

SOW **STRONG**

DEVOTIONAL







SOW STRONG

21 Day Devotional Booklet

Second Family,

Thank you for taking the opportunity to join us on this 21-day preparatory journey leading up to Pledge Sunday for Phase 2 on February 8th. We believe this 21-day period is important because generosity is always a spiritual decision. Further, we are certain that our goals in Phase 2 of our Master Plan are not about bricks and mortar, so to speak, but about preparing our campus for the spiritual harvest God will bring to fruition in the days, months, and years that lie before us.

When we talk about generosity at Second, we are careful to explain that generosity means living and giving generously for the sake of the Gospel. Because biblical generosity has the spread of the Gospel as its ultimate aim, it is an inherently spiritual undertaking. The outline of this devotional guide bears out that belief.

In **Week 1**, we will focus on Generosity Beginning with Worship. We will focus on selected characteristics of God that lead us to worship. As we prayerfully consider each of those characteristics, we are reminded of the glory that He is due and the grace He has shown.

In **Week 2**, we move to focus on the evidence in Scripture that show us that generosity is central to who God is. Each passage we read depicts God as the Giver of that for which His people are in desperate need. The passages we read demonstrate that when we are generous, we are imitating God's character in a tangible act of worship.

In **Week 3**, we close by looking at the biblical record of some who gave sacrificially toward the redemptive work God was doing through His people. The size of the gifts in the passages will vary greatly, but the resonant chord of generosity sounds throughout.

It is our hope that as we read, pray, and reflect through this devotional, God will prepare us for an incredible, worshipful response on February 8th. It is a mighty and significant work God has called us to at Second. We pray He will enable us to finish **STRONG!**

Dr. Mike Watson
Senior Associate Pastor

JANUARY 18 - WORSHIP GOD AS CREATOR

"For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him."
(Colossians 1:16)

Often, when a person receives recognition for a notable achievement, they stand before the public and utter these words: "None of this would be possible without..."

Whether it is the athlete welcomed into the Hall of Fame, the actor honored with an award, or the artist acknowledged for a masterpiece; each reminds us that they wouldn't be where they were without someone else behind them. "None of this would be possible without..."

No words are truer than when it comes to all created things. Nothing would exist if it were not for God. "...without Him nothing was made that was made." (John 1:3) The sky above? *Check*. The earth below? *Check*. The universe beyond? *Check. Check. Check*. It all exists because God has created it all. It is hard to imagine everything visible in creation was commanded into existence at God's spoken word. The unseen things? He's responsible for that, too. Marvel for a moment that He has given each of us our life and breath. (Acts 17:25)

The heavenly host praise the Lord as Creator of all. They sing unto him,

"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." (Revelation 4:11)

Let's not wait until heaven to worship Him as Creator. He is worthy of it all.

JANUARY 19 - WORSHIP GOD AS SOVEREIGN OVER ALL

"Our God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases."
(Psalm 115:3)

In Psalm 115, the psalmist pleads for God to act on behalf of His own glory – *"for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness."* (vs. 2) The only thing we know for certain from the context of the psalm is that the people of God were facing distress from nations that worshipped false gods. In the midst of that distress, the psalmist compares God to the false gods by pointing to His sovereignty over all things.

In one short verse the psalmist draws our attention to the magnitude and greatness of God. He is in the heavens, beyond comprehension, limitless and infinitely powerful. He is invisible, but the evidence of Him is all around us. As we read yesterday, He is Creator. Everything He spoke into existence proclaims His glory in the order and beauty of creation. He knows no rival.

What is more, He does all that He pleases. Because He is loving and gracious, just and righteous, doing *"all that He pleases"* reflects the splendor of His character. Doing all that He pleases means that there is no force in existence capable of thwarting His will. There is nothing to hinder His sovereign will from going forth.

What examples do we see in Scripture of Him doing whatever He pleases? We see Him making a way through a seabed so that His desperate people could cross on dry land. We see Him providing for His people by bringing water out of a stone – twice. We see His people dwelling in a land He had promised for generations. We see forgiveness, long-suffering, and restoration offered repeatedly to a rebellious people. Most significantly, doing *"all that He pleases"* means coming to earth in Jesus Christ, living a perfect life, dying on a cross for our sake, and being victoriously resurrected as the

conqueror of sin and death. He is sovereign over all and not even death could hold Him!

- Write out the lyrics to the first verse of the timeless hymn, *How Great Thou Art*. How does considering God's "power throughout the universe displayed" shape your prayer life as you bring your concerns to Him?
- What other examples of God doing "all that He pleases" in the Bible help you understand His character? What about examples from your own life?

