CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

TIME, TALENT, AND TREASURE

*Use what talents you possess: the woods would be very silent if no birds sang there except those that sang best.*

—HENRY VAN DYKE

*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*

—2 CORINTHIANS 4:7

It’s time to commit. What are you going to do about it? In the end God works in our world one person at a time. The hungry are fed, the thirsty are refreshed, the naked are clothed, the sick are treated, the illiterate are educated, and the grieving are comforted, just one person at a time. You have the opportunity to be that one person to someone who needs what you have to offer. And what you have to offer is never small and insignificant. Again, the great picture of what God is doing in our world is incomplete without your unique puzzle piece—the one that only you possess. But you must choose to place your piece in the puzzle.

My hope is that you have already made that choice—that you’ve decided to bring your “loaves” and offer them to the Lord. But in my experience, most people don’t really have a good sense of what it is they have to offer. They are willing to sign up and show up but are confused about just what they might possess that could be of value to God’s kingdom. One of the traditional ways to think about this involves looking at our three...
t’s—*time*, *talent*, and *treasure*. Each of us has resources in all three of these categories, and we often have far more to offer than we think.

When I was just twenty-six and two years out of business school, Renée and I went to our church’s weeklong missions conference every night. One evening we hosted one of the missionary speakers, a man named Andy, in our home for dinner. Andy worked for World Relief, an organization that specializes in working with churches to help the poor around the world. After dinner the three of us sat talking for quite some time.

Sensing that I had a real interest in missions, Andy asked me if I had ever considered serving full-time in missions work. He said that World Relief might be able to use someone like me. Somewhat awkwardly I explained that I really hadn’t and that my business degree didn’t seem to be a very good background for missions. Over the next days, though, I felt convicted about our conversation. *Maybe*, I thought, *I should pursue something full-time where my faith and my career could come together.* So I made an appointment to discuss this with my pastor, Dr. Paul Toms. I remember explaining my dilemma—that I really liked my job in the marketing department of Parker Brothers Games but that I felt guilty that I wasn’t making myself available to God in full-time service. Dr. Toms listened carefully, asked me a few questions, and then told me what he thought.

“Rich,” he began, “we are all in full-time Christian service. It’s just that some of us serve the Lord in secular jobs, and others in ministry jobs. But either way, we should be using our gifts to represent Christ in the best possible way. You seem to really love your business job, and it seems like God has given you a knack for it. I think you should stay where you are.” Then he laughed and added, “Who knows? Maybe you’ll make a lot of money someday that can be used for the kingdom. And if God really wants you to move into full-time service down the road, He’ll let you know.” (Boy, did that turn out to be a prophetic word!)

In the twenty years that followed, I climbed the corporate ladder and deepened my business and management skills. I tried to be an ambassador for Christ in the workplace as best I could, and as our income grew, we were able to support more and more ministries financially. But Renée and I would still sometimes talk of retiring early and going to the mission field. I used to laugh because I felt I would be the absolute worst missionary in the world. As I saw it, I had no useful skills at all. Didn’t missionaries have
to speak multiple languages, know how to improve crop yields, perform surgeries with a machete, and be able to build irrigation systems out of bamboo with that same machete? I was so klutzy that when asked to even hang a picture, I was tempted to make a call from the Yellow Pages. I really had a passion for missions and for helping the poor, but I just didn’t think I had anything to offer besides a monthly check. I completely failed to see the “loaves and fishes” that God had given me, even though they were right under my own nose:

- a zeal for missions
- a deep concern for the poor
- senior executive leadership experience
- a career in connecting people with products through marketing
- a knack for writing and public speaking
- a heart for giving financially to support ministry
- a wife who also wanted to serve the poor

Those were the things that World Vision saw when they were looking for a new leader in 1998, even though I couldn’t see them at the time. That was where my pieces of the puzzle fit perfectly. I just had to discover what God had uniquely given me and be willing to offer them in His service.

What has God given you? Moses had a stick (remember chapter 7?). David had a slingshot, and Paul had a pen. Mother Teresa possessed a love for the poor; Billy Graham, a gift for preaching; and Joni Eareckson Tada, a disability. What did they have in common? A willingness to let God use whatever they had, even when it didn’t seem very useful. If you will assess what you have to offer in terms of your time, your treasure, and your talents, you will have a better understanding of how you might uniquely serve.

