

## Commendation for *The Generous Soul*

So far, planet Earth has seen the rise of one and only one fantastically wealthy nation—the United States of America. But increasingly we who plumb the depths of this swirling sea of money and privilege and convenience are confronting what James Houston aptly identifies as the failure of success. In *The Generous Soul* Marty Duren compels a confrontation between the affluent society and the generosity-shaped activity and purposes of God. In clear, accessible, penetrating prose, Duren reminds us or perhaps teaches us for the first time that hands clinched tight around the American dream are neither free to embrace Jesus nor to enjoy the benefits purchased for sinners on the Cross and woven into the very gospel itself.

**Dr. Mark DeVine**, Associate Professor of History and Doctrine, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University and author of *Bonhoeffer Speaks Today: Following Jesus at All Costs*

Marty Duren has written a very helpful book that challenges the apathetic giving patterns of American Christians. The reason that so many give so little is not a matter of economics but of spirituality and biblical literacy (or, more accurately, illiteracy). The Bible clearly teaches what Marty calls "missional giving" and when Christians embrace the call of God to be "missionary managers" of His resources then the church will be filled with "generous souls." Read this book to be challenged to think rightly about and handle responsibly whatever amount of wealth God has entrusted to you.

**Dr. Tom Ascol**, Pastor  
*Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, Florida*

This is a hard-hitting, take-no-prisoners rendition of biblical stewardship that gets at the heart of Jesus' take and example on material possessions. A missional style of living/giving is not an option for any Jesus follower, it is a joyful mandate, as Duren makes indelibly clear and convincing. His personable writing style interlaced with his own life experience plus appropriate items from pop culture make his work an interesting read. His exegetical rigor with the biblical sources and his prophetic challenge hit squarely the open nerve of materialism that inundates so much of Christian living today. I highly recommend it!

**Dr. Jimmy Cobb**, Professor of Christian Theology, History and Ethics  
*Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary & College*

Great books are written by people who have experience, and heart knowledge of the subject about which they are writing. I've watched,

learned and been influenced by Marty in the last 20 years as God gave much of this heart knowledge to him. This book has something for all whether the experienced faithful servant, Bible teacher, new believer or struggling Christian. Read it and allow God to energize your faith to give missionally.

**Joe Wilson**, Europe/Asia Church Planter, President, Baptist International Mission Agency  
*Novosibirsk, Siberia, Russia*

Like most pastors, with very busy schedules and an endless supply of matters requiring attention, I thought I would read *The Generous Soul* in small pieces as I found time. Wow! I could not put it down. I quickly found myself pushing other things aside so that I could keep reading. This is not just another stewardship book. The Biblical truths, the stories, the ideas behind missional giving, were all gripping. Throughout my time in the book, I found myself being challenged, encouraged, inspired and convicted. *The Generous Soul* is a must read for anyone who wants to honor God with their resources, and advance those things that are near to His heart.

**Jeff Sellers**, Pastor  
*Victory Church @ Lakeside Village, Lakeland, FL*

It's been said that Satan's two major weapons to slow down the gospel are persecution and prosperity. A stroll through most church parking lots on Sunday morning will quickly point to which is being used in America. *The Generous Soul* by Marty Duren is written with a wit and conviction that sheds light on a billion dollar blind spot. We have not only bought into the American dream, but we have called it Christian. *The Generous Soul* calls us back to a sacrificial life-style that is Christ-like, yet counter-cultural for most church attendees with encouragement for all those who desire to live each day in a manner that reflects God's missional heart.

**Keith Keller**, Missionary to Ukraine  
*United World Mission*

*The Generous Soul* is captivating and convicting; at times humorous, but always courageous. Those who read it will be better for it as they are taken into a new dimension of what it means to be missional. Marty has been in my inner circle of friends for almost 25 years. I know him well. I love him dearly. I admire him greatly. He writes this book with integrity and ease, because he is a generous soul!

**Todd Wright**, Lead Pastor, Midway Church, Villa Rica, GA and co-author of *JOURNEYS: Transitioning Churches to Relevance*

*The Generous Soul* takes a fresh and compelling look at our responsibility as stewards of God's resources. As Duren states, 'Spending the money God has entrusted to our management, without His involvement, is embezzlement.' This book will challenge you to the core.

**Kiki Cherry**, New Life Campus Ministry  
*Carnegie Mellon University*

For most of my life I had this notion that there was my Church life where I prayed and listened to sermons and sang. And then there was my real life where I made money, bought a house, amassed possessions that allowed me to keep up with the American Dream. Marty Duren smashes that notion with the statement, "Our use of money is not a separate reality from the gospel." Marty has written a book that I hope finds its way into the hands of the believers that populate our churches and the Pastors who lead them. What he postulates is truth that we not only need to hear, but we need to put in practice.