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JANUARY 20 - WORSHIP GOD AS THE GIVER OF LIFE

"...then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature." (Genesis 2:7)

Our God is so creative that He chose to make us from dust and then breathed into our nostrils the breath of life. Boom. Man became a living creature. There are many things that humanity can "create", and we are usually very proud of that. But only God can impart life.

Prior to Him breathing the breath of life into Adam, Adam was just building materials. But when that divine exhale filled Adam's newly functioning lungs, he was alive. When was the last time you thanked God for your ability to breathe? Go ahead, take a deep breath in your nose and then let it out your mouth. It is a blessing to be alive.

In my youth, I had a song I would listen to from GS Megaphone titled, "Alive".

Here is the chorus:

*Just so glad to be alive
Jesus when I'm with You
Every next day is the greatest day
I've ever known
With God I'm alive*

*I've seen God take the craziest storms
And turn them into the bluest skies
But before he could change my world
I had to give Him and make Him my life
Man I just gotta say I'm so glad to be alive*

Life is truly a gift and this song is a simple reminder that we have a choice on how we approach our daily life. We ought to remind

JANUARY 21 - WORSHIP GOD AS ETERNAL

“To the King of the Ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever, Amen” (1 Timothy 1:17)

In this passage, the apostle Paul is glorifying God for His eternal greatness. Why? This doxology, this expression of worship, is a response from Paul as he remembers his salvation. In verses 15 and 16, Paul gives the reason that Christ came, which was to “save sinners” of which he says, I am the “foremost”. Paul says he received mercy so that Christ might display His perfect patience as an example to those who would believe in Jesus for...and here it is... eternal life!

As if to expound on that idea of eternal life, Paul rattles off a series of praises about the Lord and his eternality. He says, “To the King of the Ages”. We worship a God who is King of all time! That means He rules over all time and eternity; nothing escapes his sight and control. He is sovereign.

He goes on to say that He is immortal, or another word would be incorruptible! John Piper says that it means He cannot be ruined. I love that. We worship a God that cannot end. He has always been and always will be.

The next word Paul uses is invisible. Paul says our God is beyond the limits of what we can see or imagine! There is no image or object we can look to that compares to God. He is the only God, there is no competition, there is nothing that can defeat Him or render Him useless.

This eternal God is more than worthy of worship! Therefore, Paul concludes this exclamation of praise with a call to give honor and glory to God. Then, as if looking down the corridors of time into the book of Revelation, Paul says, we will do this forever and ever!

- Which of Paul's descriptors of God's nature in this passage resonates most deeply with you? Why do you think so?
- What adjectives would you use to describe God's magnitude and majesty, based on your experience with Him?

JANUARY 22 - WORSHIP GOD AS PERSONAL

"But now thus says the Lord, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.'" (Isaiah 43:1)

Many of us have been taught, perhaps if you were raised in church or around the teachings of the Bible, that God is a personal God – and this is true. However, it isn't always true. We can easily find other places in the Scripture that God keeps Himself distant from people. For example, Isaiah 59:2 teaches that God hides His face from sinners. Proverbs 15:29, as well, says that God is far from the wicked, but that He hears the prayers of the righteous. Clearly there are those from whom God is distant and those to whom God is near.

Perhaps, then, we can say that God is personal, but that a real, personal, even intimate knowledge of God is based upon a couple of other things also being true. Isaiah 43:1 is clearly a personal, intimate word spoken by God to his people – *"I have called you by name, you are mine."* But if you notice, there are two foundational realities described here to explain why God is present. First, God says He has redeemed them. He has paid the redemption price to win them back – to bring them home. That leads to the second foundational reality, which is that they belong to Him. In Isaiah 43:1, God says to His people: I created you, I formed you, I have redeemed you, I call you by name, and you are mine. Redeemed. Belong. Know.

What kind of man or woman, therefore, can truly know God as personal and intimate? Who can live in real relationship with God? It is only those who are redeemed. Those who belong to Him. You see, our ability to know God as personal is wholly based upon Christ. It is Christ who has redeemed us! In Him we belong to God.

Yes, God is personal to His people. He hears us when we call, He sees our every need, He cares for us. However, we must never forget

that all this is ours only through Christ Jesus. To borrow from the Apostle Paul in the book of Ephesians: In Christ Jesus, we who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Jesus. He is our redemption. And in Jesus, we now know God personally, intimately, and truly.

- In light of yesterday's devotion on worshipping God as eternal, spend some time reflecting on the eternal God initiating a deeply personal relationship with you. In the margins of this book or a separate notebook, jot down your response to a God that loves you that much.
- Who in your life do you most love to hear call your name? Why is hearing that person call your name so meaningful? How does that relationship help you begin to understand God calling you by name?

