

## Book Review: The Generosity Factor

by Carrie Cavanaugh

The Generosity Factor: Discover the joy of Giving Your Time, Talent, and Treasure was recommended to me by one of the most generous people I know. I thought it would be a great book to recommend to our readers as many Christian organizations rely to some degree on donations or volunteers and even those who don't must make decisions about how to allocate their resources. Although this book is short, it didn't let me down.

The book is coauthored by Ken Blanchard, coauthor of The One Minute Manager, and S. Truett Cathy, founder of Chick-Fil-A. Blanchard brings years of management consulting experience and a flare for integrating faith with the workplace. This is his 12<sup>th</sup> book. S. Truett Cathy's vision extends beyond the typical mold of a quick-serve chicken chain, to having a positive impact on his employees and the community beyond. He is also the founder of the WinShape Centre Foundation, a charitable organization for youth; and the author of Eat mor Chikin: Inspire more People. Although this book takes the form of a fictional narrative, I think there is a lot of both Blanchard and Cathy in these pages. Those of you familiar with Blanchard and Cathy's stories know that they are Christians, yet the idea of giving is not presented in this book in a purely spiritual sense. Thus, the book has a

message for both Christians and nonbelievers alike. Finally, I must admit that I have a number of theological quibbles with the book, but I still think a discerning reader can benefit from reading it.

Although the characters are a bit idealized, the story of the Broker and the Executive is one full of wisdom. It is essentially the tail of a highly successful business man who hears of another prosperous

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business man who devotes much of his time, talent and treasure to things outside of his business. Not understanding the rationale behind this, the first man, the Broker, goes to investigate and along the way finds the key to a more fulfilling and joy-filled life.

When the Broker first hears of the Executive's story, he explains, "He really believes that generosity is the answer to the question, 'What Is the Meaning of Life?'" While we might suggest the purpose of life, is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Certainly being generous can be very meaningful, bring glory to God and is something to enjoy for eternity (treasures in heaven).

When the Broker finally meets the Executive and he asks about his chain of businesses, the Executive makes this point, "There are 824 [centers], but I don't actually own them. It's more accurate to say that they've been entrusted to me." Indeed, we need to have the view that everything, every square inch of this earth, has God's name on it. He has made us stewards of it, but we can't lay ultimate claim to anything. In another section he says, "Blessings really are gifts. And I'm just the steward of anything that's been given to me. I'm a caretaker. Because much has been given to me, much is required of me. That's my responsibility, and I accept it with gratitude." But he also says, "Sometimes it's more meaningful to give out of your scarcity – to share those things that are in the shortest supply . . . No matter what your circumstances in life, there are things that you can give. Everyone can have an impact." This is the foundation for a generous heart.

The Executive also makes this point, "Some people think of generosity as an event. They get behind some cause and participate in an annual fund drive. When their big splash is over, it's back to business as usual. But generosity is an attitude. It has to be cultivated daily." I really appreciate Blanchard and Cathy bringing up this distinction because it isn't something we can check off our list

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and be done with. Because of all that God has done for us, our eyes should always be open to see the needs of others.

The Executive also explains how the three M's play a role in living a life of significance. The three M's are: Master, Mission and Mate. The Executive, as powerful as he was, saw God as his Master. His Mission was meeting the needs of others. And the decision of a Mate is one that has a huge impact as you go through life together. For the Executive, what drew him to his wife was her tender heart and over the years he was not disappointed as they were a great team working towards the same goals. These three things are truly areas one should examine as one takes a macro look at their life and how to shape it into something that is more meaningful than just going through the daily drudgery.

The Executive took the generosity factor beyond his personal life to that of his company. He explained, "Well, in our case, our ultimate stockholder is God." That view of the situation freed him from pushing for ever greater fiscal returns and instead allocated some of the returns to other good causes – blessing his staff with tuition reimbursement, funding foster homes, etc.

In the end the Broker is won over by the richness of the Executive's

life as he has a positive impact on so many around him. He also comes to see how very blessed he is and how that makes him responsible to bless others. It's a good reminder to us all and something we need to convey to potential donors and volunteers – indeed there is great joy in giving!