
Autobiographies of Giving

What follows are personal testimonies of three Christians whose lives have been shaped and enriched by the practice of giving. Interviewed and introduced respectively by Publications Committee members Dawn Boelkins, Thomas Boogaart, and Tom Schwanda, they present their witness under the pseudonyms of Barnabas, Steven, and Dorcas.

Barnabas

While growing up in a small, urban church I witnessed my parents' Sunday morning ritual of writing a check for their offering envelope and making certain that each of us children had a dime for the collection plate and a nickel for the Sunday school offering. It did not seem like much money at the time. I knew that other families at church had a similar pattern: envelopes and nickels and dimes—enough to keep the church functioning. As the church struggled to maintain its ministry in a shifting cultural climate, many needs arose and many opportunities for new ministries appeared. Our little church would discuss and wrestle and pray about an issue and then step out in faith. As a youngster, I did not know from where the resources came. It seemed like God's providence. Now that I am an adult, I know, and still it is God's providence, in a person I shall call Barnabas.

I grew up in a Christian home, saying grace at the table and having worship every evening. Those were just the facts of life. But what affected me most happened when I was sixteen. I'd had a really sore throat for quite some time. It hurt to swallow and I couldn't eat. One evening as I was kneeling during prayers I said, "Lord, if you will heal me, I will serve you all the days of my life." When I awoke the next morning, I had been healed. That sealed it. If God was willing to make a bargain with a sixteen-year-old kid, I'd hang onto him.

I think that incident had a profound influence on my life. My relationship with God has always been sort of a senior partner and a junior partner, if you know what I mean. Or, like a friendly advisor. Since God healed me I've wanted to honor him and always have.

My parents were tithers. We'd hear sermons about it and all, but it was just expected. Of course, I really don't think I tithed until I married my wife. When we were first married we went both to her home church and to mine. After our daughter was born, we decided we'd better go to one church and that's how we ended up where we did. Tithing was just part of being a Christian.

At first, it wasn't very much. Tenth grade was the last one I finished and then I started working. But there were decisions to make along the way and the choices I made bore fruit. I know it was God or the Holy Spirit. Something out

of this world always factored into my decision making, because I used to pray over and over again, "Now, Lord, this is what I'm going to do, and if there is any reason for me not to do it, let me know and I won't do it. And if you don't, I'm going to go ahead and do it." And that was my prayer constantly.

I was taught to save ten percent and to give ten percent. If you do that you will never be in want. I'm from the old school and came out of the Great Depression, so I'm inclined to think long-term. That's why I've made money in the stock market. I don't get caught up with buying and selling quickly. Our society today is built on throwaways.

Of course, we have always lived modestly. You don't have to drive a Cadillac—I drive a Buick—and you don't have to buy a new car every year and you don't have to live in a million-dollar house. You see, it's like the drive from Michigan to Florida. You've got to go through Indiana. I came from someplace else and now I'm going through Indiana, headed for the next life. That helps me keep things in perspective. There are more important things to do with money than spend it on yourself.

I never prayed for God to bless my business. That wasn't the right thing to pray for. But I've always prayed daily for wisdom and courage and strength for myself and others. I think that when you give, it shows that you care for other people around you and are not just thinking of yourself. There are so many people who need help.

I started out with a tithe to the church, of course. As God prospered me I could give more and more. I started the emerging mission fund at church. I've probably given \$50,000 to that already, and will give more when we sell our old house this year. After that, I started giving to a dozen other charities: Billy Graham, World Vision, Western Seminary, the Cook Christian training school, the Hoeffler Project, and so forth.

The Hoeffler Project goes to South America and takes over a small village and provides twenty families with cows, rabbits, or chickens to raise. The families must promise to give the first female to someone in the next village. That way, the helping spreads and spreads. It's very worthwhile.

It's hard sometimes to figure out where to give. I don't give to any charity that I haven't visited. Also, I do my planning a year in advance. Of course, I still get plenty of calls and I can't do everything. Some have more appeal to me than others. I investigate those before I decide to give. Since we've moved down here, I've stopped giving to the rescue mission and Youth for Christ back home. I like to make a difference where I live.

And I like to stay in the background as much as possible. For instance, when we lived back home, I was semi-active in the civil rights thing. I didn't march in parades or anything, but I gave the money to buy the land for the first African-American housing project that was funded by the county council of churches. I've helped a number of people go through seminary and they're the only ones who know about it. I've always been careful that I don't get too much attention, because I'm so sure that the Holy Spirit has been working in me over

these years. When it comes to testifying about what God has done with me and for me, I'm bold. But I don't want to get in the way.