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JANUARY 23 - WORSHIP GOD AS PRESENT

***"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."
(Psalm 46:1)***

When my (Michael) girls were young, they enjoyed playing hide-and-seek. I learned that I could stand up in the bathtub, against one of the short walls behind the shower curtain, and they would never find me. It was a great hiding place.

When it comes to worshipping God, I am thankful that I serve a God that is present. The Bible reminds us that God is near; He is with His children. In Psalm 46, we are reminded of God's *"very present help"*. God is always near. Spurgeon called this psalm, "the Song of Holy Confidence". We can be confident in God and have trust in Him no matter the circumstances of life. We can have this holy confidence knowing that the LORD ALMIGHTY is with us.

What are the implications of His presence when it comes to worship? First, it means that I can worship God anywhere. Jesus had the conversation with the woman at the well in Samaria about where we are to worship. Jesus made it very clear that we do not have to go to Jerusalem to worship Him, but we can give honor and glory to God anywhere. Worship should occur in our car and at work. At school and outside, working in our yard. God is always near and always worthy to be worshipped.

Second, worship is not determined by our circumstances. Paul worshipped God in a Philippian jail cell. The three Hebrews were willing to worship God even if He did not spare them from the fiery furnace. God is always worthy of our worship. Life's dark valleys can serve as a test to determine if we will trust and worship a sovereign God even when everything around us confutes that trust. I pray that we would have the heart of Joshua, *"for me and my house, we will serve (worship) the Lord,"* no matter what life throws our way.

God being present means more than His presence is there. After all, God is omnipresent – He is everywhere. But when we worship God as present, that means He is present and attentive. He is aware of my victories, my failures, my needs, and my burdens. He knows us and is with us – invested, attentive, mindful, and for us.

- When you spend time in God’s Word or in prayer, how often do you still yourself and remind yourself that God is present with you? How do you think acknowledging God as present in those moments would change your approach to those moments?
- Recall a time when you sensed God’s presence with you as you faced a difficult conversation with someone, an impossible task, or a season of isolation or loneliness. How did God’s presence sustain and/or guide you?

JANUARY 24 - WORSHIP GOD AS FATHER

“But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12)

This scripture reminds us of one of the most powerful truths in the entire Bible. When we receive Jesus, we don't just become believers, we become children of God. Our relationship with Jesus changes our identity because we are part of a new family. God is not far away, not distant, not uninterested. He is a loving Father who welcomes us into His family.

When I think about what this means to my (Tabitha) family, I am reminded that God is a Father who listens when we pray, leads us when we are unsure, protects us when we are afraid, and loves us without conditions. Children do not hesitate to ask their parents for help. In the same way, we should be bringing our worries, our decisions, our needs and our dreams to God. Worship grows when we trust Him with every part of our lives. The early believers John wrote to were transformed by this truth. It shaped their identity and their daily choices.

For families today, it can shape how we pray, how we treat one another, and how we approach daily challenges. When we remember we are God's children, it grows something beautiful in us - generosity. Children who know they are loved can freely love others. Families who feel secure in their Father's care can give, share, encourage and bless others knowing they will always have what they need. Worship and generosity go together because worship turns our hearts toward the Father, who has already given us everything.

Worship is a privilege, not a burden. Because of Jesus, you belong to God. You are His child. And when your family gathers to worship, whether around a table, in a car, or during a quiet moment before bed, you are responding to a Father who delights in you. Let

every moment of worship, big or small, remind you of who you are and how deeply you are loved.

- We began this week prayerfully considering the vastness of God as Creator, who is sovereign and eternal. We close our first week praising Him for His presence with us and for being our good Father. Spend some time praying and reflecting on this week's readings.
- If you have a relationship with Jesus, how does your prayer life reflect a child spending time with a loving father?
- If you are not a follower of Jesus yet, how does reading these passages about the depths of God's love change your understanding of who God is?

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JANUARY 25 - WORSHIP GOD AS PROVISION

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. ... Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matthew 6:25–26)

God gives us what we need—but do we believe it? If we take the time to look around and notice—God is showing us how He provides. The birds are fed, the flowers are clothed in beauty, and the sun rises each day without fail. If God so carefully sustains His creation, how much more will He care for those made in His image?

We are precious to God—more valuable than any of His other earthly creations. When we truly believe this, worry begins to lose its grip on us. Instead of being consumed by what we may lack, our hearts rest in the truth that our Father knows what we need and delights to provide it.

Jesus reminds us that our part is simple—love God (which includes believing and trusting Him), and love others. When we do, we experience the rich peace of seeing tangible ways He cares for us. God is good and wants to show us His goodness through providing for everything we need.

