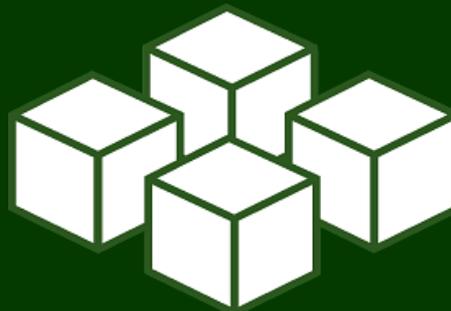

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF GOD AND MONEY

by: John Cortines & Gregory Baumer

Prepared by:
Excellence in Giving



Excellence in Giving

Executive Summary of

GOD AND MONEY
How We Discovered
True Riches at
Harvard Business School

John Cortines and Gregory Baumer

Prepared by: Excellence in Giving

God and Money

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Excellence in GivingSM is a full-service philanthropic advisory firm designed to increase the joy of the high-capacity giver through a personalized process of discovery, evaluation, participation, and celebration.

Through the Excellence in GivingSM process clients are able to give confidently and maximize the impact of their philanthropy. This model provides superior value for clients as Excellence in GivingSM partners with them to transform the burden of wealth into the joy of generosity.

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The premise of this book explores what the Bible says about generosity and how we, as believers, should approach our faith and finances.

Part I: Foundations

Chapter 1: Wealth and Giving in the Bible

While the Bible references both prayer and faith in almost 500 verses, there are more than 2,000 on money! It's also the focus of nearly 40 percent of Jesus' parables. God consistently teaches us about wealth and giving from Genesis to Revelation. The first chapter of this book is focused on Biblical references because the authors believe "the Bible should be a primary resource for gaining an appropriate understanding of any subject, including money and wealth" (13).

Wealth and Giving in the Old Testament

The Patriarchs: to what extent money was a factor in the patriarchs' relationship with God prior to the Mosaic Law (15).

- Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:3-7)
- Abraham (Genesis 14:18-24)
- Jacob (Genesis 28:13-22)

The Mosaic Law: when God first delivers commandments regarding wealth and giving. The average Israelite in the OT was commanded to give three distinct tithes, combined amounts to roughly 23% of their income (16-18).

- Levitical Tithe (Numbers 18:20-24) a 10% tithe to the Levites
- Festival Tithe (Deuteronomy 12:17-19, 14:22-27, 26:10-16) a 10% tithe to host the Feast of Tabernacles
- Charity Tithe (Deuteronomy 14:28-29) 10% tithe offered every three years to support foreigners, orphans, and widows

Biblical Characters: new insights can be found by focusing on the monetary aspects of these stories (19-20)

- Boaz (Ruth)
- David (1 & 2 Samuel, 1 Chronicles)
- Solomon (2 Chronicles, 1 Kings)

Wisdom Literature: great sources of insight (21-23)

- Job
- Psalms 15, 37, 73, 111, 112
- Proverbs 3:9-10, 19:17, 22:2, 23:4-5
- Ecclesiastes 2:9-11, 5:10, 9

The Prophets: how we should use our wealth, most often against injustice, particularly against the poor (23-24)

- Isaiah 58:6-7
- Micah 6:8
- Jeremiah 22:13-16

A wise and careful use of one's wealth has been an important part of a right relationship with God since creation. For many people in the Bible, faith greatly affected their management of wealth and giving. God undoubtedly values justice for the poor as a key responsibility of those with wealth.

Wealth and Giving in the New Testament

What Jesus Taught (25-31)

- Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7, Luke 6)
- The Rich Young Ruler (Luke 18:18-30)
- Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21)
- The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)
- Store Up Treasure in Heaven (Luke 12:33-34)
- The Final Judgment (Matthew 25:31-45)

What the Apostles Taught (31-33)

- Attitude Toward Wealth and Money
(Hebrews 13:5; 1 Timothy 6:7,9-10, 6:17-19)
- Attitude Toward Giving
(Acts 20:35; 2 Corinthians 8:7, 14; 9:7, 11)

A Brief Note on Tithing

The authors do not view tithing (defined as giving 10% of income) as a requirement. It can be a respectable starting point for Christians seeking to honor God through their generosity. However they do not believe it is a requirement because (36):

- With the 3 Tithes in Mosaic Law, Christians should technically be giving 23%, not 10%.
- Neither Jesus, Paul, nor any other NT writers specifically command Christians to tithe.
- The NT offers a great deal of instruction on giving. The core message is that rather than following a strict formula, Christian giving should exhibit a set of qualitative traits which honor God's character.