You see, I've never given sacrificially like they talk about. I've always given out of my abundance. When I started out I gave a tenth. Now I almost triple tithe, and one year I gave away half of everything. A lot of Christians believe in God but they don't trust him. But the Bible says, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." At first, you may think that's not true, but if you start living that out, a wisdom comes into you so that you don't ask for a new Cadillac, or a bigger home, or a bigger boat. You ask for wisdom, strength, courage—things like that. You ask to be a part of the solution and not the cause of problems. That's the sort of things you pray for and God is surely willing to give them to you.

Steven

Steven is in his fifties, married, with three children. He lives in the Midwest and is a lifelong member of the Reformed Church in America. He heads an international company and is a consultant in the areas of stewardship and fund-raising.

Stewardship is a very important part of my life. I do not recall exactly when it became that. In some ways, I was not especially sensitive to the needs of other people while growing up. That changed during college when I became interested in an organization working for disadvantaged children, an organization that I have maintained contact with to this day.

I have also committed myself to promote stewardship in the church. Yet I am uncomfortable with talking about myself and suggesting in any way that I am a credible example. I am not. Because I live in very comfortable surroundings and constantly struggle with my own attachment to things, it seems pompous for me to expound on the meaning of stewardship and challenge others to give sacrificially. I also realize that my achievements in the area of stewardship are not my own. Much of what I have learned in this area is due to the influence of my wife, Julia, my children, and my faith.

Influences

Over the course of my life, a number of factors have influenced my thinking about stewardship. First, the teaching of my parents was formative. From an early age, they always encouraged me to save. Even if the job was merely working in the yard, part of the money that I earned went to the church, part of it went to the bank, and part of it went to me. I held my first steady job, a paper route, when I was in the eighth grade. I made \$2.80 a week and at my parents' encouragement, put most of it in the bank.

To save money remains important to me. I remember an incident from my college days. It was my parents' practice to buy each of their children a car on graduation from college. I was heading to graduate school and realized that

maintaining a car would cost me money. I told my father that I did not really want a car, although I eventually took my parents up on their offer.

Second, a commitment to stewardship came from observing other people who gave sacrificially. My experience with fund-raising has taught me something about giving patterns. I know firsthand the generosity of people and have learned to celebrate it. I am rewarded and motivated by seeing how generously people give. Julia's influence remains important, and I am grateful that we feel the same way about stewardship.

Finally, I learned about stewardship through my experience in business. Business and investment have always interested me. As a boy of ten or eleven, I not only read the *Wall Street Journal*, but also made my first stock purchase. My parents had a friend in the oil business whom I perceived to be very successful. Acting on his stock tip, I bought a Canadian penny oil stock. I remember going to the bank, withdrawing \$153 dollars from my savings, and buying a hundred shares at \$1.53 a share. That first stock purchase ended badly when the company went bankrupt. However, the loss only made me more eager to try again.

The business world has continued to contribute to my understanding of stewardship. Living daily in a highly competitive environment has taught me that survival depends on asking some important questions: How can I maximize profit? What is the most efficient utilization of resources? It is important to ask a version of these questions regarding stewardship as well. I learned to ask myself: How can I maximize the effect of my giving? How can my assets be used to create the greatest good for the greatest number of people?

The Christian Community

My understanding of stewardship has been greatly influenced by the biblical teaching that sacrificial giving is expected of all. Minimally, that means tithing. In light of that, it is fascinating to read studies of giving patterns in the United States. They tell us that the larger the income, the smaller the percentage that is given to others. Thus, the people who have the fewest resources give the largest percentage of their income.

A number of years ago, a pastor was reflecting on Matthew 6:19-21:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

He pointed out that people generally assume that once their heart is right with God, their commitment will follow, including the commitment of resources. But the Bible says the opposite. "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Treasure, or money, leads the way.

That reflection was an eye-opener for me. The truth that the human heart is weak and dutifully follows the money is confirmed by my experience. On the one hand, Jesus' saying about the human heart is not a very pleasant commentary on human beings. On the other hand, it highlights the importance of stewardship. If people commit their assets to help other people, their hearts will follow.