Living in the truth of God’s provision brings incredible freedom. If the Creator of the universe is taking care of me, then I am free to do what He has called me to do—without fear, without anxiety, and without holding tightly to what I have.

When we see God’s provision it frees us from worry and empowers us to live generously. When we trust that our needs are met in Him, it is natural to open our hands to bless others. This is the abundant life Jesus invites us into—a life marked by peace, gratitude, and generosity.

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JANUARY 26 - GOD GIVES PEACE

“The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:5b-7)

Do not be anxious about anything, the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds. One thing that sets Christians apart is the peace that we have no matter the situation.

Paul was writing this letter when he was sitting in prison. He was waiting on a trial that could result in his death. Yet, he talks about not being anxious and the peace that he has.

How can this be? Paul says, “The Lord is at hand,” meaning that the Lord is near. As Paul is sitting in that prison, he is not facing this alone. He has confidence that the Lord is with him. Think about how he must have felt in that moment knowing that the Creator of everything we see, who is all powerful, all knowing, can heal anything, and raise the dead is with him. This is why he was not anxious and felt peace. This promise of peace is not just for Paul. It is for every follower of Christ.

As you are reading this, you might be so overwhelmed by your circumstances or the challenges you are facing, that you have convinced yourself your circumstances are beyond this promise. You might be experiencing hardship and difficulties. This passage teaches us that no matter what we face, we can find peace.

How? Let your request be known to God through prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving. Set aside some time to talk to Him. Share what you are going through and ask Him to help. Thank Him for all that He has done for you. The peace from God comes to us as we are in the presence of God. This is supernatural peace. It is not

self-help, positive thinking, or a determined stiff upper lip. It is one of the great gifts of God to His people. The gift is given as we are changed in His presence.

Paul wants us to remember that God is near to us and in Christ we can have peace that surpasses all understanding. We are not alone. God is with us.

- In the margins of this book or in a separate notebook, describe a time when God's presence with you helped you deal with loss or difficulty. How would you describe the impact of God's peace?
- What are some ways that you regularly spend time in God's presence? How do you find participating in those practices gives access to His gifts, like His peace, for example?

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JANUARY 27 - GOD GIVES REST

"My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."
(Exodus 33:14)

Life often feels like a relentless journey—full of responsibilities, decisions, and unexpected challenges. In Exodus 33, Moses faced a daunting task: leading Israel through the wilderness toward the Promised Land. The people's lack of faith and obedience had frustrated the Lord, and they were judged accordingly. Moses knew that without God's presence, the journey would be impossible. So, he pleaded, *"If Your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here"* (v.15). God's response is both comforting and powerful: *"My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."*

This promise speaks directly to our hearts today. We often strive in our own strength—trying to control outcomes and dictate direction. But God reminds us that His presence is not just an abstract idea; it is a living reality. When He is with us, we are never alone. His presence brings peace and guidance in uncertainty. As a believer, we echo Moses' words that we do not want to go where the Lord does not go before us—go with us.

Notice the second part of the promise: *"I will give you rest."* Rest means trusting that God is in control, even when facing circumstances that seem beyond control. It means laying down anxiety and picking up His peace. It means walking forward with confidence, knowing that the One who goes with us is faithful.

When we think of the numerous places in Scripture where God is described as generous and giving, certainly one of the great gifts God gives to His people is the rest that is only found in His presence. Today, pause and remember His presence in your life. Join us in praying that the Lord would go before us, be with us, and clearly show the way forward.

- When you think of rest, what activities (or lack thereof) come to mind? How does that differ from the rest God promises to give in this passage?
- What are some ways that the world attempts to counterfeit the type of rest that only God can give? How do you see those worldly attempts fail or fall short?

JANUARY 28 - GOD GIVES STRENGTH

“...fear not for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)

Have you ever found yourself in a moment where you were completely overwhelmed? Overwhelmed to the point of not knowing what to do next? Maybe a set of circumstances left you completely exhausted in every way:

- Mentally, in that you had tried every solution you could imagine and were worn down from dwelling on the matter.
- Physically, because your restlessness over the matter had chased sleep and vigor far from you.
- Spiritually, because you had prayed, sang, wept, confessed, and dwelt on Scripture, longing for wisdom on how to move forward.

If you can identify with any of those descriptions, you are in a good position to appreciate Isaiah's words to God's people facing exile under pagan nations. Amid their bleakest outlook, where hope seemed impossible, God spoke to the faithful remnant of His people. The words God spoke through Isaiah were warm, assuring, and brimming with hope.

The fear that paralyzed them would be put aside, not because they would figure a way out of their predicament, but because their God was with them. In personal tones, God promised that He Himself is with them and His relationship with them is intimate and powerful.

