



28 DAYS OF DEVOTION

WEEK 1 (October 17 - 23) Born To Be Generous

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.

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