Chapter 2: Seven Core Principles for Biblical Wealth and Giving

1. Everything we “own” actually belongs to God. *Everything.*

While many people acknowledge God’s sovereignty over creation, we are usually reluctant to attribute this same sovereignty to our houses, vacations, and paychecks. This could be because as humans, we have a natural inclination to attribute our successes to internal factors and our failures to external factors. We innately exaggerate our own role when positive things happen in our lives.

However, an accurate understanding of our possessions is derived through God’s sovereignty. “Even when we earn something, we do so by using skills given to us by God (Psalms 144:1), in a job gifted to us by God (Exodus 20:9), with the support of an organization and political economy that are both ordained by God (Romans 13:1-2), all of which are held in existence moment-by-moment through God (Colossians 1:17). The credit is all His” (46).

2. “Our” wealth and possessions should be used for God’s purposes.

“Stewardship is the active and responsible management of God’s creation for God’s purposes” (46). We are required to be actively involved in the utilization and distribution of God’s resources to achieve His purposes. A steward is not only responsible for fundraising and fund allocation; he is also responsible for how those funds are used.

If we accept this definition of stewardship, we must realize that all of our purchases should be made with the intent of furthering God’s Kingdom, not just our tithes and offerings. While God’s purposes include seeking justice for the poor, they also include our enjoyment of His blessings. “We must be active, thoughtful, strategic stewards of God’s possessions” (48). Sometimes that means giving making sacrifices to the Lord and others, that means spending quality time with your family on vacation! The main idea is to have a clear understanding of why you’re using God’s resources in the ways you choose.

3. Wealth is like Dynamite, with great potential for both good and harm.

“Money is not inherently good or bad, but it is powerful” (48). As humans, we are greatly susceptible to the temptation to fall in love with money, and our character is likely to be damaged by its influence. Paul Piff, a psychologist and professor at the University of California, Irvine, studies how money influences humans’ relationships. He has found that “as a person’s level of wealth increases, their feelings of compassion and empathy go down, and their feelings of entitlement, of deservingness, and their ideology of self-interest increase” (50).

It is important to be attentive to harness the power of money for God’s glory, while also protecting ourselves from its potential to corrupt our lives.

4. Worldly wealth is fleeting; heavenly treasure is eternal.

“When deciding how to manage our giving, consumption, and savings, we must ask ourselves which course of action will most glorify God and most benefit His Kingdom on Earth” (52). The accurate view of wealth prioritizes treasure in heaven over treasure on Earth. As Christians, we need to remember money is temporary form of wealth when we decide how to use it!

5. Giving generously to the poor is a moral duty in a fallen world.

“God has a deep and profound love for all His creation. Based on the teachings of Jesus, God has a particularly strong affiliation with the poor”(53). “We as Christians hold a moral duty to support the poor because the poor are fellow children of God, and because supporting our fellow brothers and sisters reflects God’s nature, resulting in His glory” (55).

6. Giving should be voluntary, generous (even sacrificial), cheerful, and needs-based.

“We know whether we have given voluntarily and cheerfully. We also know whether our giving is supporting genuine community needs” (56). But knowing whether or not we have given generously is more difficult to measure. Being generous with our wealth is to give in such a way that God is glorified. He is “glorified by our giving when we recognize His sovereignty, are grateful for His provision, and are joyful in our opportunity to serve Him” (58). Finally, our giving must be proportional with our means.

7. Giving generously breaks the power of money over us.

“Benefits of generosity include increased joy, personal satisfaction from serving others, spiritual growth, and blessing from God, both now and in eternity. Perhaps most importantly giving generously breaks the power money can so easily hold over us” (59).

We easily surrender to the idea that just a little more money will help us to have the life of our dreams. Ironically, this misguided belief seems to strengthen as we accrue more wealth. Additionally, the love of money may create self-righteousness that causes us to lose our compassion for the underprivileged; to fail to serve Jesus by failing to serve those whom he loves. The love of money can also distort how we measure success in our lives.

Worshiping wealth causes us to become insecure, unsatisfied, and self-absorbed. However, sharing generously protects us against falling into greed and allows us to experience joy of participating in the redemption of God’s Kingdom.