**TIME**

Of the three categories of assets we have to offer, the one we often consider least is time. Whether we are generous or stingy, most of us are much more careful and deliberate about what we do with our treasure than with our time. The same is true of our talents. If you are a gifted teacher, a brilliant scientist, or a superb organizer, you may not have a full
understanding of how you can best use your talent in serving God, but you probably think and pray more about that than you do about how you use your time. Even though time is a finite resource, most of us waste a lot of it. How many hours do we spend watching TV, strolling through the mall, or sitting in traffic, which could be better spent in building God’s kingdom?

Time has value—many of us are paid by the hour or the week because our employers understand the value of our time. If you doubt the value of time as a kingdom resource, consider this. Let’s say that each of us on average has about two hours each day that might be available for service if we so chose. Over the course of the year, if we valued our time at just $10 an hour, that would be the equivalent of more than $7,000 that each of us could make available for ministry. The total asset value for 120 million American Christians would be more than $800 billion! Even if we all just volunteered one hour a week to serve a charitable cause, it would be worth $62 billion each year. That’s what it would cost if our churches and nonprofit organizations had to pay for that time. As the saying goes, “Time is money.” But giving our time to kingdom causes has an even more important dimension because of the eternal impact it can have. God can multiply the impact of the time, treasure, and talents that we make available to Him.

Last year I met a Korean man who lives and works in New York. He knew I was the president of World Vision, and he told me how important the work of organizations like ours had been to him when he was a child right after the Korean War. He and his family, he said, desperate and dislocated by the war, had been helped enormously by the shipments of clothing, food, and even school supplies that they received—lovingly donated, sorted, and organized by people of goodwill in America and perhaps other countries. These donors had given of their time, treasure, and talents to help the people suffering in a foreign nation. And the young Korean boy benefitted immeasurably from their kindness; he was able to finish school. He was so grateful for the generosity he and his family had experienced.

Today, that “boy” is the secretary general of the United Nations—his name is Ban Ki-moon. I wonder if the people who donated their time, treasure, and talent back in the early 1950s had any idea of the impact they would have.

We never know how God might use our efforts, no matter how insignificant they may seem to us, to influence important issues and needs in our world. Listen to this story of a senior citizen who made a difference.
When Bread for the World member Connie Wick of Indianapolis, Indiana, wrote a letter to her senator supporting the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) and HIV/AIDS funding, she didn’t know it would be mentioned at the White House. But that’s what happened on July 13, 2004. Bread for the World President David Beckmann was attending a White House signing ceremony when he had the opportunity to talk with President Bush about the importance of full funding for the MCA. Mr. Bush called over two key senators, Majority Leader Sen. Bill Frist (R-TN) and Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN), and asked them to help secure the MCA funding that he had requested.

Just after this conversation, Sen. Lugar said to Beckmann, “You know, I am just now responding to a letter from a constituent, Connie Wick. She is saying just what you are saying, that we should fully fund the MCA, the AIDS initiative, and not cut funding for ongoing programs of assistance to poor people.”

Connie Wick, the longtime leader of a Bread for the World group at the Robin Run Retirement Community in Indianapolis, said reports of the conversation with the President were “heart-stopping.” She has worked on behalf of hungry and poor people most of her life. “Robin Run has a lot of committed activists,” said regional organizer Mariah Priggen. “But Connie is really the one who gets everyone and everything organized. It’s been her passion and vision that anchors the group and keeps it moving.”

“I was again impressed by the power of Bread for the World members,” said Beckmann afterward. “The Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had just been asked by the President of the United States to help get full funding for the MCA. What immediately came to the senator’s mind was a recent letter from an active constituent—Connie Wick at the Robin Run Retirement Community in Indianapolis.”

Wick’s experience offers encouragement to all who have wondered whether their letter writing on hunger and poverty issues really makes a difference.

One of the most remarkable insights I have ever had regarding how God uses our seemingly insignificant puzzle pieces to accomplish significant things is the story of a young man from Boston, named Edward
Kimball. Edward taught Sunday school at his church because he felt called to invest himself in the lives of young boys and men. To get to know his students better, he would often visit them during the week where they lived or worked.

