

The Divine Pipeline Design

by **A. Brent Cobb**

“Dad, sometimes it seems like all you do is give, give, give,” said the front of the greeting card from our daughter. Inside the card were the words, “I’m just glad I can be there for you in those times.” Very funny! But when I act as though my Heavenly Father gives, gives, and gives only for me, as though He doesn’t have the rest of the world on His heart, it’s not a laughing matter.

Ted teaches house church pastors in a creative access area. Recently he was teaching an intensive course in missions when Joe announced that on Friday they would have opportunity to give for urban compassionate ministries among street kids in Brazil. He invited the 40 house church pastors to join him in asking God what He wanted each one to give. It would be their first time to participate in a missions offering.

The Friday worship service set the stage for the drama about to unfold. The pastors praised Christ with joyous singing and prayed for Him to grant them a spirit of generosity. When they passed the offering box, each one gave with joy. Joe asked two students to count the offering and report the total. When they announced it, everyone cheered. The bivocational pastors, who struggled to make ends meet, had given an offering that on average equaled two weeks’ income for each one.

Spying a tiny box still inside the large offering box, Joe picked it up, opened it, and found a note and a ring inside. He began to read the note aloud, but his voice broke as he sensed the pure love for Jesus expressed by the gift, the offering of a husband and wife in the class. In the husband’s handwriting, the note read, “We gave so modestly in the cash offering. This ring, worth very little in the marketplace, is our effort to give what is most precious to us. It was my first gift to my fiancée to express my love for her. Thanks for asking us to give our all in response to Jesus Christ’s Great Commission. We trust that He will use this ring to call others to participate in His mission to the world.”

Nazarenes in Papua New Guinea’s remote Jimi Valley are people of the divine pipeline. The district superintendent treks mountain trails and fords valley streams to visit 43 churches and missions. Despite having no telephones, televisions, or Internet connections, the churches are vitally connected to their international denomination in giving to the World Evangelism Fund (WEF). Last year 18.2 percent of all their giving went to the WEF, and they also gave to other needs in the world.

What inspiring displays of pipeline giving! As we cooperate with the divine design, God, with His inexhaustible resources, meets others’ greatest needs through us.

God promised to bless Abraham greatly so that through him all earth's peoples and nations would be blessed (Genesis 12:2-3; 22:18; Acts 3:25). God generously gives to us and through us in order to accomplish His purposes. His giving *to* us is not merely *for* us. It's also for people without the Savior, those who need to experience Christ's self-giving love through you and me.

God lavishes love on you and me (1 John 3:1) and then trusts us to be pipeline people through whom He can channel resources to meet crying human needs. The apostle Paul declared, "I am debtor" (Romans 1:14, KJV). Phineas Bresee said, "We are debtors to every man to give him the gospel in the same measure we have received it."

From my earliest childhood, I observed my parents' giving. Laypersons, they gave generously to God so that great blessing would come to others. Dad had little education and low income. Yet he gave sacrificially through the new Nazarene church we helped start. He mortgaged our home so the church could qualify for a loan to buy land for a building.

**With His inexhaustible resources, God meets others'
greatest needs. Amazingly He does so *through us*
as we cooperate with the divine design.**

It doesn't add up that my parents earned so little, gave so much, and yet always had more to give. Watching the divine pipeline in operation, I learned that the more we give the more God gives. And at many points along the global pipeline I have seen many needs met.

An unknown poet could have been talking about my dad when he quipped, "A man there was; some thought him mad; the more he gave, the more he had." Dad is 92 now and still active in the same church, Lafayette Church of the Nazarene in Lexington, Kentucky. The church has thrived through these 50 years as a pipeline congregation. I am thankful for my dad and his church, great givers like our Heavenly Father.

My wife, Marty, and I have found it easy to present our lives to Christ as conduits through which His resources flow. Millions of laypersons and ministers, including missionaries, have tested God's promise in Malachi 3:10, returning to Him one-tenth of all that comes to them and freely giving offerings as well. And God has kept His promise. As He gives to them in order to give through them, God "feeds the need" of people hungry for something only He can supply.

In 1970, as missionaries in Korea, Marty and I heard tape recordings of worship services at Pasadena, California, First Church of the Nazarene. In one sermon, Pastor Earl Lee said that heaven's windows are stuck shut for some people in the church. But he guaranteed that when

people trust and obey God in tithing and generous giving, heaven's windows get unstuck. They open wide, and through them blessings come showering down on the givers!

A church member once complained to his pastor, "It's getting to the point that about all we hear around here is 'give, give, and give.'" The pastor shot back, "I like that; you've just given one of the best descriptions of Christianity I've ever heard!"

The Bible describes this pipeline design principle in many ways and applies it to more than mere money. Here are some examples:

- "Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand" (1 Chronicles 29:14b).
- "Never walk away from someone who deserves help; your hand is *God's* hand for that person" (Proverbs 3:27, MSG).
- "The world of the generous gets larger and larger; the world of the stingy gets smaller and smaller" (Proverbs 11:24, MSG).
- "Mercy to the needy is a loan to GOD" (Proverbs 19:17, MSG).
- "If you give, you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use in giving—large or small—it will be used to measure what is given back to you" (Luke 6:38 NLT).
- "We have all benefited from the rich blessings he brought to us—one gracious blessing after another. . . . God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:16-17, NLT).
- "God loves the man who gives cheerfully. God can give you more than you can ever need, so that you may always have sufficient for yourselves and enough left over to give to every good cause" (2 Corinthians 9:7b-8, PHILLIPS).
- "I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you mighty inner strength through his Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 3:16, NLT).

"Giving is not self-impoverishment but self-enrichment," wrote Stephen Olford in his book *The Grace of Giving*. Underprivileged Philippian Christians, despite their paltry resources, knew the joy of pipeline giving. They generously supported Paul in his church-planting efforts. He wrote to them, "Such generosity is like a lovely fragrance, a sacrifice that pleases the very heart of God" (Philippians 4:18b, PHILLIPS). Reflecting on their dire circumstances, Paul added, "You can be sure that God will take care of everything you need, his generosity exceeding even yours" (Philippians 4:19, MSG).

“We cannot live for ourselves alone,” wrote Herman Melville. “Our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads, and along these sympathetic fibers, our actions run as causes and return to us as results.” As we partner with God and with one another in pipeline giving, we rejoice to see an ever-enlarging convergence of resources being rushed along to thousands of points of need.

We resonate to the spirit of Mother Teresa’s words, “What you are doing I may not be able to do. . . . What I am doing you may not be able to do. . . . But all of us together are doing something beautiful for God” (*Workers for the Harvest*). We know that as we all participate in the divine pipeline design, others’ needs are met, and not according to our limited incomes but according to God’s limitless resources.

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