When we reflect on the many things that God gives to His people, we return again and again to the fact that God gives strength to His people. That strength does not come with renewed determination

on the people's part. It comes from God's loving presence with them. His strength is given to them so that they are made strong in Him.

So too, with us. We know God's character is one of generosity because He gives us strength as well. His gift of strength is not because we deserve it or earn it, but because He is our God and He loves us. Strength when we do not know what to do. Strength in hardship and difficulty. Strength when ours is depleted and we need His the most.

- Recall a time in your life when you desperately needed God's help. In what ways did He give you strength beyond your own means? How did realizing that God was sustaining you change your relationship with Him? Did you find yourself more likely to look to Him for help in future seasons of difficulty?
- Why do you think it is important to share our stories of how God gives us strength with others?

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JANUARY 29 - GOD GIVES HOPE

“...but they 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)

Isaiah's prophecy recorded at the end of chapter 40 was originally written to those facing the judgment and oppression of exile. Their freedom would be removed as they were forced out of the Promised Land into other lands governed by pagan kings. We know from other prophets who lived in exile, like Daniel, how desperate those conditions were. They were helpless, having no control over their environment, circumstances, or safety. In the face of looming despair, God redirects their focus to the hope that was to come through the Almighty on behalf of His people. Hope was promised and coming. All they had to do was wait for its arrival.

Man's perspective often sees waiting as a necessary evil. God wants you to know that waiting is not a waste of time. Waiting is a workout for your faith. Waiting places your hope in perspective. As you wait upon the Lord, He is training you to renew your strength. He is teaching you to run without being weary; to walk and not faint. Next time you are in an opportunity of waiting, embrace it. God is working on you so that He may work through you.

If we choose to control our own circumstances, then we risk weakening our faith and hope in the Lord. If we choose not to wait on the Lord and go our own way, then we will likely become weary and faint. However, if we choose to wait on the Lord, then we will mount up with wings like eagles. How majestic is the eagle in flight. God's glory is revealed in the waiting. In the waiting, God gives hope.

Waiting and hope can only coexist when that in which we place our hope is assured, certain, and faithful. A promise never broken. The writer of Hebrews says it this way: *“Now faith is the assurance of*

JANUARY 30 - GOD GIVES RESTORATION

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Many of you know my (Mark) family. My wife Amy and I have 5 kids, three of which are driving age, and I don't know about your family, but we don't give our kids new cars when they drive, because inevitably they will do something to them to decrease their value, like fender benders, wrecks and such and it just doesn't seem worth it. So, they drive cars that need work, and therefore, I have become a serviceable “YouTube mechanic”. I can do brakes and spark plugs and a few other more difficult jobs, but my work only goes so far. When I'm done, they still have an “old car” with “new brakes” or “new plugs” or “new shocks” or whatever it is that I'm replacing. I will never get that car to look brand new or drive brand new again.

Now I'm sure you've seen these restoration shows where someone takes an old, beat-up car and restores it to its former glory. New parts, new paint job, new interior, new everything, the only thing left that might look stock, is the body. The transformation Paul is describing in this passage is still further than that. He is saying that the old has passed away. That old life that you were living in sin and for self is gone. It has passed away. That word means it has died, perished, gone. He says the new has come! God has given you a new life! It is as if you went into the shop as a 1971 Ford Pinto and what came out was a never-been-driven sky blue 1957 Chevy Bel Air with white side panels! Or fill in the blank of your favorite vehicle ever created. It's still a car, but it's a new creation.

God has given us a restored life. Those things that are broken within us have been forgiven, renewed, and restored. We've been remade into something new. And notice, this gift was given because of nothing that we did; you didn't do any of that work in the shop! Jesus Christ did ALL that work on the cross and has given this gift free of charge. No shop fees or hidden costs. All this leads to Paul

imploring the Corinthians to be ambassadors for Christ so that others might be restored to God as well. Let's give to the world this message of restoration. Consider ways today that you might be able to offer this message to those in your circle of influence. Praise be to God for this gift of restoration.

- How would you describe the difference between “brand new” and “like new”?
- In your journey with Him, how have you seen the impacts of God’s gift of restoration bear fruit in your life? How has it shaped your relationships?

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JANUARY 31 - GOD GIVES SALVATION

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

"For God so loved the world..." In other words, Jesus says, God loved the world in this way. He so loved the world. What way is that exactly? How did God love the world? "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son." To paraphrase pastor and theologian Dane Ortlund for a moment: John 3:16 teaches us that God, the greatest Person ever, gave the greatest gift ever which displayed both the greatest generosity and greatest love ever known. God gave us His only Son – Jesus. But in saying He "gave" His only Son, we now find ourselves bumping into another question – what does it mean that God "gave" His Son?

