for and to accept the abundant generosity of the church at Philippi as they had ministered to his needs. That is why he could say in the verses just prior to the ones above, "I have learned to be content with whatever I have" (v. 11 NRSV). The good news for us is this: Paul was not promising that believers can do anything and everything because of Jesus. Rather he was saying that because Jesus is sufficient for all our needs, we can be content in every circumstance in which we find ourselves.

~M. Thomas Norwood Jr.

Reflection

What does Christian contentment look like? How can we experience the joy of grateful living for God in all areas of our lives? Why do we find it hard to accept generosity from others?

Challenge

In your journal, chronicle your life's journey toward finding contentment up to this point. What ups and downs have you experienced?

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Day 9- Choosing Gratitude

Make sure no one repays a wrong with a wrong, but always pursue the good for each other and everyone else. Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in every situation because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:15-18 CEB)

A mother was busy navigating the complexities of a new school environment when all she had taught her children was tested. At the end of the school day, the oldest child began to explain the most recent incident of bullying, hurt feelings, and distress. The mother had taught the children to use their words, seek adult support, and defend themselves, but these lessons were lost in the heat of this moment as she declared, "Why didn't you simply put her in her place? You are twice her size and height."

These words were a direct command to end this once and for all. The youngest child replied, "Something hard must be going on in her life. Maybe we should pray for her." The words coming from the first-grader stung, and the mother immediately regretted what she had said.

The decision not to repay a wrong with a wrong is a way of living that results from our desire to express gratitude rather than fear. It is a lifestyle that includes an attitude of kindness and generosity even in the face of unfairness. It requires us to continually cultivate holy habits that foster a better world for us all.

It is impossible to live the Christian life without aligning our words and actions. Nothing will be solved repaying wrong actions with wrong actions. When we see and experience wrongs, we must choose a different path—one that is grounded in gratitude and reflects our Christian beliefs.

Imagine what type of community would exist if we truly cared about each other. How different would our world be if we reflected on the intentionality of scripture to remind us to rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all situations? In a complex world where bullying, meanness, selfishness, and greed exist, we must choose to respond from a place of gratitude and actively pursue good for everyone. The pursuit of good is a high calling that requires us to behave in a Christlike manner that is often counter to the world's view.

~Aimee A. Cole-Laramore

Reflection

How often do you encounter or experience wrongs in this world? Are you attentive to others? Where do you find joy?

Challenge

In your journal, express gratitude for your current circumstances. Reflect on ways to pursue good for those around you.

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Day 10- Rejoice, Don't Worry, and Give Thanks!

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:4-6 NRSV)

Paul, writing from prison to the Christians in Philippi, offered quite good advice, especially when considering his own personal circumstances.

I saw this advice exemplified in a woman named Betty who tended the breakfast bar in a hotel where I stayed five nights a month for several years. She had a giving spirit and a contagious joy. I never once saw her anxious or fearful. My greeting was fairly consistent whenever I saw her: "Good morning, Betty! How are you doing today?" With a big smile on her face, her answer was equally predictable, but I never got tired of hearing it: "Don, I am blessed and highly favored." Every day, she spoke into her own life the words of God spoken to Mary through the angel (see Luke 1:28-29).

One day, I shared with the hotel manager how inspired I was to be greeted by Betty in such a positive way each morning. The manager went on to tell me about some of the life struggles Betty was experiencing and what challenges she was conquering—addiction, abuse, homelessness, and illness. A modern-day Paul, Betty was writing a letter from her own personal prison through her words and actions for me and for others to read:

- Rejoice in the Lord always.
- Don't worry about anything.
- Give thanks in everything.

I am grateful to God for sending such an angel into my life. I will never forget Betty's example of joy and gratitude.

People in twelve-step recovery often say that it's impossible to be in a place of fear and resentment if you are in a place of gratitude. Paul understood that. So did Mary. So did Betty. And, though I don't always get it right, in my grounded moments, so do I.

~Donald A. Smith

Reflection

Where do you feel "imprisoned" in your life? When have you recently succumbed to worry and/or found it hard to rejoice? Who are the "angels" who, for you, model a worry-free life of joy and gratitude?

Challenge

Write and mail a note of gratitude to at least one person who is a living example of Philippians 4:4-6.

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Day 11- Does Gratitude Really Matter?

Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" (Luke 17:17-18 ESV)

Too many bad breaks had happened for Joe: a job lost, a marriage ended, and mounting medical bills and car repairs had taken his last dollar. Finally, however, came a good break in the form of a job opportunity that offered a new beginning. But there was no money for gas to get him back and forth to work while he waited for the first paycheck. Reluctantly, Joe asked his pastor as they stood in the church's entryway, "Can you help?" After hearing the young man's story, the pastor agreed to meet at a local gas station where she paid for a tank of gas. His departing words were "When I get my first paycheck, I will be back to repay you." Would it matter whether he did? The gas was a gift, offered without strings.

As Luke describes in chapter 17, there were ten people stricken with a disease that had segregated them from family and community. As they cried out to Jesus for mercy, they wondered, "Could he help?" Jesus instructed them to go to the High Priest who had authority to decide if they were healthy enough to return to home and society. As they made their way there, each one was healed. Life was changed! One (and only one), however, returned to offer gratitude. One came back. For whatever reasons, nine did not.

Did it matter? After all, Jesus did not set forth any expectations. The healing was a gift of grace. Grace doesn't set rules for how the receiver is to respond to the gift.

Yet one senses there is a bigger question: did it matter to the one who came back? How did expressing gratitude offer perhaps a greater healing beyond the physical? Gratitude has great power in life. It moves us to complaining less and celebrating more. It enables us to see more clearly the good in all that is around us. With grateful hearts we focus less on the scarcity of what we do not have and more on the abundance of what we do. Saying thank you can transform an attitude of entitlement into a heart of feeling blessed. Offering thanks does matter ... to the one who says it.

~Dustin L. Cooper

Reflection

How many times did you say thank you yesterday? in the past week? What happens in your heart when you express gratitude?

Challenge

Make a point this week to say thank you, really focusing on the person as you express your gratitude. Pick someone who deserves your thanks and write or call them. Write about your experience in your journal.

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Day 12- Count Your Blessings

You can pass through his open gates with the password of praise.
Come right into his presence with thanksgiving.
Come bring your thank offering to him
and affectionately bless his beautiful name! (Psalm 100:4 TPT)

I recently saw a plaque in the home decor section of a store with the phrase "Gratitude turns what we have into enough." I took a picture with my phone so I could remember the exact wording because it struck me as identifying a deep need in our present culture, while at the same time issuing a subtle yet powerful call to action.

Unfortunately, we live in a culture where what we have is rarely enough. We want more—more money, more toys, more stuff, more recognition, and so on and so on! We are a people who often resist the word *enough* when it comes to our possessions. We want "more" because we think that getting "more" will bring us happiness and contentment. The truth is, what we truly desire from life will not come from what we have. Ultimately, happiness and contentment come from how we view what we have.

Your challenge for today will be to "count your blessings." In the lyrics of the hymn "Count Your Blessings" are two phrases that are applicable to this exercise:

> Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
> And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.*

Through counting our blessings, we begin to see that God is generous with his people and that he delights in giving to us just what we need.

In my work in the ministry of stewardship and generosity, I have yet to meet an unhappy grateful person. There just seems to be a deep peace and abiding joy that only comes from a heart of gratitude. There is also a sense of contentment that accompanies a spirit of thanksgiving.

Gratitude indeed turns what we have into enough, but the best thing about gratitude and thanksgiving is described in Psalm 100:4: "You can pass through his open gates with the password of praise. Come right into his presence with thanksgiving" (TPT).

Gratitude and thanksgiving can lead us right into the presence of God, and God becomes our "enough"!

~Joel Mikel

Reflection

What is your gut reaction to the question, "Do I have enough?" Does that reaction change when you count your blessings?

Challenge

In your journal, create a "table of blessings and thanksgiving" by listing every blessing in your life: your relational blessings, your material blessings, and your spiritual blessings. As you list them, write beside each one the words "Thank you, God!"

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*Johnson Oatman, "Count Your Blessings," 1897.
https://hymnary.org/text/when_upon_lifes_billows_you_are_tempest.

Day 13- Sensible Stewardship

Everyone should give whatever they have decided in their heart. They shouldn't give with hesitation or because of pressure. God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7 CEB)

William and Wanda were two of the most frugal people I've ever known. Decades into retirement, they fed their family and many others in our small town from the huge garden that William tended along the gravel driveway between the road and their house. William loved to collect aluminum cans to sell to the local recycling center and cash register receipts from a local grocer who would donate 1 percent back to their church. Wanda drove a twenty-year-old Buick and believed rinsing and reusing plastic storage bags and aluminum foil was sensible stewardship. They lived a simple life where nothing was wasted.