Despite the Bible's strong statement about stewardship, the church does a miserable job of teaching it. It is hesitant to ask for money and timid in telling people that a tithe is the least that is expected of them. Not only does the church fail to teach stewardship, it often undermines its practice. I am so disappointed by my church's attitude toward stewardship that I have chosen to work with other organizations in this area. Non-profit organizations do a much better job of promoting stewardship because they are intentional and direct about asking people for money and about holding them accountable. Christian colleges, for example, have expectations of their constituents and continue to provide them with "opportunities for giving"—which is another way to say "holding them accountable." Para-church organizations are usurping one of the vital functions of the church. A church's practice of stewardship is a barometer of its health. When other organizations take over its work, the church has less value because it gives up a certain presence in the community.

Happiness

Although our society assumes that increased wealth produces increased happiness, I have experienced the opposite in my life. The more resources I have accumulated over the years the less happy I have become. Such accumulation brings its own set of problems. Because one of them is the removal of motivation, I worry about the impact of wealth on my children.

My unhappiness made me stop and think. If I was not happy and was not making others happy, then I was a poor steward of my wealth. It was as simple as that. I came to realize that my strong desire to save money and accumulate resources is not an end in itself. Money is only a tool. I needed to connect maximizing the return on my investments with maximizing happiness for other people.

Happiness and stewardship are closely related. While this perspective is not widely accepted in society, I am eager to present it to people. The practice of giving brings enormous excitement and joy to both giver and recipient. A life of stewardship is full of surprises because things happen that you never could have anticipated. I have found that much more comes back to me than I ever give away. Many people are anxious when asked to give because they fear they will not have enough for themselves. Over the years, I have learned to say, "Do not be anxious." A steward's life is a rich life.

I enjoy doing fund-raising and development because it gives me the opportunity to teach people with resources something that they might not learn on their own. Our attitudes about stewardship influence everything else in life.

They motivate us in our work and in our relationship with others. So I am always comfortable asking people of means for generous amounts of money. I am convinced that none of us with abundant resources gives to the level that we should.

Time

Our society places too much value on money and gives too much respect to the people who have money. I have noticed in many situations that people tend to connect money with goodness and intelligence. They think that if you are rich you are smart, but I have not found that there is necessarily a correlation between the two.

I have also learned that one of the best measures of stewardship is the amount of time that people give. From the perspective of sacrificial giving, time is much more important than money. Whether we are rich or poor, each of us has the same number of hours in the week. We cannot buy any more, and we cannot have any less. I appreciate people who give generously of their money, but I admire people who give generously of their time. When I see a person doing that, I say to myself: "This is a person of quality."

Tension: What Should I Give?

From time to time I ask myself: What is expected of me? Do I give enough? My answer is a very quick, "No!" because I do not give sacrificially. I do not give up anything I really want. I think that sacrifice is important, especially in a society where people tend to respect the size of the gift rather than the size of the sacrifice. When I reach the point of sacrificial giving, maybe I will accept a compliment for my stewardship. Until then, I will celebrate the generosity of others.

I often wonder what the Lord is going to say when I get to heaven. Will God say, "Steven, you were a good steward!" or "Steven, you indulged yourself!?" I suspect that that question will always remain unanswered. That tension in my life keeps me from being overly indulgent.

I experience less tension when it comes to the use of my time. I do a number of worthwhile, time-consuming things, but even there, the Lord knows that I have more than enough time for myself and that I could do more for others. I do not measure the percentage of time I give. I only ask myself: Am I involved? Am I doing things? Am I volunteering?

Because I do not see myself as a model, I refrain from talking to groups about my practice of stewardship. The one exception was a talk to a group of other businesspeople who were part of an organization focused on stewardship. I did it because these people face some of the same situations that I face. The occasion prompted me and my family to think more deeply about stewardship and to raise the level of our giving.

Tension: What Should I Keep?

Entitlement is one of the areas of struggle in my Christian life. To what am I entitled? What amount of all my resources does the Lord intend that I keep? When we built our present home some years ago, I was uncomfortable with its size. Yet, in the light of what is being built today, I no longer feel that way. I remember when I bought my father's Cadillac. I was thirty-nine, and well aware of what a Cadillac symbolized. Even though it was a used car, it took me a while to become accustomed to riding in it.

When people see what I am currently driving, it is obvious that I have become accustomed to fine cars. The cost of the Cadillac was a fraction of the price of my present car. I enjoy expensive cars, and no longer spend a lot of time thinking about the money I spend on them. When I pull back and look at what I am doing, I sense that this is probably not good stewardship. But sometimes I tire of the complexity of deciding what is proper stewardship, and I say to myself, "What the blazes!" At the same time, I know there is no wisdom in that attitude.