In order to understand the nature of this gift of His Son, we need to expand our search just briefly. You see, when Jesus speaks the words of John 3:16, He is in the middle of a longer conversation with a man named Nicodemus, a teacher and religious leader of the Jews. Just prior to this famed verse, Jesus tells Nicodemus the following in John 3:14-15: *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life."* Most people don't read these verses together. But they should. You see, these verses teach us how exactly God gave His Son. Jesus reaches back all the way to the Old Testament, recalling a time when, because of Israel's disobedience in the wilderness, God sent what can only be described as a swarm of poisonous serpents into their camp (Num. 21:4-9). Many were being bitten and dying! In his despair, Moses cried out to God on behalf of the people – *"Lord, have mercy on us!"* So, God, in His mercy, instructed Moses to craft a bronze serpent and to lift it up high in the camp. And an amazing thing happened – whenever a person was bitten, they would simply look at the bronze serpent, lifted high on the pole, and live.

So, why does Jesus reference this story when describing His coming? Why does Jesus reference a bronze serpent on a pole when teaching us about the generous gift of God in sending His Son? Because this is how God “gave” His Son. He gave Jesus, His one and only Son, to come and be lifted up, on the cross, that all might look to Him and live. Just as the serpent was lifted up, so too was Jesus. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. He is our salvation. Look to Him and live.

- As we close out our second week, in which we've seen some of the ways God is a generous giver to us, which one of the gifts from God do you see a particular need for in your life today? Rest? Provision? Strength? Salvation?
- Spend some time praying and thanking God for His loving generosity toward us. Perhaps journal in the margins or in a separate notebook, recounting the evidence of God's blessing in your life.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

FEBRUARY 1 - DAVID GATHERS MATERIALS FOR THE TEMPLE

"And David the king said to all the assembly, 'Solomon my son, whom alone God has chosen, is young and inexperienced, and the work is great, for the palace will not be for man for the Lord God. So I have provided for the house of my God, so far as I was able....Moreover, in addition to all that I have provided for the holy house, I have a treasure of my own gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I gave it to the house of my God...Who then will offer willingly, consecrating himself today to the Lord?' Then the leaders of fathers' houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, commanders of thousands and of hundreds, and the officers over the king's work.... Then the people rejoiced because they had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the Lord."
(1 Chronicles 29:1-9)

Following a Sunday sermon on giving, I transitioned to one of the exit doors during the closing prayer to greet those who would exit that way. I will never forget the words spoken by one of the members: "If I had known you would be preaching on giving today, I would have stayed at home." I do not remember my response. I am sure it was something merciful like, "I am glad that you were here." Her words have stuck with me throughout the years.

The Bible has a great deal to say about giving. This passage has a great deal to say about giving. The Bible is clear; our generous and giving God expects His children to be generous and obedient givers.

Notice the attitude of the people of God when they recognized that their giving was "to the Lord". It was part of their worship. It was God's way of inviting His people to be a part of His work. Also notice that the giving in this chapter was to meet the practical need of the construction of the temple. Sometimes we think

that building projects are not very spiritual. The Bible teaches us otherwise. All of our giving is to the Lord. In fact, it was such a deep expression of his worship, that King David modeled worshipful generosity for the people as he gave to a temple that he would not see.

When we have this attitude in our giving, then we will experience the joy in giving generously to the Lord. In the New Testament, Paul expressed the same truth, that we as Christians are to be cheerful givers no matter the cause because ultimately, it is to the Lord. Remember, giving to meet practical needs is still very pleasing to God!

- What is your response to David's generosity in light of his knowing the temple would be built by Solomon? How does this show David's attitude toward worship?
- What models for generous giving have had a profound impact on your life? For whom would you hope that your example of generous giving would be equally significant?

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FEBRUARY 2 - THE WIDOW AT ZAREPHATH PROVIDES FOR ELIJAH

"Then the word of the Lord came to him, 'Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.' So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, 'Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.' And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, 'Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.' And she said, 'As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.' And Elijah said to her, 'Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth."' And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. 16 The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah." (1 Kings 17:8-16)

When God sent Elijah to the widow at Zarephath, the timing felt impossible. Israel was in the middle of a devastating drought and Elijah was asking for just a little water and a bite of bread. The widow had almost nothing left; she had just enough flour and oil for one final meal for her and her son. She was preparing for the end, not a miracle. God, however, was preparing a miracle right in the middle of her scarcity.

The widow didn't give because she had an overabundance. She didn't wait until she had more. She gave from what she already had, what she was trying to hold onto. What made her offering meaningful was not its size but her willingness to trust God with

what seemed insufficient. God took her small act of obedience and turned it into ongoing provision for her entire household. Scripture tells us that her jar of flour did not run dry, and her jug of oil did not empty. Not just for one day, but day after day throughout the drought. God took what looked like “not enough” and turned it into “more than enough”.