More importantly, William and Wanda loved Jesus, and they loved serving others. They volunteered countless hours in the church and in the community and believed that one of the best ways they could love God was by loving other people. They constantly spoke of God's grace and of their gratitude for Jesus.

I will never forget the day Wanda stood up to speak in one of our campaign meetings. She said, "You know how thankful we are for Jesus, and we love this church and the impact we are making in this community. We are going to give $1,000 ... a month ... for this campaign." I nearly fell out of my chair. If she had said $1,000 total, I would have been surprised, but $36,000? What in the world were they thinking? Maybe Wanda and William were thinking about 2 Corinthians 9. They understood that God's grace in their lives provided them an opportunity to be generous. In turn their generosity would stir others to give with thanksgiving to God. And maybe that would lead more people to understand God's grace and the joy of being generous.

~Richard L. Rogers

Reflection

Have you ever done something truly sacrificial? Have you ever chosen to be extravagantly generous? What motivated you to do it? How did that decision shape who you are today? How has someone else's extravagant generosity impacted your life?

Challenge

In your journal, make a list of five practical ways you can create less waste and practice "sensible stewardship" like William and Wanda. Implement at least one of these in your daily or weekly routine.

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Day 14- The Divine Nudge

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. (2 Corinthians 8:1-2 NRSV)

Although he had a job that provided a predictable income, Devon felt like he was always struggling to make ends meet. He felt imprisoned by expenses that siphoned off what would be his discretionary income. Now he was faced not only with that persistent sense of shortage but also with his church's annual campaign and its catchy theme about generosity. Certainly, he wanted to commit and participate with others in the congregation to help the church afford its ministries. Yet, he felt embarrassed and angry at himself for not being able to give anything.

His sadness and guilt were intensified when the pastor spoke the passage above from 2 Corinthians on the first Sunday of the annual campaign. Despite the pastor's analysis, those women in Macedonia must not have been as impoverished as they pretended to be, and certainly not as limited as he was. He remembered reading long ago the words of Anne Frank: "You can always—always—give something, even if it's a simple act of kindness!"* But they're not looking for kindness right now, he thought, as he reflected on her words.

As Devon was walking his dog that evening, it dawned on him that he was focused on himself, not on God or the provisions that God persistently makes for him. That's how God expresses his love for me, he realized. The words from his pastor last Sunday included ones commonly attributed to the fourteenth-century Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart: "And suddenly you know: it's time to start something new and trust the magic of beginnings." And so began Devon's entry into prayer realizing that God was nudging him toward something new.

~Sanford D. Coon

Reflection

When have you felt trapped by scarcity? Has abundance ever felt out of reach for you? How might grateful recognition of God's persistent provisions be transformative toward generosity?

Challenge

In prayerful mindfulness, identify three things right now for which you are grateful to God. Pause three more times through the course of today to practice this discipline. Continue it tomorrow and beyond and throughout any interval in which you feel limited by scarcity.

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*Anne Frank, "Give!" in *Anne Frank's Tales from the Secret Annex: A Collection of Her Short Stories, Fables, and Lesser-Known Writings*, ed. Gerrold van der Stroom and Susan Massotty, rev. ed. (New York: Bantam, 2003), 121.

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Day 15- Blessed to Be a Blessing

"I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing." (Genesis 12:2 NIV)

It was during an official ceremony at the Balad Air Base, Iraq, in 2011, that I remember singing "God Bless America," thinking to myself how fortunate I was to live in "the land of the free and the home of the brave." I found myself standing a little taller, my chest swelling with pride knowing that that evening I would have a comfortable place to sleep and a bountiful buffet of food waiting for my next meal at the DFAC (dining facility). Waiting for my return back in Arkansas were a devoted wife and a very supportive church. I was not alone that day in feeling blessed. This was not the case, however, with everyone in attendance at that ceremony. There were those who had left their finances in a mess, those who had left a relationship in shambles, and still others who were struggling with issues of loneliness.

Try to imagine what would happen if the "blessed" of this world took seriously God's announcement to Abraham that they were to pass along his blessings. Prayerful willingness is the starting point. Abraham said yes and the world was changed. Saying yes might mean the "blessed" help take on the burdens of the homeless, the hungry, and those who have fallen on hard times. The apostle Paul wrote to the Roman church, "Those ... strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter" (Romans 15:1 MSG). How much effort would it take to lift the spirits of the downtrodden? What would a blessing look like to those who feel alienated from society?