Regardless of income, we all face the issue of entitlement. When we sit down with friends to a large meal, how do we justify taking so much for ourselves when so many people are hungry in our world? When I go out for an expensive meal, I cannot help but wonder what a modest wage earner would think about the amount of money being spent. Such thoughts remind me of how indulgent I am.

It strikes me that we often associate with people who live in similar circumstances. Such associations generally send the message that whatever we are doing is all right. We form our attitudes about money based on the attitudes of the people around us. I know that I experience less tension than I used to. This is not good because the more tension I feel, the more disciplined I become in spending money. I see how family and friends spend their money and how the company I lead spends its money. The sight of other people being very comfortable spending money in ways that I have been raised to think are indulgent influences me to change my attitudes. I loosen up a bit. Is that good or bad?

Guiding Principles

Having thought about stewardship for many years, I have developed some guiding principles. I close with them because in some ways they summarize what I have learned and what I value.

1. I am committed to be always involved in two or three projects or organizations that are focused on meeting the needs of others.
2. I try to make sure that my stewardship of time strikes a balance between work, family, church, and commitment to others.
3. As a Christian, I feel it is my duty to respond to requests from my local church. If I refuse, I better have a pretty good reason.

4. Particular requests should be self-evidently good for the community. On the basis of this principle, I am very comfortable rejecting some initiatives. I believe that the Lord has entrusted me with resources and expects me to make the best decisions that I can.
5. I support requests that will have the greatest impact on the community.
6. While I do not and cannot talk to everyone who seeks support from me, I do feel responsible to listen and evaluate carefully the nature of each request. Over the years, I have learned much from the people and organizations that have approached me. They have broadened my understanding of the world and made me a more compassionate Christian.
7. I consider the character of the person making the request. I am unavoidably influenced by my perception of that person's judgment and integrity.
8. I consider the effectiveness of the organization. I look at budget and any available statistical measures of performance.
9. I do not downplay my emotions. Inevitably, the emotional component to giving influences my decisions. This is part of what it means to be human. However, I try to measure my emotional response to minimize the effectiveness of stories like, "Johnny is starving, therefore, give to Johnny." If I responded automatically to that kind of appeal, I could never refuse anyone.

Dorcas

The Apostle Paul seeks to awaken our giving when he challenges us to remember the words of the Lord Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35, NIV, here and throughout). Over the years I have been a pastor to many types of people. I have served congregations in the East and Midwest. The membership of these congregations has spanned the spectrum from powerful owners of businesses and strategic leaders in industry to teachers, doctors, accountants, construction workers, and service technicians. Their incomes ranged from near poverty to millionaire status. While privileged to minister to many who took the opportunity to give seriously, one person stands out above them all. I will call my friend Dorcas. I have known her for almost twenty-five years and she is now in her late '70s. Dorcas combines the refreshing qualities of compassion, sensitivity, and unlimited generosity. Giving is her first name and she has always been quick to offer herself and her gifts to others whether within or without the church. Although her limited financial resources have been further compounded by thirty years of widowhood, her attitude is one of abundant joy as she lavishly shares what she has with others. Beyond the mere placement of money in the offering plate, she gives promptly, willingly, and generously by volunteering both time and energy to help anyone in need. More than anyone I know, Dorcas mostly closely echoes the reality of Jesus' words about the widow's offering:

As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "I tell you the truth," he said, "This poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on" (Luke 21:1-4).

As Jesus observed the givers at the temple that day, he clarified an essential truth: Liberality is based more on attitude than amount. Giving that makes God's heart sing with joy depends upon God, not self, for supplying the person's daily needs. Dorcas' giving from a dedicated and generous heart has much to teach us about the joy of giving. But this is Dorcas' story, not mine. Let her communicate directly what it means to follow Jesus Christ in an age of saturated consumption and increased confusion about wants and needs.

I began tithing when I got my first job at age 18. Unlike those who wrestle with God about whether tithing is still expected, or whether it is to be based on one's gross or net income (I feel gross is correct), I readily accepted this biblical challenge. It was really not a difficult decision for me. I had been taught that Christians are to tithe. I clearly remember the pastor preaching and encouraging us in the words of Malachi 3:10: "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." I have been practicing tithing or grateful giving for almost sixty years and can honestly say that I have experienced time and again the truth of Malachi's words.