Even today, we often feel the same pressure that the widow must have felt. Expenses rising, schedules filling up, and our responsibilities stretch us thin. There are moments when giving to the church, to missions, to someone in need, feels challenging. We hesitate, wondering if we have the time, the energy, or resources to spare. This passage reminds us that God doesn’t ask us to give because He needs our resources; He ask us to give because it grows our faith and strengthens our trust in Him. Giving is not about losing something. Giving is about placing what we have into the hands of a God who multiplies.

When we remember God’s faithfulness—how He has carried us, provided for us, and sustained us—giving shifts from a burden to a privilege. It becomes a picture of worship, a joyful response to the God who sees our needs before we speak them and who blesses obedience in ways we could never predict or imagine. Like the widow at Zarephath, we discover that when we trust God with the little we have, He is more than able to make it enough.

- How would you describe the widow’s attitude toward what she had to offer?
- Think of a time when you felt like what you had to give was insufficient? How does the text speak to that? What does God place greater value on than the amount?

FEBRUARY 3 - LOAVES & FISHES

“Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?’ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, ‘Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.’ 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 for so many?’... Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, ‘Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.’ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.” (John 6:5-13)

The story of the loaves and fishes shows us both people’s limitations and God’s abundance. When there was a hungry crowd and almost no food, the disciples expressed doubt. They looked at what they had, and it clearly wasn’t enough.

Isn’t this where we often find ourselves? We bring what we have to God but really cannot see in our human understanding how things will work out. But when we step out in faith and bring what we have to Jesus, He shows up in huge ways. Proverbs 3:5 reminds us, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”* Jesus asked the disciples to offer what they had, and then He made it more than they could have fathomed.

The miracle of the loaves and fishes is more than a display of power; it is a call to discipleship and ministry. Jesus invites us to participate in the work of His Kingdom. He uses ordinary people—offering ordinary things—to accomplish extraordinary purposes. God invites us to be part of what He is doing. Not because He needs us, but because we are glorifying Christ when we are involved in His work.

FEBRUARY 4 - AN ALABASTER JAR

"Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, 'Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.' But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, 'Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.'"
(Matthew 26:6-13)

As I read these words, I cannot help but think about what I would do if I had the opportunity to serve Jesus like Mary did. Mary was willing to sacrifice something that was worth a year's wages for Christ. Would you or I be willing to do the same?

Let's not be too quick to answer. A year's worth of wages is a lot of money. It is a tremendous sacrifice. It is why the disciples responded the way they did. In John's account of this event, a greater insight is given that shows the difference between the heart of Mary and that of the disciples. John tells us that it was Judas Iscariot who made the inquisitive objection. However, John also clarified that, *"He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it."* (John 12:6) Mary recognized who Christ was and willingly gave away her most valuable possession. Her heart was to express love for Jesus; Judas' heart was to benefit himself.

Today, take a moment to remember who Christ is and what He has done for us. He is the Son of the living God, who came to live with us, was arrested, beaten, and gave His life on the cross for us. Jesus

did not deserve this. He made this sacrifice out of love for us, so that we could be forgiven of our sins, and have a relationship with Him and the Father. Spend some time thanking Him for all He has done and asking Him to give us opportunities to sacrificially give back to Him.

- When was the last time you bought a gift for a loved one or someone very close to you? How did you go about selecting the gift? What was your most important criteria that the gift meet?
- How did Jesus respond to such a lavish expression of love and worship?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines, typical of notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

FEBRUARY 5 - JOYFUL GIVING

“We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.” (2 Corinthians 8:1-5)

Paul’s relationship with the Corinthian church was extremely difficult. His two letters to that fellowship of believers represented his most direct and corrective writings in Scripture, except for the Galatians. Among the causes was a group in the congregation that rejected Paul’s apostolic authority and refused to heed his biblical guidance away from sin. To that end, Paul vigilantly prompted the Corinthians to pursue Christlikeness.

One of the areas that he was particularly sure to spur them on to completion was the matter of the contribution for the suffering church in Jerusalem. Faithful giving to the contribution is referenced in multiple letters. The amazing thing about the contribution was that Paul, as God’s called apostle to the Gentiles, was urging Gentile believers to give to relief efforts for the church in Jerusalem, due to the persecution they were experiencing at the hands of Jewish leadership.

To encourage the Corinthians’ faithfulness, Paul told them of generosity of the churches in Macedonia (Philippians, Thessalonians, and Bereans). The persecution that the believers in Macedonia faced for the faith was far worse than anything the Corinthian believers faced. In fact, where the Macedonian churches were destitute to the point of not being able to meet basic need, the Corinthian churches had considerable means. Still, it was the

Macedonians whose generosity had become known far and wide—to the point that they begged to be allowed to give even more.