~Chaplain (Colonel) Walter L. Smith, USAF (Ret.)

Reflection

Surely there has been a time in your life when you thought, "I'm so blessed." Do you remember the feeling that overcame you? Was it in response to an unexpected gift or a second chance? Is God calling you to be a blessing? Will you say yes?

Challenge

Go to your list of blessings in your journal. Pray for guidance and ask, "Is there a way that one or two of my blessings could be used by God as a blessing for others?" In your journal, write about what need in your community or in your church you might help with because of your blessings.

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Day 16- Sleepless Nights

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus. (Matthew 1:24-25 ESV)

Have you ever had a restless night in the midst of trying to make a significant decision? I can remember many sleepless nights tossing and turning seeking peace—praying, weeping and often getting up walking the floor. Some of those restless nights revolved around financial issues: the purchase of a home or car, new career opportunities, or how generous I should be to the church or other great ministries. During those hours I would pray and pray and pray even more seeking peace. My preacher dad would often say, "Pray the night through until you find peace!"

Generosity is a decision and should be rooted deeply in prayer. My grandmother would say, "What is in the well comes up in the bucket." Prayer deepens our well of generosity. Giving comes from deep within us. Praying enables us to connect with God and listen for God's will.

Joseph was seeking peace about his relationship with Mary. His fiancée, whom he greatly loved, was with child, and he was not the father. Deciding what to do was a life-changing decision and required much prayer. In stressful exhaustion he fell asleep, and an angel (a messenger from God) gave him a path forward. Joseph's decision had become one of obedience to God.

Generosity begins as a response to God. This response is most often an act of faith. In the end, Joseph acted on faith and because of his faithful response to the call of God, the world was forever changed. The call to generosity begins with prayer and moves through faith. In the end, we are forever changed and, just maybe, the world is too.

~Tom Melzoni

Reflection

Do you remember a decision about generosity in your life? Did the decision require obedience to God's call? How did God speak to you?

Challenge

Pray: "God, how much should I keep of your generous blessings in my life?" This is a different kind of prayer. Respond by giving what you don't keep to impact a life, a church, and a world.

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Day 17- Wrestling with God

Then he said, "Your name won't be Jacob any longer, but Israel, because you struggled with God and with men and won." (Genesis 32:28 CEB)

Prayer is not always easy!

Nancy was eagerly anticipating her retirement as an elementary school teacher when her pastor asked if she would consider developing a Sunday morning program for special needs children. Her first thought was, naturally, "This isn't how I imagined spending my first year of retirement." Reluctantly, she agreed to pray. Nancy prayed, wrestling with God, and in the end, instead of spending her first year traveling, gardening, and doing all of the things she had long dreamed of, she spent her time pulling together a curriculum for families and their special needs children. She continually asked herself why she agreed to do this.

On the Sunday of the program's launch six families and their special needs children attended the first class. Three months later, all six families joined the church, and the children were baptized. Nancy sat in the back pew, a smile lighting her face. She hadn't traveled much, and her garden still had weeds, but she wouldn't change a thing.

Like Jacob, the willingness to struggle in prayer and step out in faith transformed Nancy's life.

Transformation defines us as followers of Jesus. Usually, as with Nancy and Jacob, transformation comes with struggle. We wrestle with God, sometimes through the wee hours of the night and always through prayer, and this prayerful wrestling changes us.

Faithful giving and generosity are not always what we naturally do. Faithful giving and generosity are prayerful struggles that define who we are, or rather, who God calls us to be. Prayerfully wrestling with God about who God wants us to be changes everything about us.

~R. Craig Miller

Reflection

Have you ever felt God asking you to change? When are times that you have struggled with God? Who serves as an example for you when you resist God?

Challenge

Search your heart and find where you are currently struggling with God (if it isn't obvious). Spend an hour with no distractions in "prayerful wrestling."

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Day 18- Praying It Through

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them. (Luke 6:12-13 NIV)

A close friend of mine has an adult child who spent several years running from God. It wasn't a series of short sprints either, but more like a marathon. Alcohol and recreational drugs were an easy trap for someone with addictive tendencies and family history. New relationships always turned into broken relationships, and her two boys were pulled through the pain. She bounced in and out of rehab programs while her family kept encouraging her, loving her, and praying for her. For almost a decade, they wept through every setback, they scooped up the kids for time with the rest of the family, they kept believing that God wanted her to be free from the bondage, and they kept praying.