**Darren Tyler**, Lead Pastor  
*Conduit Church, Franklin, TN*

Marty Duren joins the growing number of Christ followers who recognize that something is dreadfully wrong in our current system of Christian economic activity. He issues a challenge to take seriously the call to missional engagement and embrace a lifestyle of generosity that shows the true beauty of what Kingdom living is all about. Theologically astute and rich in stories of remarkable giving and receiving, *The Generous Soul* will guide the reader toward a better sense of what it means to truly give "all" to Christ our Lord.

**John Elam**, Director of Missions  
*Northwestern Baptist Association, Woodward, OK*

After reading this book, I am left with an overwhelming desire to pass this 'test of faithfulness' and be seen in God's eyes as a 'generous soul.' When I walk the dirt paths of Africa, the need for and the lack of missional giving is painfully evident. If we truly believe that God is the owner and sustainer of all things, we will not only obey His commission to go, but we will also surrender our lives to give. Marty has rightly divided God's Word to reveal that any spiritual investment offered now will pale in comparison to the eternal inheritance that awaits.

**Beth Holt**, Heavenbound Ministries, Millerville, AL and author of *It is Well*

Stewardship has fallen on hard times. Competing with the wider consumerist culture, pastors struggle to find helpful material on giving.

Denominational material is often over-simplified. Financial programs are more ‘how-to’ than ‘what-for.’ In *The Generous Soul*, Marty Duren offers a theology of missional giving - that is, giving located squarely in the context of God and His Kingdom. We plan to use *The Generous Soul* at Snow Hill in small groups and recommended reading for those interested in a theology of giving.

**Todd Littleton**, Pastor  
*Snow Hill Baptist Church, Tuttle, OK*

*The Generous Soul* tells it like it is: most of us have a problem with materialism - it has even entrenched itself big time into our Christianity. But Duren doesn’t just condemn us for our devotion to things; he gives us help and Biblical insight in our ongoing struggle in dethroning the god of mammon. Aided by a fresh biblical perspective and stories from his own journey, we get a glimpse into what life would be like if we were to become generous souls.

**David Brazzeal**, Composer, Writer, Chaplain to the Arts  
*Paris, France*

I started my review of *The Generous Soul* by reading it as I would read any book. It was, after all, just another item on my “to do” list. But then, I noticed that something happened. It would not permit me to read it from a detached perspective. Each chapter prompted me to reflect on, and wrestle with, the hold that money and possessions have on my soul. The reader will especially resonate with Marty’s personal stories of God’s faithfulness and timely provisions. Prepare to be challenged!

**Dr. Gary Elkins**, Professor of Philosophy  
*Toccoa Falls College*

Wow! What a remarkable challenge and reminder. In a sea of Christian literature, this is a book every professing believer needs to read. But make no mistake, it is not for the faint of heart. Quite simply, it is a call to put your actions and monies where Jesus’ heart is - on seeking, serving, and saving the lost. In my opinion, Marty has cut to the chase and has driven a stake through the heart of en vogue “missional” living that has pierced both my conscience and my wallet.

**Dr. Joey Rodgers**, Senior Pastor  
*First Baptist Church, Peachtree City, GA*

The Generous Soul takes a refreshing and holistic look at the church’s response to God’s ownership, painting a compelling picture of what the life of a Christ follower should look like. In the midst of these uncertain economic times, this is a must-read for pastors and church-goers alike.

**Jason Berry**, Campus Pastor  
*12Stone Church, Flowery Branch, GA*

# THE GENEROUS SOUL

## AN INTRODUCTION TO MISSIONAL GIVING

BY

MARTY DUREN

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For Alvin Luther Autrey  
November 21, 1937 - February 24, 2008  
*insquequo resurrection*

Author's note

Due to formatting differences, some content from the print version has been excluded. Said content was primarily song lyrics.

Footnotes are numbered consecutively throughout. Endnotes will be published at the end of the series.

Events from my past have been recorded almost completely from memory (as opposed to a journal or conversations). Any error is mine alone and is wholly unintentional.

“The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself.”

Proverbs 11:25 (NKJV)

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

Matthew 6:33 (NKJV)

“Give, and it shall be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

Luke 6:38 (ESV)

## introduction

### Why this book?

One website states that 291,920 titles are published in the United States annually—more than 5,600 a week.<sup>1</sup> With so much to assimilate and so many from which to choose, why this book? Simply put, it needs to be written, and not because I am the one writing it. If this particular subject has been covered in this particular way, I've somehow missed it.

A recent visit to my local Christian bookstore's theology section revealed no books directly related to this subject. Some of the general theology books had no references to money, finances or stewardship, either in the table of contents or the index. The area of the store labeled *Finances* had plenty of books related to budgeting, debt elimination or investing as a Christian, but no books on the relationship between missional living and finances.

This should not be so.