Chapter 3: Motivations for Giving

The last three of the seven principles, make claims that can be tested and verified. “Whenever it’s possible, a truth claim should be exposed to the evidence to see whether it can stand the test of hard scrutiny” (70).

The Moral Case for Generosity: Testing Principle Five

When non-Christians discover truth, the Christian should rejoice, because the ultimate realities of God that are written on every human heart are surfacing. It is valuable to examine what other belief systems and philosophical frameworks have to say about generosity.

Religions: There is something fundamentally and unavoidably human about the need to share our resources for the good of others. This is valued not only in Christianity but also in Utilitarian forms of Atheism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism.

Secular Moral Philosophy: “The traditions of the Christian Faith and secular Western moral philosophy converge in Aristotelean moderation on the issue of wealth” (80). The authors agree that guilt should not lead us to surrender all material possessions nor should we let a love of money inspire us to consume as much as possible. Regardless of one’s beliefs, anyone can find a convincing reason to give generously.

The Medical Case for Generosity: Testing Principles Six and Seven

“The Science of Generosity project based out of the University of Notre Dame found that giving is good for you. Intentional and regular practices of generosity have been associated with the release of a slew of good chemicals, including oxytocin, dopamine, and various endorphins.” (83). There is also a strong and clear association with a sense of purpose in life, personal happiness, and overall personal health in those who give generously.

On the other hand, the absence of giving is bad for you. “Those who do not give regularly have been found to harbor higher levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which has a linkage to everything from headaches, to stroke, to depression. It also affects pain management, body temperature regulation, blood pressure, and the control of fear”(84).

Chapter 4: Trends and Movements in Generosity

Statistics show that American Christians do not give away very much money. Surveys conducted at the “University of Notre Dame indicate less than 3 percent of American adults give away ten percent or more of their income” (95). “The barriers to obedience in these areas is likely a combination of lack of knowledge about how to give, excessive worry about providing for one’s family and saving for the future, and frankly, significant sin issues around selfishness, materialism, and lack of compassion for the poor” (96).

While it is apparent that most Americans are not generous, the authors wanted to refine the research to regular church-attending Christians who earn more than \$90,000 per year. “This demographic gives an average of 8.8 percent of gross income away each year, a significantly higher number” (97).

The authors wondered what they would find if they went “one level deeper, and [sought] out highly devoted followers of Jesus who earn very high incomes? [Their] survey on Christian Wealth and Giving, conducted in the fall of 2014, gave some preliminary answers to this question. [It] included over 200 individuals, ages ranged from people in their twenties to those in their seventies, and wealth ranged from middle class to those with \$20 million or more. The median respondent gives 10 percent of household income each year, with some giving 20 percent or more” (98).

They “learned that most higher-income Christians (approximately 60%) believe they should give the traditional tithe plus additional offerings as led by God. Only approximately 10 percent of respondents believe Christians are called to give “only” the traditional tithe. The remaining 20 percent believe Christians should give whatever portion of their income they feel called to give.

Then, the authors tested the attractiveness of intentionally limiting one’s lifestyle in order to give more generously, specifically by either limiting annual spending or net worth. Roughly a quarter of respondents said they do this or plan to, and another quarter said they did not like the idea. More than half, however, reported that they found the idea intriguing, but had either never heard of it or had never given it much thought” (100). One of the authors’ intents in writing this book is to expose more people to this idea.

The disconnect between the interest in and participation in each concept highlights the need for greater education and communication about these topics in churches today.

Chapter 5: The “Three S Framework:” Spender, Saver, or Servant

People lean towards one of three tendencies (113):

- **A Spender**, represented by most people in the Western world, is someone who pursues the greatest possible present consumption, even if mindful of the need to save some.
- **A Saver**, by contrast, strives to limit consumption to some extent, focusing instead on increased wealth accumulation.
- **A Servant**, possessing the rarest mindset of all, orients their life around limiting both consumption and wealth-building, focusing instead on giving the most money they can toward blessing other people.

Your perspective on money is influenced by how you view the present and how you view the purpose money serves. “Temporally, Spenders maximize value today, Savers maximize value in the future, and Servants maximize value in eternity” (113).