One Sunday a challenging teenager showed up in his class. The boy was seventeen, a bit rough hewn, poorly educated, and prone to outbursts of anger and profanity. Edward thought about how he might reach this boy and one day decided to visit him at the shoe store where he worked for his uncle. Kimball passed by the store once, trying to get up the courage to speak to the boy. What would he say, he wondered, and how would he be received?

Finally, he entered and found the boy in the back, wrapping shoes and putting them on the shelves. Edward went to him, simply put his hand on the young man’s shoulder, and mumbled some words about Christ’s love for him. And apparently his timing was just right, because right there in the shoe store, the boy was moved to commit his life to Christ. His name was Dwight L. Moody, and he became the most successful evangelist of the nineteenth century, preaching to an estimated one hundred million people during his lifetime and traveling perhaps a million miles—before the time of radio, television, automobiles, and air travel!

But the story gets better. Moody himself, in 1879, was instrumental in the conversion of another young man, F. B. Meyer, who also grew up to become a minister. Meyer subsequently mentored J. W. Chapman and led him to Christ. Chapman also became a pastor and evangelist and started an outreach ministry to professional baseball players. One of the players he met, Billy Sunday, became Chapman’s assistant and advance man for many of his evangelistic meetings.

In time, Sunday, having learned the art of preaching from Chapman, started to hold his own evangelistic meetings. He went on to become the greatest evangelist of the first two decades of the twentieth century in America. One of his revivals, in Charlotte, North Carolina, in the 1920s, was so successful that an associate of his named Mordecai Ham, who years earlier had given his life to Christ at one of his crusades, was asked to come back to Charlotte a few years later to hold a second series of evangelistic meetings. On one of the final nights, when Ham was preaching, a gangly teenager came forward and responded to his call to “give your life to Christ.” His name was Billy Graham.
Do you sometimes feel that you have nothing worthwhile to offer—that you are a nobody when it comes to doing great things for God? I wonder if Edward Kimball felt the same way. He never did anything spectacular or particularly newsworthy. He just showed up out of faithfulness to God, an hour or two each week, to teach the boys in his class. And yet Edward Kimball’s dedication to teaching Sunday school faithfully and caring about those boys changed the world.

Talent

*My faith demands—this is not optional*—my faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I am, whenever I can, for as long as I can with whatever I have to try to make a difference. —Jimmy Carter

Unfortunately the word talent is often misunderstood. We automatically think of special abilities, such as playing the bassoon, singing opera, writing poetry, dancing ballet, or perhaps athletic abilities in soccer or tennis. But in the context of evaluating those things we possess that may be useful in service, the word talent has a much wider meaning. Yes, it does include those artistic and athletic abilities we usually think of, but it also encompasses much more. Let me try to expand the way you look at the talents God has given to you. Let’s start with your unique personality and character traits. Are you outgoing, contemplative, determined, stubborn, visionary, thoughtful, funny? All of those parts of you describe how God uniquely made you.

They are also characteristics that God intends to use in your service to Him. Your talents also include your life experiences. Each of us has a unique life history, made up of our family background, education, professional and work history, experiences and the wisdom gained from them, relationships, and connections. No one has ever lived the same life as you, and that is one of the things that makes your “puzzle piece” extraordinary. We also have interests and passions that God has placed in our hearts. Bono has a passion for Africa; William Wilberforce, a burning desire to end slavery; and Connie Wick, an interest in lobbying on behalf of the poor. You may love animals or care deeply about the environment. You may be fascinated by politics or passionate about running marathons. But whatever
your objects of deepest interest, they may provide clues to your particular way of serving.

Thus, when considering our talents, we need to consider all of the above—our abilities, personalities, passions, pursuits, knowledge, experiences, and relationships and networks. These things are all resources we possess that can be used in one way or another.

Finally, the Bible tells us that each of us has been given “spiritual gifts” that we are to use in building up the Church, the body of Christ. (These gifts are listed in Romans 12:6–10; 1 Corinthians 12:1–12, 28; and Ephesians 4:11.) These include such gifts as spiritual discernment, giving, leadership, mercy, administration, teaching, evangelism, wisdom, and exhortation. We are told that God has distributed these gifts throughout the Church to equip His people to do kingdom work. For a follower of Christ, discerning one’s spiritual gifts is an important part of understanding just how and where he or she can best serve in furthering the work of the Church. To help, various organizations have made a number of assessment tools available on the Internet. I challenge you to check them out.