The cause for the Macedonians' joy in giving, as Paul made clear, was their understanding of the grace of God that had been extended to them in Jesus Christ. Their joy was so great that they had to be restrained from giving to their detriment! May our own desire to worship God with our whole lives be as fervent!

- Think of a time in your life when you wanted to express deep gratitude to someone. What was the manner you chose to express that gratitude? Why did you pick that method?
- The generosity of the Macedonians became the way they were identified by Paul. What defining characteristic would those who know you well identify you by?

[illegible]

FEBRUARY 6 - PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."

(Philippians 1:3-5)

Whenever the apostle Paul would close one of his letters to a church in the New Testament, it would usually include a list of those that were serving alongside him in the spreading of the Gospel. Some of those names appear in multiple letters, like Timothy, Priscilla, and Aquila. Others appear only once. Regardless, the purpose for their listing is the same: it is a gracious acknowledgment from Paul of those that reliably and fastidiously partnered with him in real, sacrificial, tangible ways for the sake of spreading the Gospel. Some partnered through physical presence, like Timothy and Titus, as they served as spiritual leaders in new churches that needed structure and spiritual guidance to thrive and survive. Others, like the Philippians, partnered with Paul by meeting needs for sustenance, shelter, and care.

Whatever form the partnership from the Philippians took, it was a repeated investment in Paul and his ministry. We know from reading the letter to the Philippians that part of Paul's purpose was to thank them for the gift they sent. The gift was most likely to meet Paul's physical needs during his imprisonment. Prisoners in Roman prisons were not guaranteed care or even food, so those needs generally fell to loved ones and friends of the imprisoned. On this occasion, Paul took time to thank them for not only this most recent gift, but the sacrifices they had made in their partnership with him "from the first day until now."

The deep bonds that are forged when people serve together toward a goal that demands endurance, perseverance, and sacrifice can be seen in multiple pockets in our society. Sometimes it is brothers in arms that happen to see one another in an airport,

decades after their shared military service. Sometimes it is retired athletes that lived through storied, epic seasons together that gather to relive those moments. Sometimes it is a couple celebrating a 60th wedding anniversary, remembering all they lived through and overcame to get to that moment. Surely none of those instances could approach the bonds of the first Christians, sharing the same joyous hope, regardless of background, sacrificing to extend that same hope to a darkened, hostile world in desperate need of the love of Christ. Partnership in the Gospel is indeed one of the great gifts of our generous God to His people.

- When you think of crucial, long-tenured relationships, who have been those people that God has brought into your life for the long haul? Describe those relationships.
- Who have been your most significant partners in the Gospel? Mentors? Teachers? What about their relationship has been the biggest contribution to your faith?

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FEBRUARY 7 - MAKE A PLAN

"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

(2 Corinthians 9:7)

Giving is more than an act of generosity—it is an act of worship. When we give, we reflect the heart of our Heavenly Father, who gave us His Son, Jesus Christ, as the ultimate gift of grace. God is not pleased by sacrifice alone, but by a broken and contrite heart. He desires for us to decide in our heart to give. True generosity is not about obligation or guilt; it is about joyfully participating in God's work and trusting His provision.

Genuine joy in giving begins with understanding that everything we have belongs to God. Our time, talents, and treasures are entrusted to us, not for selfish gain, but for His glory. When we release what we hold tightly, we experience freedom from the grip of materialism and step into the abundant life Jesus promised. Giving shifts our focus from "What can I keep?" to "How can I bless others?"

Generosity also strengthens our faith. Each gift is a declaration that we trust God to meet our needs. It reminds us that His resources are limitless, and His promises are sure. As we sow into His kingdom—whether through supporting our church, blessing others, or investing in missions—we become partners in spreading the gospel and transforming lives.

The joy of giving is contagious. Our generosity becomes a testimony of God's goodness and a reflection of Christ's love in a world desperate for hope. A generous act inspires others to do the same.

Today, ask God to fill your heart with joy as you give. Whether big or small, every gift offered in faith and love honors Him. The emphasis

is not on the amount of your gift, but on the condition of your heart. We align ourselves with our Creator and honor our Lord Jesus Christ when we make a plan to be generous.

- Spend a few moments scanning back through this devotional. What have been the most poignant entries, points, or ideas that God has brought to your attention as you've read and prayed?
- Why do you think having an intentional plan for giving is important?

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STRONG

SCRIPTURAL INTEGRITY

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GENEROSITY

Living and giving generously for the sake of the gospel

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.

ECCLESIASTES 3:1