

## DAY ELEVEN

*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

Artyom is a ten-year-old Russian orphan. When the church group visited Artyom, for some reason, latched onto Scott. He took Scott by the arm and led him through the orphanage showing off his room and the place he ate meals. All the while Artyom's eyes were filled with joy and laughter. In spite of the fact that Scott spoke little Russian and Artyom spoke no English, the two connected. As the church group prepared to depart, Artyom sat beside Scott, pulled a silver ring from his finger and held it out for Scott to take. Scott eyes filled with tears and he spoke the only Russian word he knew -- nyet, nyet -- no, no. This child, who had nothing in the world to call his own except this ring, desperately wanted to give this ring to Scott. For Artyom, his abundant joy and extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity. Like the Macedonians, Artyom desperately wanted to give.

What do we want? For many of us who have so much, we want more. And truth be told, it's never enough. What would happen if, by God's grace, our desire to gain more and have more could be transformed into a heart-felt desire to give more? What would happen if we spent as much time figuring out ways to give as we spend figuring out how to earn, have and keep?

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Who has taught you about generosity?
2. Can you recall a time when someone who could least afford it gave you a generous gift? What was it like? How did you respond? Did it affect you in any way?
3. Can you recall a time when you were particularly generous? What was it like? What did you learn? How has it impacted your life?

## PRAYER

*Oh God, thank You for the examples of generosity You have sent into our lives. Forgive us Lord for being more concerned with how much we can earn, have and keep, instead of how much we can give. Open our hearts, Oh God, to the joy of generosity, Amen.*

PS. Yes, Artyom finally convinced Scott to take the ring. He wears it as a vivid and real reminder of what it means to truly give.

## DAY TWELVE

*For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints—and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and by the will of God to us...*

2 Corinthians 8:3-5

It simply makes no sense. The Macedonian Christians, in the midst of their own poverty, in the midst of their own struggles, begging earnestly for the joyous privilege of GIVING. IT MAKES NO SENSE. How could this happen? The answer is amazingly simple. They gave themselves first to God and then to others.

Her name was Michelle. As she considered her gift to the church campaign, she became increasingly upset. She desperately wanted to make a significant gift, but because of her life situation she thought it impossible. She was faced with medical bills for a child, college tuition for another child, and a 35% pay cut for her husband. Like the Macedonians, Michelle wanted to give. Her pastor listened to Michelle's frustration and suggested that she be open to what God may want, and in fact, what God may do. He suggested that she simply pray. Reluctantly, she agreed. As she gave herself to God in prayer, something happened. She became aware of ways she could give and give with generosity. It wasn't easy. It wasn't magic. It required prayer, faith, and trust. When Michelle arrived at the church on Commitment Sunday, her face radiated joy and peace. She gave herself first to God and then to others.

In every campaign the goal is the same, that each of us would give ourselves first to the Lord and then to others. If we truly give ourselves to God and then to others, we will raise all the money we will ever need. And far more importantly, lives and hearts -- like Michelle's -- will be forever changed and transformed.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Have I truly asked for God's guidance in giving?
2. Am I open to what God would have me do?
3. What might prevent me from being open and obedient to what God wants from me?

## PRAYER

*Oh God, I am frightened to think about coming to You for guidance. I'm not sure I want to hear what You have to say. Forgive me. Help me to lay aside all of the reasons and fears and help me to turn to You in faith and trust. Help me, Oh God, to be open to whatever You would have me do. Fill my heart with the Macedonian spirit of generosity. Through Christ my Lord, Amen.*

## DAY THIRTEEN

*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved.*

1 Corinthians 10:31-33

In a wonderful devotional classic, God Calling, the two anonymous authors write on March 16 of the Christian's calling to reflect God to the world and to make God real in the world. Think of those phrases for a moment. Reflect God, and make God real in the world. Another way of saying, as Paul does do everything to the glory of God...not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved. Do I reflect God to the world in all that I do? Do I make God real in all that I do? Do I work that others may come to the saving knowledge of Christ or do I spend most of my time seeking my own advantage?

If I take the time to ask these questions, if I take the time to examine my life, I may not be pleased with the answers. The truth is most of my time is spent in seeking my own advantage. If I look at my checkbook or budget, I am confronted with the same questions. What do my spending patterns reflect? What do they make real? To whose advantage am I working? The answer is almost always the same, my family and me.