When you think about what talents you have to offer, think in these broader terms, not just in terms of a specific ability you might have. Most of us have a lot more to offer than we give ourselves credit for. The apostle Peter was an impulsive and passionate person—a fisherman by trade. God used his passion and impulsiveness to make him a “fisher of men.” Peter became the entrepreneur God used to launch the first-century church. Paul, a man who persecuted the Church in the same century, was a zealot with a brilliant mind, a deep knowledge of Jewish theology, and a gift for scholarship and writing. He was also a Roman citizen, something that played heavily in his various arrests and imprisonments, leading him ultimately to Rome for his trial. God used every dimension of Paul’s abilities and circumstances after his conversion on the Damascus Road. Even his imprisonment turned out to be a “talent” used by God, as Paul wrote most of his letters from his prison cells.

Sometimes just the position we occupy—not even our abilities or personalities—can be used by God. In the book of Esther, we see the amazing story of how God used a queen to save the entire Jewish race.

Yes, you can definitely impact the world if you are royalty . . .

But you can have just as much impact if you’re a nine-year-old boy.
HOOPS OF HOPE

Austin Gutwein was just nine when he learned about children in Africa who had become orphaned because of AIDS. Most adults would laugh at the idea of a nine-year-old tackling the global AIDS pandemic, but Austin believed he could do something—that he had a “talent” that God could use. Austin described his journey in this letter, found on the Hoops of Hope Web site:

In the spring of 2004, I watched a video that showed children who had lost their parents to a disease called AIDS. After watching the video, I realized these kids weren’t any different from me except they were suffering. I felt God calling me to do something to help them. I decided to shoot free throws and on World AIDS Day, 2004, I shot 2,057 free throws to represent the 2,057 kids who would be orphaned during my day at school. People sponsored me and we were able to raise almost $3,000. That year, the money was used by World Vision to provide hope to 8 orphan children.

From that year forward, thousands of people have joined me in a basketball shoot-a-thon called Hoops of Hope. By doing something as simple as shooting free throws, Hoops of Hope participants have raised over $500,000. The children left behind by AIDS now have access to food, clothing, shelter, a new school and finally, a medical testing facility.

Last year, our goal was to raise $150,000 to build a medical testing lab in Sinazongwe, Zambia. This lab will enable medical staff to test parents for HIV/AIDS prior to administering medication for the disease. The medication will allow parents suffering from HIV/AIDS to prolong their life and keep their children from becoming among the 15 million children already orphaned by this disease.

Not only did Hoops of Hope participants raise enough money to fund the building of the lab, they also supplied the lab with 1,000 medical Caregiver Kits. This will allow those caring for HIV/AIDS infected moms and dads to have the basic supplies they need. We also were able to furnish the 2006 Johnathan Sim6 Legacy School.

In 2008, we would like to build a second medical lab in Twatchiyanda,
Zambia (also the site of the 2006 Johnathan Sim Legacy School), provide Caregiver Kits and provide bicycles for caregivers to ride. The lab combined with Caregiver Kits and bicycles will help to keep parents healthier and alive longer so they can provide for their children.

I hope you’ll join us by participating or sponsoring a participant. It’s an awesome event that will leave an impact not only on the lives of the kids we’re helping, but on yours as well.

In Him,
Austin

Today, Austin has thousands of kids in two hundred different locations doing “Hoops of Hope” in most of the fifty states and in other countries around the world. His cumulative fund-raising is approaching one million dollars. Think of it: a million bucks—for shooting hoops! Talk about using your talents to change the world!

