

WE REALIZE OUR PURPOSE WHEN WE GIVE**Genesis 1:26-31; Romans 8:28-39****(Read Romans 8:28-39)****INTRO:** Let's pray:*Speak, O Lord, as we come to You**To receive the food of Your Holy Word.**Take Your truth, plant it deep in us;**Shape and fashion us in Your likeness,**That the light of Christ might be seen today**In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.**Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in us**All Your purposes for Your glory. Amen*

You probably recognized the words of that prayer as the first verse of Keith Getty and Stuart Townend's powerful prayer hymn, *SPEAK, O LORD*. It's very appropriate too, because this is a talk about purpose. The purpose we realize as we give. Let me explain.

Early last June Kathy and I made a quick weekend trip to Kathy's home area in Lancaster County, PA to attend one of her niece's baby shower and a high school graduation of another. On Sunday morning, that weekend, we attended Pequea BIC Church. It was a delightful homecoming because we have quite a number of friends and family there and it was close to where the graduation party would be in the afternoon.

At offering time we placed \$20 in the plate. Even though, every Sunday of the year we place our tithe in ABC's offering plate whether we are here or not, we still believe it's important to give to the church we are attending on any given Sunday. Then, what do you know, Pastor Jerry spoke on giving. He was in the midst of a series on giving. Less than a week later we received a greeting from the treasurer of the church (who is a friend and married to a high school classmate of mine who is also on staff at Pequea. She greeted us warmly and provided a receipt for our giving. In early January we received another year-end receipt along with this wonderful little book entitled *WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU GIVE*. (Hold up book) It was a thank you gift for our giving. It does not ask "What happens when you give?" Instead it is a declaration of five facts of what happens when God's people give. It is 38 pages long and an extremely quick read and so I read through it as soon as I took it out of the envelope. When I closed it some 15 or 20 minutes later I had an overwhelming sense that I was to preach a series utilizing it as my inspiration and as a resource for our own generosity series here at ABC entitled *WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE GIVE*.

So here it is. Today and for the next four Sundays we will present these facts, or should I say promises, of what are true and what happens when we give. And let me say, it's not just about our tithe that we place in the offering plate – which, truthfully is what EVERY Christ Follower is to do, but is also about our attitudes and entire thinking on the matter.

Today, as my title rather obviously suggests, I'm going to show how we realize our purpose when we give. To do that we're going to look at the Genesis passage Cindy read earlier and the Romans passage I just read. They aren't the only scriptures on the subject, not by a long shot, but they are clear.

First, looking at Genesis 1:26-31, we can answer the question, "What are we here for?" by seeing

The importance of our being created in God's image

- Notice how Genesis 1:26 says *Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness*. Let US indicates that we were created in community, for community. Community means give and take. Community means providing and being provided for. God had giving in mind from our very creation.
- And that image is a divine image. The author of this little book makes this powerful observation,

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

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

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

You differ from every other created being because you were created in the image of the Creator. What we read in Genesis, before the forbidden fruit and the cowardly lie, the shameful hiding and the cursed leaving, are the first words God said about us.

“You were created to resemble me.”

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

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

GOD IS LOVE, SO WE LOVE.

GOD IS KIND, SO WE SHOW KINDNESS.

GOD GIVES, SO WE ARE CALLED TO BE GENEROUS.” (End quote)

- That is the image we reflect. It’s a divine image. It’s a holy image. It’s an image that shows our purpose to be one of responsibility. We are not only to be generous in our financial giving, but we are to be generous in our responsible in our care for the very Creation God was speaking into existence here in this first chapter of Genesis. Mankind is to rule over creation according to these verses – not as a dictator who takes but as a steward who keeps. Peterson renders these first couple verses like this:

God spoke: “Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature

*So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,
the birds in the air, the cattle,*

And, yes, Earth itself,

and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.”

God created human beings;

he created them godlike,

Reflecting God’s nature.

He created them male and female.

God blessed them:

“Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge!

*Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air,
for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth.”*

Genesis 1:26-28 (The Message)

- See that? We are to be responsible. We are to care for creation not destroy it. That is the essence of stewardship.
- Another part of that wonderful and intentional reflection of the image of God is, in Psalm 139 type language, we were knit together in our mother’s womb to be...

Fearfully and wonderfully Wired for generosity

- Isn’t that great? I can ask that because I didn’t think it up. It’s here in the book, and its here in this book too (hold up the Bible). In the author’s words, *“In a tangible and intentional way, you were made for this. God’s generous nature is imprinted on your soul.”*
- Think about it. It’s how we were created. It’s God’s intention that when we see hunger or injustice or inequality, no matter where or when or who, we should be moved to action to do something about it. I love how this author puts it, *“You were wired to care, and it has nothing to do with tax deductions. Because you were formed in the image of God, your heart naturally beats in rhythm with God’s heart.”*
- A couple years ago an independent commission was formed to determine how to simplify the tax code. Their proposals were not popular with anyone because, for one, they proposed doing away with the charitable donation deduction. Charities really didn’t like it. They felt, probably correctly, that giving would go waaaaaaay down if givers no longer received a tax deduction for it. Should churches be worried about that possibility? They should not. Churches should be filled with people who give regardless of the deductions or the accolades or anything else other than it is what God has called them to do. When we give, we do more than meet needs and soooo much more than a duty, we are showing we have our Father’s eyes.

- See? We realize our purpose. It's a divine purpose God has for our life – not to respond to a need, but to do what we were created to do. It's because . . .

We were called according to his purpose

- *For those who love him, God works everything for good.* EVERYTHING! Even things that don't seem good when they're happening, God brings good from them. When we love him we know we are called. If we doubt that we are called by God, we probably are – to really even think about what God thinks of us is to know we are called. To reject that, as some do, is to reject his calling and reject his purpose for us. To reject God's calling is to reject all the good God has purposed for us. To reject God is to walk away from him and his plan for eternal life with him glory. To reject heaven is to accept hell. God doesn't send anyone to hell. That is not his purpose for us. His purpose is that none should perish. But he give us the choice to choose for ourselves. Choose for his purpose.
- Then we will know that while God doesn't cause the bad things that happen to us, he will redeem them for his own good purpose. God works everything for good for those who are called according to his purpose. So what is good? It is good according to God. Sometimes something good hurts in order to heal. Chemo does that for a cancer patient. Its very purpose is to nearly kill the patient in order to kill the cancer in order to bring healing.
- That's how good can come out of anything for the one called according to his purpose. That God was so generous, it says later in our Romans 8 passage that, *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?* Romans 8:32. He didn't even spare his own Son, but gave him to die for our sins. For God so love the world that he gave. So we are most like God when we give.
- It is in our holy DNA to be generous. Yes, we were made to give. That's why we realize our purpose when we give. Think about that. Amen.