Because I am one who has trouble remembering to pray for things for more than about a week, I can't even wrap my head around "praying it through" for almost ten years. Maybe that's why I usually only see God make the impossible become possible through the prayers of others. You guessed it—my friend's daughter is a new creation. She has new purpose and direction in her life. She is chasing after God and expressing God's love back to those who stayed beside her, fought for her, and refused to stop praying.

Whenever I read these verses in Luke 6, I wonder about the mystery of prayer and what I might be missing. This is Jesus, the Son of God. Seems like he was well equipped to select the twelve apostles from among his disciples, on his own, right? Instead, he waited for this moment when he had spent the whole night praying to God.

~Richard L. Rogers

Reflection

Why do you think Jesus spent so much time praying? Is there a major decision or situation that you should be praying about? Is there someone who desperately needs you to be praying for them?

Challenge

Take a picture of something that represents who or what you need to be praying for as if someone's depending on it. Then make that picture the lockscreen image on your phone to remind you.

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Day 19- The Journey of Prayer

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." (Luke 11:9 NIV)

Most of us are good at the first baby step of prayer. It is easy to ask God to do something! Unfortunately, after the asking, we think that we are finished; we think that since we have already asked, we are expected to do nothing more.

The first step in any journey is critical. We do need to ask in order to receive. But asking is just the first step. It takes many more steps to continue a real journey of prayer.

Jesus offers his disciples a model for such a prayer journey. Ask—yes, of course! But then seek. And finally, knock on the doors that you find.

Seeking God's will is much more work than simply asking; seeking takes time, attention, listening, looking, searching. That journey of prayer will lead us far past asking, deep into new paths of seeking God's way for our lives. Along those paths we will discover doorways—places where choices and decisions must be made. Do we have the courage and commitment to knock on those doors? And when those new doorways are opened, will we step into a new way of life?

Simply asking demands little of us. Seeking means searching for God's will in our lives, and such seeking will undoubtedly change us—redirecting us in God's way. Knocking on the doors that God would open to us may well lead us down paths that we never imagined! We do not know what God has in store for us when we begin such a journey, but one thing is certain: such a journey of prayer will change our lives. After all, changing us has always been the real power of prayer.

~Mick Tune

Reflection

Are you seeking God's will? Have you asked God to lead you down God's paths and open doors?

Challenge

During your prayer time, write down in your journal what you are asking and what you are given, what you are seeking and what you are finding, what doors you knock upon and what is opened to you.

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Day 20- Rerouting

The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd.

By faith, we see the world called into existence by God's word, what we see created by what we don't see. (Hebrews 11:1-3 MSG)

A few years ago, while traveling in Long Island, I found myself in downtown New York City at 10:00 at night with the gas gauge below a quarter of a tank. I had missed the exit I was supposed to take, and the GPS kept saying the words I hear so often—rerouting-rerouting-rerouting. I kept turning, kept on following, and went through some areas that probably weren't the best places to get stuck. Sometimes the GPS would say to turn, and the road would be closed for construction—rerouting-rerouting-rerouting.

As I was traveling down an alley, I looked up, and lo and behold I was right beneath the Brooklyn Bridge! Finally, the GPS had gotten me safely to my hotel. Needless to say, I offered prayers of thanksgiving.

Sounds a lot like life for some of us, doesn't it? Maybe you have made similar mistakes in life, some choices that were not the best. Maybe you have felt lost and in a "bad place." Maybe you know where you want to go or should go, but you just don't have a clue how to get there. And all the while God is saying to each of us, "You may not know the way, but I do. I know exactly where you are, and I will lead you home." You may get sidetracked, you may take a wrong turn, and you may get completely lost, but God always knows exactly where you are and will lead you home.

~Scott McKenzie

Reflection

Are you pounding the steering wheel of life in frustration because you are not headed where you want to go? Right now, are you looking around and saying, "This isn't where I want to be"?

Challenge

Pray for God's guidance. Ask God to help you trust in him. Beware, God may say, "rerouting-rerouting-rerouting."

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Day 21- Let It Be

And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:38 ESV)

Mary received the angel's message and had to make a life-changing decision. Imagine the courage and faith it took for Mary to choose to "let it be." Her decision would release her into a new direction and change her life, and ours, forever.