**TREASURE**

*That bread which you keep belongs to the hungry; that coat which you preserve in your wardrobe, to the naked; those shoes which are rotting in your possession, to the shoeless; that gold which you have hidden in the ground, to the needy. Wherefore, as often as you are able to help others, and refuse, so often did you do them wrong. —Augustine*

Earlier in the book I stated that anyone earning fifty thousand a year has an income higher than 99 percent of the people in the world. Simply stated, by comparison the average American is, well, wealthy. The question is, what does God expect us to do with our wealth? In assessing our time, treasure, and talents, we must give adequate consideration to the financial resources God has entrusted to us. Too often we cop out of this responsibility by saying something like, “I volunteer my *time* to help those in need,” or “I use my *talents* to raise funds for philanthropic causes . . . so I don’t really have to give my *money*. People wealthier than me can do that.” But following Christ is not an either-or proposition. We need to be stewards of our time, our treasure, and our talent—all three.
Imagine for a moment that Bill Gates was trying to discern how he could best make the world a better place. How would you react if he concluded that, instead of investing a single dollar, he would spend one week each year in Mexico, shovel in hand, digging latrines for people who have no toilets? One of the wealthiest men in the world, with a net worth greater than $50 billion, phenomenal business skills, and matchless influence, deciding that the best way he can help is by shoveling dirt for seven days a year! I think we would all say, “Give me a break!” Thankfully, that’s not what Bill Gates did. He looked at the highest and best use of all of his assets—time, talent, and treasure—and created an innovative foundation endowed with billions of his own dollars to tackle some of the world’s biggest challenges: global health, education, and development issues.

But it doesn’t take billions of dollars to make a difference.

The lack of clean water causes millions of needless child deaths each year. Yet the cost to bring clean water to one person costs only one dollar per year! When you realize that a gift as small as a dollar can save a life, it is hard to argue that you’re not wealthy enough to make a difference. We might instead want to ask just how many lives our own wealth would enable us to save. In truth, the cost to feed the hungry, to educate children, to make microloans to poor farmers, to inoculate children, and even to provide needed surgeries to the poorest of the poor is extremely affordable and within the reach of most of us.

Now, you’re probably thinking, Sure, Bill Gates has time, treasure (lots of it), and the talent (lots of that too) to make a difference, but I’m not Bill Gates. Well, Leon McLaughlin isn’t Bill Gates either—and his talent was shining shoes! But he believed that he could make a difference.

Leon works at a shoe shine stand in a large office building in Seattle. Several years ago, while traveling in Mexico, Leon met a woman who told him a story that changed his life. The woman had hosted an American tourist in her home. The tourist, when using her bathroom, noticed that the bathtub was filled with water, so he pulled out the plug to drain it, thinking he was doing the woman a favor. When he told the woman what he had done, she began to cry. He had just drained the only clean water she would have for a month.
Leon returned to Seattle, determined to learn as much as he could about the crisis caused by a lack of clean water in the developing world. He took his interest further by taking online classes in the repair and maintenance of water distribution systems and becoming an agent for First Water, a Georgia-based manufacturer of a filtration machine that can produce 740 gallons of clean water per hour.

Following a spate of flooding in Bolivia, Leon approached World Vision to see if the organization could use one of his machines to assist the thousands displaced by floodwaters there. World Vision said it could, but they would need Leon to donate the machine and pay for its transportation and ongoing technical support and maintenance. Leon was not put off. He remembered that he was shining the shoes of some of the top lawyers, business executives, and bankers in the city. So he taped pictures of the flooded Bolivian community on the walls of his shoe shine stand to stimulate conversation, and he then began to talk to his clients about his dream to help bring clean water to communities that didn’t have it.

It worked. Through his shoe shine contacts, Leon was able to fund his first machine for Bolivia. World Vision Bolivia staff were so impressed with it that they soon ordered five more. An additional ten machines have since been ordered to supply schools and hospitals in Bolivia, and Leon is now setting his sights on other countries that struggle for lack of water.

Leon works three different jobs to support his “habit” of helping others. Dean Salisbury, World Vision’s director of supply-chain management, told me that other corporations had been approached to donate filtration systems like this, but Leon was the only one who agreed to do it and to provide the additional money for transportation, technical training, and maintenance. “His goal in life,” said Salisbury, “is not to make money, but to help people. It’s very refreshing in the corporate world.”

Indeed it is. Leon did not allow himself to be overwhelmed by the magnitude of a problem. Instead, he brought the “loaves” he had and offered them to help others.

A SHARP ELBOW IN MY CONSCIENCE

I seem to be the kind of person who has to learn the same lesson over and over again. I have confessed already that I continue to struggle with the
consistency of my compassion and commitment to those suffering in dire circumstances. I have to work hard at maintaining a tender heart and letting my heart continue to be “broken by the things that break the heart of God.” A few years ago God dealt with me again on this issue—this time speaking through my wife’s sharp elbow (something that has often been a powerful teaching tool in my life).