Once I began, I never found it difficult to be consistent in my tithing. However, because my husband did not share my enthusiasm for giving, my tithing has always been based on my income. I knew the church, like any other family, needed money both to survive and to accomplish her mission. My conviction about giving was strong and I was blessed by doing it. Although I knew it was my duty and responsibility, I never felt pushed or forced into giving. Unless grateful giving comes from the heart it becomes a burden. I can relate to the widow that Jesus describes in Luke 21. She did not give because she had to or because the religious leaders were watching and taking notes. Rather, she gave out of joy and gratitude to God. My heart probably feels like hers and it is out of my heart filled with blessings that I gratefully give to God. I felt this way from the beginning, and my sense of partnership with God has continued to grow. I think that in some very small way my giving contributes to the accomplishment of God's work on earth.

I'm often amused when I hear two-income families complain about money and about how the church is always asking us to be faithful and generous in our stewardship. I can't understand why they aren't satisfied with their two incomes. I'm also confused about how they can spend all their money and have nothing left for God. Money has often been tight, sometimes very tight, for me. Yet, a

simple practice I learned early has helped me never to forget God or the needs of the church. When I started to earn money, I soon realized how many ways there were to spend it. I discovered that unless I set aside my money for God as soon as I received my check, it would probably disappear before Sunday morning. That was when I learned a simple principle: Put aside my offering to God first. That way I no longer worried about having enough for God after all my bills were paid. I have tried to pass this principle down to others, including my oldest grandchild. His job paid him Sunday night, and he never seemed to have any money left for the offering the following Sunday morning. I suggested that he put money into the offering envelope as soon as he received it. He tried it and it worked. That is how he learned to give.

I also remember an earlier conversation he and I had one Sunday during the offertory. As the deacons approached, he asked if he could put my envelope in the plate. In doing so he turned it over and was startled by the amount I had placed inside. He looked at me and said, "Wow, Grandma, you put all that money in the offering! That's a lot!" I reminded him that I wanted to express my deep appreciation for all God's goodness to me. Long ago I had learned the important truth that God will provide for all my needs according to his great riches in Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

I should probably say more about that motivation for giving. In addition to the motives of obedience and joy, I give because God has always provided for all my needs. Amazingly, I never had to look for work. One day a mother phoned to ask if I could watch her child while she was at work. Soon others came to me with the same request. Since I have always loved children, it seemed natural to say yes. I have cared for hundreds of children over the years and God has always graciously cared for me.

I have now cared for children for almost forty years. I love them and rejoice to provide a loving environment for them while their parents are at work. I have lost track of their exact number, but there have been a lot of them. From the beginning I decided not to set a specific fee for my services. Realizing that the ability to pay varied, I encouraged parents to offer what they could. My own experiences had taught me that some months are leaner than others, so if they missed a month I trusted them to pay when they could. Many of my church friends, neighbors, and family thought that if I was not crazy, I was at least a very unwise businesswoman. They told me I was foolish to allow people to take advantage of me. But indelibly etched into my heart and mind was the biblical truth that God could be trusted. Since God had provided for me in the past, who was I not to help others in their present need? Although some families surely did take advantage of me over the years, others generously made up the difference, and it all worked out. I clearly remember a woman with financial struggles so severe that she often could pay me little or nothing. She finally received a good job that required her to move away. Amazingly, she didn't forget me. Although I was no longer caring for her son, she began to send me \$50 a month. When I told her I didn't need the money, she increased it to \$100 a month. This

continued for a full year after she and her son had moved away. From such experiences I know deep within my heart that God can be trusted to provide. To depend upon God is the most safe and secure thing to do. I certainly agree with Cirilla D. Martin's trust that "God will take care of you." I often sing her hymn to myself after my prayers at bedtime. The first and third stanzas with refrain are particularly precious as I remember the numerous ways God has cared for me.

Be not dismayed whate'er betide, God will take care of you;
Beneath His wings of love abide, God will take care of you.

All you may need He will provide, God will take care of you;
Nothing you ask will be denied, God will take care of you.

[Refrain] God will take care of you, Through every day,
O'er all the way;
He will take care of you, God will take care of you.

Perhaps I am unique in not having the usual struggles or doubts about tithing. I suppose once I got started and saw God's faithfulness there was no way to stop. Why should I? I just did it. Once I realized God expected me to tithe, it became a consistent discipline. I decided that I would faithfully practice this way of giving.