Over the last decade or so, a thriving conversation has erupted around the concept of *missional*. It is a very important idea relating to

how followers of Christ are to live in the world. Reams of pages have been written—not to estimate the number of 1s and 0s flung into cyberspace—exploring how Christians should relate to culture, what it means to be the church in a community, noting the difference between mission and missions, the nature of the gospel, ecclesiology, missiology, and on and on. It seems that almost every worthwhile connection has been made; many being profitably argued and others batted around *ad infinitum*.

One area that seems to have been explored to a lesser degree is how missional living relates to the financial responsibility of Christ's followers. Usually called stewardship, this sometimes overlooked and often loathed “money talk” is the bane of Christians in the West who spend an inordinate amount of time trying to justify purchases of excess clothing, housing, transportation, gaming, media, food, and other trinkets or toys. Yet, when Jesus wanted to draw a clear distinction between those who vie with God for our allegiance, one to whom we might submit the leading of our lives, He did not picture God opposed to ambitions, positions, or expressions, but possessions. He warned, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matt. 6:24, NASB). Driscoll and Breshears rightfully note, “Money and wealth and possessions are among the greatest idols of our culture, and there is simply no way to be a disciple of Jesus apart from learning to worship God with stewardship.”<sup>2</sup> In *Understanding Christian Theology*, Swindoll and Zuck assert that the development of stewardship in the believer is an evidence of sanctification (growing in Christ's likeness).<sup>3</sup>

The context of twenty-first century American life places us into a time when money is spent in astonishing ways. An August 2007 article on businessweek.com, relates:

If there's still any doubt whether the pampering of pets is getting out of hand, the debate should be settled once and for all by Neuticles, a patented testicular implant that sells for up to \$919 a pair. The idea, says inventor Gregg A. Miller, is to 'let people restore their pets to anatomical precision' after neutering, thereby allowing them to retain their natural look and self-esteem. 'People thought I was crazy when I started 13 years ago,' says the Oak Grove (Mo.) entrepreneur. But he has since sold more than 240,000 pairs (a few of which went on prairie dogs, water buffalo, and monkeys). 'Neutering is creepy. But with Neuticles, it's like nothing has changed.' Nothing, except there's a fake body part where a real one used to be.<sup>4</sup>

Yes. You read that right. Nearly one thousand dollars to give animals fake parts to help their self-esteem. There is humor in this book, but that part is not a joke. Authors Diane Brady and Christopher Palmeri also report that Americans, as of 2006, spend forty-one billion dollars annually on buying, feeding and caring for pets, more than the GDP of over one hundred countries in the world.<sup>5</sup>

It does not seem we have come very far since Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker were mocked for air conditioning their dog's house, unless "in the wrong direction" is taken into account. More than a quarter-million sets of Neuticles proves that little is too extravagant for our pooches and kitties anymore. If only one year's worth of pet expenses were used, say, to install deep water wells in Africa, at thirty thousand dollars each,<sup>6</sup> around 1.4 billion wells could be built across that continent—more than one well for every man, woman and child. If only the \$229 million spent on faux-testicles<sup>7</sup> had been used on African well projects, more than seven thousand deep water wells could have been dug. I just cannot imagine a scale where those disparities will ever balance.

Missional giving makes a financial priority of those things that are priorities in the kingdom of God: evangelism, justice, helping the poor,

showing mercy, meeting needs, providing a cup of cold water in Jesus' name. Or some cash. Or cash from selling a car. Or a jet ski. Missional giving recognizes that all possessions entrusted to God's children are entrusted for the singular purpose of fulfilling God's plan. Missional giving approaches finances with the presupposition that Paul was telling the truth when he wrote, "My God shall supply all of your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19; NKJV). Missional giving does not recognize a dichotomy between God's money and my money. Instead, it forces the realization that all money and possessions belong to God and His children are channels through which Kingdom work is financed.

The proper understanding of finances means that the priorities of God's people related to money and possessions should be the same priorities that God has for the Kingdom. The use of money is not a separate reality from the gospel. On the contrary, our use of money and possessions is a direct reflection of our understanding of and love for the gospel and the Savior it reveals. If the gospel ("the Good News") is the story of God's redemptive activity through Jesus Christ of all things lost in the Fall, then everything under our management is usable for the embodiment and expansion of the gospel. If we keep money and possessions under a separate section of our lives it is tantamount to lording over that area ourselves rather than yielding lordship to Christ. To maintain this control of our finances is like divorcing ourselves from God. We cannot, no matter how much we try, serve both God and mammon.

As managers of God's possessions, our responsibility is to handle "our" stuff just as God would if He were on earth; this is the substance of Jesus' parables. With this in mind, I would offer this definition: *Missional giving is the financial strategy of the missionary manager, purposefully utilizing all the money and possessions God has entrusted to him or her according to His priorities and viewing all financial activity as integral with God's kingdom.*

Exploring these concepts is why this book exists.