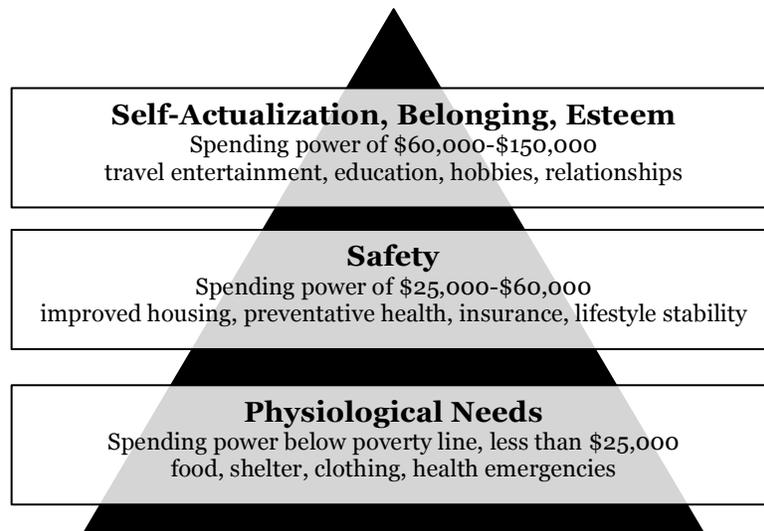
“A Spender views financial resources as a way to enjoy every part of the high life that money can buy. Savers have a more complex view of money, viewing it mostly as a tool for security, stability, flexibility, and personal freedom. Servants, view their money as a potential blessing to the world in Christ’s name, desiring to make the most of its potential for positive impact” (113).

Chapter 6: Spending - Investing in the Present

In order to have an accurate approach to giving, one must have an accurate approach toward consumption. Often people, regardless of income, spend money in a way that focuses on acquiring things and not on improving their ability to follow God's purpose.

The chart below "is an attempt to roughly correlate various spending levels to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, illustrating this principle for a family of four in a typical American city. This is not to suggest that all human needs can be met with money, but is rather indicative of the broad financial concerns of those in each budgetary bracket" (134).

Mapping of Spending Budgets to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs for American Family of Four (134)



This is an oversimplification, but hopefully a helpful one. The purpose of this chart is to show the "relative ease or difficulty with which people choose to save or give their income" (135).

"Increased spending power does not necessarily equate to human flourishing; rather, high spending power enables the possibility of human flourishing, if and only if the funds are spent wisely" (137).

Universal and Healthy Desires for Flourishing

Here's the ultimate question: how much should be allocated toward consumption, saving, and giving?

“Should spending continue to increase without limit? Or, in order to avoid the tragedy of “superdevelopment” – excessive spending that does not increase human flourishing – should there be a ceiling on consumption?” (138).

The authors believe there should be a ceiling on consumption and with extensive research they concluded that ceiling is \$150,000. However, this number is contingent on several factors and may fluctuate with circumstances. For example, it may be necessary to adjust this ceiling based on a family size greater than four or average cost of living in one's city. After examining a “variety of sources in order to understand spending from the most scientific, rigorous perspective possible for [their] own future planning, they believe a universally desired lifestyle usually hone in on spending power in the low-six figures range” (138).

Spending should be limited, allowing for saving and giving in a healthy way. The authors also believe, that once a decided amount of income has been achieved, spending should no longer depend on that figure.

After completing this research, the authors realized they wanted to implement what they learned. Each wanted to bless and support their families without harboring a love of money and pattern of consumption. They created what they call *Spending Finish Lines*. “The Finish Line was established after careful consideration and prayer, and represents the devotion of excess income to other purposes – namely, saving and giving” (140).

Parting Thought – How Do We Spend?

From a growing perspective of a Servant, the nature of our spending may change. When the lines between Spending and Serving begin to blur, consider it a beautiful accomplishment.

Chapter 7: Saving – Investing in the Future

With spending allocated, how should excess income be distributed between giving and saving? “As New Testament followers of Jesus, we have one foot in the eternal future, but the other is still firmly planted in earthly realities. [The authors] believe saving has a valid place in the life of a Christian” (146). Our desire to glorify God must take precedence over our savings goals.

As Servants, we must carefully consider the savings vs. giving decision based on the priority of the needs around us. It is wise for our savings to be linked to a tangible goal or need.