Over the years, giving has taught me a great deal. It has been my laboratory for generosity. The first thing was to notice God's incredible goodness to me. Again and again I have learned that God will provide. This is not to say I haven't had some very tight and difficult times. Through periods of waiting and wondering about how I would pay my bills or whether I would be able to stay in my house, I have sought to give faithfully to God and have always found the means to cover my expenses. Please realize that I have had to wait patiently for God's gracious provision. It wasn't anything instant or magical like the TV evangelists who promise you financial success if you donate to their ministries. Rather, it's the trust and dependency that I see as I read and ponder Jesus' story about the widow's offering.

The second thing I've learned from sacrificial giving is that you can't outgive God. The more you give, the more God gives. It's a strange experience I know is true, but really can't explain. Over the years, I have been almost out of money countless times. I had to make a conscious decision whether to fill my church offering envelope or pay the electric or telephone bill. I always filled my envelope for God first and was surprised a few days later when some unexpected money would come to meet my outstanding obligations. I can't remember all the random and anonymous gifts that I have received at unexpected times. I guess you could say that I really take seriously the story of the widow's offering.

A third lesson from tithing is that I am not poor. As I give I receive great joy. I can honestly say that it is better for me to give than to receive. Maybe receiving is difficult for me. I'm not a very public person and I don't like to receive applause. However, my giving creates the great gift of contributing to

God's work and of helping people. I can't begin to express the pleasure I receive this way. God has so blessed and touched me that my heart is like a waterfall of blessings, spraying my gratitude to those around me. Paradoxically, the more I give, the more God fills my heart; the more joy I receive, the greater my desire to share that with others. I give generously, not only because the Bible teaches and encourages it, but because I am blessed in the process. As I give, I truly feel refreshed and closer to God.

I am still learning and living out these principles today. Recently I underwent double hip surgery. For more than seven months I was unable to work or care for other people's children. I was worried about both the huge costs of my surgery and rehabilitation and my loss of income. Once again God's faithfulness blessed me through family members who filled the staggering financial gap. Now that I have recovered, God has provided new children for day care. Thus, in all these many years, God has never once failed me. I certainly don't want to fail God!

A joyful surprise comes when adults I cared for as children return to thank me. My heart dances with joy at their kind words of appreciation and the realization that I have had a part in shaping their lives. They usually thank me for being nice to them and for treating them as special and important individuals. The common need to feel special is especially true of young children. I recall a little boy who arrived during a snowstorm. He was the only child without boots. Rather than keep him inside while the other children played outside, I took him to the Clothes Closet at the local Methodist church and bought a pair of boots. That expenditure of a few dollars produced a huge smile as he joined the other children playing in the snow. That was twenty years ago. This young man, now a college graduate, recently made a special point of thanking me for those boots. Even my limited resources make possible simple deeds like that, and they seem to make a difference. In my pleasure from helping others, I remember that Jesus took time to be with little children and to bless them with his love.

Finally, giving has taught me that while financial gifts are needful, it is equally important to share our time and energy with God and the church. I have discovered that I can help people through my hands. Over the years I have baked cakes for weddings, baptisms, birthdays, and a variety of other celebrations. Rather than charge exorbitant prices, I often offered my cakes to people at cost. I shared in their joy and found pleasure in helping them. I have done people's laundry. I often visit with elderly and shut-ins, or take them shopping or to their doctor. When one of our church families was evicted from its home, I agreed to let them stay with me until they found a new place. By the time their search was successful, the parents and their five sons had lived with me for four and a half years! Challenging as that proved at times, I was glad to help them. My plans are never so rigid that they can't be changed to help someone in need. People tell me that my flexibility and willingness to stop and help others in our busy and hectic society is a special gift to them.

Dorcas has been an inspiration to many in both church and community. I chose that name for her because she so closely resembles the Dorcas of Acts 9:36-39. Her quiet and unassuming ways remind me of the famous and wise advice of St. Francis of Assisi: "Preach Christ regularly, and if necessary use words." By its generous love and compassion freely offered to others her life has been a powerful testimony to the faithfulness of God. I experienced that personally because part of her ministry has been to care for the pastor's children. Week after week, Dorcas graciously and lovingly sat with our children while my wife and I led worship. Sometimes that gift extended beyond worship to meetings and other functions. Little wonder that our children developed a close, grateful relationship with her. Trust is a difficult but foundational principle to learn in the Christian life. Without it we take ourselves too seriously and God not seriously enough. Dorcas blesses others both by her practice of giving and by her humble, thankful heart. It is impossible to gauge how many lives this unassuming saint has touched over the years. I am ever grateful that she touched mine.

THE REFORMED FAMILY WORLDWIDE

A SURVEY OF REFORMED CHURCHES, THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS,
AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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