Often we are called to make difficult and life-changing decisions. Seeking God's wisdom may result in a change in direction or giving up on dreams and plans we have made. For Mary, her decision to "let it be" created challenges for her socially, culturally, religiously, and personally. If she chose to live according to God's will, her life would be changed forever. Despite all the challenges, Mary made the choice to "let it be" according to the call of God.

Repeating a phrase in prayer may make it live within us. It's like a favorite piece of music that we can play over and over again in our head. It soon becomes part of us. "I am the servant of the Lord" was such a phrase for Mary, spoken first at one of the biggest moments in her life. In times of prayer, a sentence like that can occupy mind and heart and raise us closer to God. For example:

There will be an answer, let it be ...
Whisper words of wisdom, let it be ...

Allow these words, keeping in mind Mary's words to the angel, to play repeatedly in your head and become a part of you. Like Mary, choose to become a servant of the Lord, and "let it be."

~Tom Melzoni

Reflection

What does God have in mind for you? In what way, like Mary, are you to bear good news to others and be empowered by the Holy Spirit?

Challenge

Find your phrase and pray to seek God's will for you. If you say "Yes!" the work of God will be brought forward. Like Mary, say, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Let your gift be a response to God's messenger in your life.

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Day 22- Who Is in Possession?

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. (Mark 10:17-22 NIV)

He came to the correct person, Jesus, and he asked about the correct subject, eternal life. But when Jesus responds, "Why do you call me good? ... No one is good—except God alone" (v. 18), it seems strange. Most of us probably think Jesus is good, so what is Jesus attempting to teach that young man? The lesson Jesus is teaching is that in order to get eternal life, doing good or being good is not enough.

Jesus goes on to remind the young man of the commandments that the young man had already accomplished. At first the young man is elated. He thinks he is in! "Teacher, ... all these I have kept since I was a boy" (v. 20). You can just imagine him pumping his fist and exclaiming "I made it!"

Peering into him and loving him, Jesus says, "One thing you lack. ... Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (v. 21).

The young man finds himself at a crossroads and has to answer the question we all face. Do we believe our future will be good because God is with us? Or do we believe our future is secure because our portfolio is diversified enough and our assets are allocated sufficiently? Simply put, is our faith placed in God or in our stuff?

In the end, the young man allowed his possessions to own him, and he missed life. God asked to be loved more than the young man's stuff, and the young man was not able to do it.

~Dale McConnell

Reflection

What is at the center of your life—God or your possessions?

Challenge

Take a personal inventory of all of your possessions. In your journal, reflect on the question, "Is there anything I would be unable to give up if God asked me to?"

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Day 23- When Lunch Becomes a Banquet

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" (John 6:8-9 NRSV)

It is likely the little boy who gave up his five loaves and two fish never forgot the encounter with Jesus! He had heard the men asking if anyone had any food. He had the lunch his mother had prepared. What should he do? With a child's open and generous heart, he opened his bag and shared his lunch with them. Imagine his surprise. He thought he was giving away his lunch, but discovered he was being invited to a feast that would feed thousands! In Jesus' hands, that lunch became a banquet.

Donna and Gary, a childless couple in their early forties, consented to be chairpersons of their church's capital campaign. As requested, each day they prayed the campaign prayer: "Lord, what do you want to do through us?" Nobody knew, but they had been saving for a thirty-five-foot camping trailer for several years. The time had come to make the purchase, and as they were driving to the dealer, they looked at each other and asked, "What are we doing?" They discovered God's answer to their campaign prayer was to postpone the purchase of a trailer and contribute their savings to the campaign.

God's leading to Donna and Gary was sealed by faith when they chose to sacrifice for their church's campaign. Not only did their response impact them, but it had a huge impact on their church. It was not just about the money. When they told their story, the impact of their faithful response to God's answer to their prayers inspired heart-searching prayers from other members of their church family.

Sealing God's answer to our prayer with faith is a critical step in the journey of generosity.

A year later in a follow-up conversation with the leaders of the campaign at their church, I learned that Donna and Gary had been blessed with a "miracle child." I called and visited with them on the phone. Joyfully, they told me of the birth of their daughter. They had all but given up hope they could ever have a family! What an amazing God we serve.