It was the closing night of a three-day conference on the urgent need for the Christian community to respond to the widows and orphans of the AIDS pandemic. I was the closing speaker at the final dinner for about three hundred people. My goal was to challenge them to do something, to get involved. In fact, we had cleverly positioned the photo of a child who needed to be sponsored at each place setting so that I could provoke everyone in the room to support the one child whose framed picture stood on the table right beside their chocolate mousse. I spoke for thirty minutes and gave what I thought was quite an inspiring call to action. Then, as the music played and people considered how to respond, I sat down at my table and bowed in prayer, praying that we would receive a strong response to my call for support.

That’s when I felt Reneé’s elbow. I glanced toward her and found her pointing to the photo of the child in front of us. I whispered that my call to action was not for us but for everyone else. I reminded her that we already sponsored a dozen kids through World Vision and that we certainly couldn’t pick up another at every event. Then I bowed again in prayer. The second time the elbow was more insistent, and when I looked up, she handed me the response card and pen and gave me “the look.” I’ve seen this look often in our marriage, so I knew what I had to do; I reluctantly filled out the card, and we became the new sponsor of a young boy named Morgan, from Zambia. My college-aged son, Andy, had come down from school to attend the event, and he decided to sponsor the child at his place (I think to impress his girlfriend, who was also there). It turned out to be Morgan’s brother Jackson.

The conference ended, and we all went home. Honestly, I didn’t give much thought to these two boys over the next couple of years. Reneé is the one who writes letters to our kids and sends them cards. I just pay the bills. But about two years after the event, I was planning a trip to Zambia when my staff reminded me that I had two sponsored boys who lived there.
“Oh yeah,” I said. They then told me they thought we should film me meeting the two boys, and that we could tell their story in one of our TV specials. So a few weeks later I found myself walking across a field in Zambia to meet Morgan and Jackson, who lived with their grandmother, Mary Bwalya.

When she saw me, Mary ran to greet me, grabbed my hand, and bowed almost to the ground, thanking me profusely for what I had done. She said, “When I learned two years ago that a family in America had decided to sponsor Morgan and Jackson, I knew that God had replaced the parents these boys had lost! If I had wings, I would have flown to the airport to greet you.” I was stunned and embarrassed. Mary was not eager to thank me because I was the president of World Vision; she wanted to thank the American sponsor who had rescued her grandsons. She saw me as a new father for two boys who had lost their own father to AIDS. I then sat and talked with her and the boys, and I learned just how dire their situation had been. Both of their parents had died within the same year. There were four siblings, Jackson being the oldest. They had literally nursed their parents on their deathbeds, watching their painful and horrible deaths as they wasted away, consumed by sores that covered their bodies. Jackson, thirteen at the time, knew that he would have to care for his three younger siblings, so he quit school and tried to find work and food. (Mary lived several hundred miles away and had not yet heard of the deaths of her son and daughter-in-law.)

But Jackson was not able to support them, so all four left school and began to scavenge and beg for food. “There were days we lay all day on the floor of our hut because we were too weak from hunger. We sometimes went a week with no food, and I feared that Morgan would not survive,” Jackson told me.

Finally, their grandmother learned of the deaths and managed to take a bus across the country to rescue her grandchildren, taking them back with her. But a poor widow herself, Mary could not manage to feed and support four young children. Soon they all began to sink deeper into hunger and despair. They hit bottom when a storm wrecked the little mud hut they lived in, adding homelessness to their desperate conditions.

Here Mary picked up the story. “That was when I learned the joyous news—that an American family had decided to sponsor Morgan and
Jackson—and I thanked God that He had raised someone up to help us.”

I felt so ashamed. That night two years earlier at the banquet, I had filled out a card and dutifully written down my credit card number—only because my wife had made me. I had not thought about the lives involved, that my decision might have been a matter of life or death. It had only been a transaction to me, costing me just two dollars a day. But to Mary and those boys, it was an answer to prayer that literally may have saved their lives. If you watch the TV special that features my meeting with Morgan and Jackson, you will see me crying as I tell their story. God had broken my heart again with something that broke His heart too. If you don’t think a small gesture of compassion can make a difference, think again.