One of the benefits of a stewardship campaign is that it helps us re-prioritize our lives according to God's plan and not simply according to our own wants and desires. A young family had been saving for years to remodel their home and make it exactly what they had always wanted. As part of a stewardship campaign they began praying about what God wanted and not what they wanted. They looked at the project, they looked at their church, and they prayed with an open heart. They wanted to reflect to the world the love and grace of God. They wanted to make God's love real to their community. They intentionally decided to put their remodeling money to work for the advantage of others and not themselves. The process was not easy, the answers were not always clear, but as they told their story, their faces radiated joy and peace. Their house had not been remodeled, but their hearts and lives had been.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What does my life reflect?
2. Am I willing to honestly and openly seek God's will for my life -- even my finances?
3. How can I reprioritize my life in order to better reflect God and His love?

## PRAYER

*Dear God, I confess that I do not always reflect You and Your love. I confess that much of my time is spent in seeking my own advantage. Give me the courage, Oh God, to seek Your will for my heart, my life and even my finances. In all that I do and say, help me to reflect You and Your love. I pray through Christ my Lord, Amen.*

## DAY FOURTEEN

*...Children, how hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God.*

Mark 10:24

Perhaps the saddest story in Scripture is of the rich young man who quietly and sadly turns away from Jesus when asked to sell what he has and give it to the poor. In his explanation to the disciples of this difficult teaching, Jesus indicates that the fundamental question is one of trust. In whom or what do we place our trust?

From our earliest days most of us are taught to make it on our own, to depend on no one but ourselves. We are continually reminded to value our independence. And yet God appears to call us to a radical DEPENDENCE on God as the ultimate source of life and blessing. Who do we trust for our happiness? For many of us the answer is rather simple and obvious. We trust in ourselves and our ability to take care of ourselves.

In *God Calling*, the authors write: I am your Lord, your supply. You must rely on Me. Trust to the uttermost limit. Trust and do not be afraid. You must depend on Divine Power only. In the midst of making your decision on giving, you are asked to prayerfully consider not only the question of sacrifice, but also the questions of faith and trust. Does the gift you are considering demonstrate that ultimate faith and trust rests in God and not in the accumulation of wealth and possessions?

The Williamsons were already committed to giving to their church. They were comfortable and felt good about their tithing. As they prayed and waited on God, they felt called to increase their tithe, to go up to the next step of giving. They said yes and made the commitment. THEN, this couple saw their stocks crash and they faced the difficult question of what to do about their commitment. Most of us would be shaken and afraid to see our commitment through. But the Williamsons were people who had ultimate faith and trust in God. They simply said, "Because of what God has done for us, because of His blessings we will trust and have faith that we will be able to keep the commitment He led us to make."

*...Children, how hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God.*

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. As you look at our life, where do you truly place trust?
2. If you were the rich young man, how would you respond to Jesus?
3. Does the gift you are considering represent faith and trust in God and not in ability to accumulate wealth and possessions?

## PRAYER

*Lord, I confess that Your question to the rich young man deeply troubles me. I speak of trust and faith in You but often find myself living as if I only trust in myself, my abilities, my wealth and my possessions. Teach me Lord. Teach me to trust truly in You and Your love. Show me the gift You would have me make, a gift of sacrifice and faith, Amen.*

## DAY FIFTEEN

*But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

Isaiah 40:31

In our family, we all understood that if we went to a restaurant and the line was long and the wait more than a few minutes, we were not going to stay. We might spend an hour driving to different places but we weren't going to wait fifteen minutes just to get a seat at our favorite restaurant. I wonder how many good meals we missed just because we refused to wait?

In our current day of microwaves, 24-hour news, remote controls and drive-through windows, our ability to wait seems almost non-existent. I want it right now, and if you can't get it for me right now, I'll find someone who can.

*But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

Perhaps the most important task of the stewardship journey is to wait upon the Lord. Waiting upon God can take many different forms. One man turned his evening walk with his dog into his prayer and waiting time. Of course, after his potential pledge had more than doubled his wife told him, "Please stop taking the dog for a walk! I'll walk him from now on."

As we learn to wait upon God and listen for His still small voice, strange things begin to happen. We begin to experience renewal and strength, joy and peace. Waiting upon God can renew marriages, as couples wait upon God together. Career paths change as people seriously consider the question, "God, what do You want from me, not just financially but with my entire life?"

Waiting may not be easy. Waiting may require finding a specific time, perhaps in the car with the radio off, perhaps in the shower, perhaps taking an evening walk. Remember..

*But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Am I willing to wait upon God?
2. What are some of the barriers in my life that prevent me from waiting on God?
3. Is there a special time that I can devote to waiting upon God?

## PRAYER

*Dear God, forgive me for always being in such a hurry. Teach me to slow down. Teach me to wait. Teach me to listen. In my waiting and listening, Oh God, bring renewal to my heart, my life, my family and my church, Amen.*