~Gregory McGarvey

Reflection

How did the boy's experience that day impact his faith and living in years to come? Have you ever given a gift and discovered it opened a door to new relationships or experiences you could not have imagined?

Challenge

Pray with intention: "Lord, what do you want to do through me?"

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Day 24- Relying on God

Then Jesus said to them, "Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed. After all, one's life isn't determined by one's possessions, even when someone is very wealthy." Then he told them a parable: "A certain rich man's land produced a bountiful crop. He said to himself, What will I do? I have no place to store my harvest! Then he thought, Here's what I'll do. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. That's where I'll store all my grain and goods. I'll say to myself, You have stored up plenty of goods, enough for several years. Take it easy! Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself." (Luke 12:15-19 CEB)

Most of us have experienced that feeling of relief when, after a time of hard work, we can finally take a breath. Our work is done, and now it is time to enjoy the fruits of our labor. We look forward to taking a drive in our new car, treating ourselves to a fancy dinner, and being able to eat, drink, and be merry, much like the Rich Fool of the parable found in Luke 12.

This idea sounds great, right? But Jesus tells the crowd, with harsh criticism, God's thoughts on greed:

"But God said to him, 'Fool, tonight you will die. Now who will get the things you have prepared for yourself?' This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and aren't rich toward God." (Luke 12:20-21 CEB)

The Rich Fool will die, and the stuff he has accumulated will be worthless to him. Ouch! Seems that although the Rich Fool had amassed substantial wealth, he forgot to acknowledge God's role in his success. Instead of expressing gratitude to God for his abundance, he became complacent. He had become self-reliant rather than relying on God.

The journey of generosity begins with a fundamental understanding that God is the source of everything. Our relationships, skills, and even our wealth are blessings from our Creator. Being sealed by faith means we understand we are not self-made, but God-made. Finding our way home involves giving the glory and thanks to God for his eternal generosity.

~Kristine Miller

Reflection

Can you recall a time when you became complacent and self-reliant? What happened to remind you of God's provision in your life? How do you acknowledge your dependence on God and give thanks?

Challenge

Try spending an entire day being attentive to all the ways in which God has provided for you. Keep a list in your journal and reflect on each one. Did you notice that while you're listing your blessings, they keep coming? How can you express your gratitude to God?

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Day 25- Whom Do You Worship?

The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." (Genesis 22:15-18 NIV)

After giving Abraham and Sarah the gift of a long-awaited son, God instructed Abraham to "take a journey" with his beloved son, build an altar, place the child on this altar, and ... sacrifice his life to God? (Read the story in Genesis 21 and 22.) In reading this story, it is difficult to imagine what God may be doing!

As a father of six, I cannot imagine the depth of faith and trust Abraham demonstrated to have even left on that journey! Forty-four years ago, I went through an experience that would change my life forever. Our first child, who had lived a healthy three years of life, was diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia. Only fourteen days after her diagnosis, that precious girl died in my arms, and I came face to face with the question, "Who is it that you worship, Larry, the Gift or the Giver?"

In Genesis, God asked Abraham the same question. God asked Abraham to decide who it was that he would worship, the Gift (Isaac) or the Giver (God). At various points in our lives, we will all answer this question, and the answer will determine how we live life. Worshiping the Gift will only make us bitter, angry, cold, and unhappy. Worshiping the Giver will make us loving, caring, generous, and compassionate. Worshiping God, the Giver, enables us to live in the presence of a loving and giving God whose abundant generosity is always available to us.

~Larry Sykora

Reflection

So far in your life, especially during times of loss or crisis, how have you answered the question, "Whom do you worship?" When have you trusted God and when have you chosen something else?

Challenge

Think of someone you know who has gone through tragedy and still has clearly trusted God and has remained positive and hopeful. Talk with the person and ask him or her these questions: How were you able to get through this? What role did faith play?

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Day 26-What's in Your Cup?

"But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you." (Luke 11:41 NIV)

Jesus had already had a busy day. He'd performed an exorcism and spent time teaching. While he'd been speaking, a Pharisee had invited him to eat dinner. But Jesus ignited a controversy when he didn't wash up before taking his seat at the table.

Being "pure" was a big deal to the Pharisees, so they would wash both themselves and their eating utensils in ritual baths. Some taught that it was important to keep the outside of the cup clean, while others focused on the inside.

Jesus sidesteps their debate altogether by shifting the focus to the contents of our cup. It's not just about being clean, inside or out, but it's about the quality of what's inside. In the comparison, he leaves open the question whether he is talking about what's within our cup or within our heart. One is tied to the other. You can't have good wine and a sour heart.