A WIDOW’S MITE

*But the king replied to Araunah, “No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the L ORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them.* —2 Samuel 24:24

A few years ago Raul Hernandez, one of our World Vision representatives in Florida, responded to a phone call from an elderly woman in Miami who asked if he could come to her apartment to discuss a gift. When he returned, he e-mailed the rest of us at World Vision about his meeting. Here is his account:

The apartment complex was situated in a poor Latino neighborhood of Miami. As I knocked at the door, I noticed the humble surroundings. She opened the door. Ana is a wonderful 91-year-old young Colombian lady.

“Come on in, you are the person World Vision sent to receive my gift?” She invited me to her humble one-bedroom apartment. No air conditioning. But the room was filled with excitement and the refreshing presence of the Holy Spirit. Her smile reminded me of the sweetness of my own grandmother who was instrumental in my salvation. We started a long and vivid conversation that I wished wouldn’t end.

I was told about her coming to the U.S. in 1954 (even before I was
born) with her husband, her struggle to raise up her three children, her long working hours to meet the basic family needs, her striving to keep the values she was taught in her native Colombia and to keep the unity of the family. Then she told me about her terrible time of sickness, almost totally paralyzed, immobilized, strangled by pain, limited by the mercy of others to move her around. Until she met Katherine Kuhlman and through her she met the Lord and His healing power that sustains her until today. I have to confess that I was ashamed that I need more medication than she needs.

After many marvelous stories she stood up and said, “Let me bring my gift to the children that World Vision is serving.” She went to a little night table and brought an envelope to the table where we were seated. She opened the envelope with care as if it was a ceremony of mercy and love. She passed to me five clipped lumps of twenty-dollar bills. “Count them, please,” she said. “I want to be sure I counted correctly.”

I counted them, and it was one thousand dollars. She then said, “I have been saving this for a long time with the intention to give it to World Vision for the poor children in the world. Every time someone gave me a gift for my birthday, or for Christmas or New Year, I saved it for the poor children. You see, I have this apartment, it’s the only possession I have, but then I am so blessed by the Lord that I want to bless those who are less fortunate than me. I used to sponsor a girl from Guatemala since she was a little baby, but then she graduated and World Vision transferred my sponsorship to another girl in Colombia whom I still sponsor. But I was thinking, I will soon start my travel to my Celestial Home, to my Father; I need to do something soon on behalf of those suffering children, that was why I called to World Vision to send me someone to receive this gift. I want to keep this anonymous, God knows. My prayer is that as Jesus took two fish and five loaves of bread and multiplied them to feed the thousands, that He will do the same with this, my gift. It’s not much, but it is everything I have.”

I was crying inside, such generosity is only possible by the work of the Holy Spirit. I felt I was blessed beyond my imagination. The humid heat of Miami, in this small apartment without air conditioning, was totally forgotten under the refreshing breeze I felt coming from above as I enjoyed this visit with a World Vision donor. I was wondering, as I
drove back home, how many Anas World Vision has the privilege to be blessed with; she is not a major donor, she is a heavenly donor.

World Vision has received multimillion-dollar gifts, but I am almost certain that Ana’s gift caused equal rejoicing in heaven, because Ana gave what she could.

My hope is that as you have read these past few chapters, you have developed a better understanding of what you, uniquely, have to offer. Most of us greatly underestimate the potential value of our time, treasure, and talents in terms of what they can add to the beautiful mosaic of what God is doing in our world. Many of us sit on the sidelines because we don’t appreciate what we have to offer. Others know what they have to offer, but they don’t know how. To speak to this, let me quote my pastor, Earl Palmer: “God can’t steer a parked car.” If we sit in the parking lot with our engines turned off, just waiting for a voice from the sky, we’ll never get anywhere in our quest to solve the world’s problems. We need to at least “start our engines.”

We may not be clear on just how God wants to use us. But that’s no excuse for doing nothing. Just jump in, and start doing. Austin Gutwein shot free throws and built a school for orphans. The widow Ana saved her quarters and dollars for years and offered them to God to help children. And Bill Gates started a foundation to improve global health and education.

What will you do?