Jesus then says, what matters isn't the condition of your cup but your willingness to share what's inside. What defines our cleanliness isn't the state of our cups, inside or out, but the abundance of our generosity. Instead of focusing on keeping yourself clean, what matters is giving away your good wine, just as he demonstrated earlier at the wedding at Cana. This is the best antidote to the greed that leads to death. What is within our cup reflects what is within our heart. An empty cup equals a full heart. Surprisingly, when the cup is empty, we arrive home and find our best self: the very person God created us to be.

~Len Wilson

Reflection

In what ways do we allow our faith to become focused on keeping ourselves clean? How might you change your focus to the contents of the cup instead of the cup itself?

Challenge

Look for a way this week to share the contents of your cup with a stranger or someone outside of your daily circle.

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Day 27- The Voice

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:27 NIV)

Sometimes the voices overwhelm us, voices calling for us to buy this or do this; voices calling for us to be fearful or angry; voices reminding us of our failings and sins; voices telling us we are not worthwhile or lovable. One pastor I know refers to these voices as the committee meeting in our minds.

There is, my friends, another voice. A Voice quiet but persistent, a Voice whispering in our ears, "You are mine ... you are loved ... you are forgiven ... you are of eternal worth." In the midst of the committee meeting going on in your head, can you hear that Voice? In the midst of other voices, can you dare to believe in the other Voice? Can you dare to believe you are both known and loved?

Parents called their rabbi and asked him to please come to their home and straighten out their willful and disobedient child. When the rabbi came to the house, much to the parents' chagrin, he simply held the boy close to him and never said a word. The boy grew up and became a famous rabbi, known for wisdom and compassion. When asked how he came to be so wise and compassionate, he said, "As a boy, I put my ear close to the chief rabbi's heart, and in that moment, I heard the heartbeat of God." Hear the heartbeat of God, whispering "I love you." And when we hear the heartbeat of God, when we believe in the voice of God whispering "I love you," then we are home; then we are whole.

~Scott McKenzie

Reflection

When do you most hear God's whisper?

Challenge

At the end of the day, sit down for a few minutes and ask, "What voices did I listen to today?" In your journal, make a list of the committee voices you hear throughout the day. Now in the quiet, can you hear the whisper of God, can you hear the heartbeat of God? Welcome home!

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Day 28- The Joyful Ouch

For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. (2 Corinthians 8:3-5 NIV)

The background of this scripture lesson is a great Palestinian famine. Suffering and hunger were rampant. Paul enlisted the aid of the Gentile churches for relief of Jewish Christians.

The Macedonians responded in a remarkable way, with no excuses. One might say they had every right to find an excuse as they were severely persecuted and impoverished themselves. And yet, as God's own people, their hearts were moved by God's grace and the expressed need. Excuses for not giving were abandoned and they ultimately gave beyond their means and pleaded to do so.

Some years ago, our family was starting the stewardship journey of a capital campaign in our church. Believing we should encourage our children to take part in the experience, we sat our two boys down, explained the campaign and its purpose, and suggested we find a way to give of ourselves to support our church through the campaign.

My "bright" idea was to suggest our two boys come up with their own definition of the word *sacrifice*—in a one-word definition. (The one-word definition is where I went wrong.)

Our older son, a mature twelve-year-old at the time, shouted with fervor, "That's easy, it's the word *ouch*!"

Hurriedly his eight-year-old brother, not to be outdone, responded with a hearty, "That's easy, it's the word *joyful*!"

"That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard!" his big brother stated.

Trying to save the day, my wife jumped in and asked our younger son to explain what he meant. He answered her in these questions:

"Well, aren't we doing this for our church?" Yes, my wife replied. "Then, aren't we doing this for God?" Again, a yes in reply.

"Well then, why would God want this if it is not joyful?"

Our sons' wisdom has morphed into a new definition for giving at our house. The combination of these two words is a definition for giving back to God out of God's goodness and grace—it's a "joyful ouch." And in the joyful ouch, we discover our best self, the self created in the image of a loving, generous God.

~Terry Goolsby

Reflection

In response to God's goodness, bounty, and grace, what is your "joyful ouch"? Can you remember the times when you've offered excuses instead of giving?

Challenge

In your journal, list other times you've felt joy in sacrifice.

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