The Basics: Freedom from Consumer Debt (148)

- **Personal Finance Guideline:** Pay off the debt. Pay cash for cars. Keep 3-6 month’s expenses in an emergency fund.
- **Our Finish Lines:** Debt-freedom, two cars worth no more than \$30,000 each, and a \$40,000 emergency fund.

Consumer debt, defined here as all non-mortgage debt held by a household, generally represents negative net worth. This includes car loans, student loans, credit-card debt, and payday loans. When in consumer debt, it is reasonable to allocate a relatively large percent of income toward debt repayment, rather than spending or giving. However, repaying this debt should not take alleviate the need to give. “Regular giving is important for maintaining personal well-being and obedience to God’s Word” (149).

The Basics: Home Ownership (151)

- **Personal Finance Guideline:** Payment less than 28% of income. Home value no more than three to four times your income.
- **Our Finish Lines:** In normal geographies look for no more than 3,000 square feet with five bedrooms, which typically cost less than \$500,000 unless local real estate conditions are exceptional. Will not spend more than what we can qualify for on a 15-year mortgage, counting only 80 percent of our income.

The guiding principle the authors use in choosing a home is first that it is affordable, and second it is adequate without being excessive.

It is important to remember that regardless of what home we buy, it is really God’s home, not ours. Also, recalling our role as stewards of His possessions will give us perspective on how we should use our most valuable possession – our home.

The Basics: Retirement (155)

- **Personal Finance Guideline:** Save at least 15 percent of your income. If you can, max out all available accounts. If you finish early, nice job.
- **Our Finish Lines:** Save no more than is necessary to generate our spending finish line in perpetuity, from age 67 forward. If we start getting ahead of pace, consider cutting back savings.

While the authors recognize the importance of saving for retirement, they have chosen not to prioritize the accumulation of this fund over their desire and ability to share the love of Christ with the world.

The Basics: College for Children (158)

- **Personal Finance Guideline:** Open 529 accounts and save according to expected future expenses.
- **Our Finish Lines:** Prayerfully save an amount for each child that covers the majority, but not the full totality, of their overall anticipated college expenses.

It is clear in the Bible that God wants us to provide for our families. College tuition is something every parent should consider paying, assuming the character of their child warrants such an investment. However, aggressively setting aside money for their college fund, at the expense of giving generously, deprives children of the chance to see their family's money making an impact.

Reflection on the Basics

“God is my provider – not my own superior planning abilities” (160). This truth does not alleviate our obligations to save wisely, plan ahead, and make good choices. It does mean that we might choose to give now rather than to save until all of our desires have been met.

Luxuries: Financial Independence (161)

- **Personal Finance Guideline:** Keep saving! Maybe one day you can stop working!
- **Our Finish Line:** Only accumulate more than The Basics if there's a good reason. Never, under any circumstances accumulate more than 33 times our Spending Finish Line in a Financial Independence Fund. (Limit: \$3.3 million)

“Financial Independence represents a level of wealth which can finance a lifestyle in perpetuity, meaning the owner never needs to work again” (162). The reasoning behind seeking financial independence would be highly unique to each individual. It is critical to ask what is the purpose of this further accumulation of wealth? It should be done very carefully, if at all.

Luxuries: Inheritance (165)

- **Personal Finance Guideline:** Maximize value through careful estate planning. Complain about the inheritance tax and try to avoid it.
- **Our Finish Lines:** Pay for college, and provide a modest amount of help beyond that, relatively early in our children's adult lives. Involve our kids in our generosity as they mature, providing a rich spiritual heritage of giving.

Luxuries: Further Wealth, Business, Equity, Etc. (167)

- **Personal Finance Guideline:** Keep building your wealth – grow your empire.
- **Our Finish Lines:** No plans to accumulate any extra equity for the long term. If we handle some in the short-to-medium term, we will steward it wisely as belonging to God.

Chapter 8: Serving – Investing in Eternity Through Giving

The authors have come to believe that there are three key criteria they see as best practices for getting the giving game right. (180)

- Gifts must be Gospel-centered. If not, they lose their eternal value.
- Great gifts are aligned with the giver's personal ministry calling. Why not give our money to the same place we give our time and talent, where we have strong relationships, to an area where God has called and enabled us to make a difference?
- Giving is best when done with maximum effectiveness. This is a self-evident statement, but it's often hard to work out in practice.

How Should We Then Give? The Three Giving Goals:

Gospel-Centered

We are called to address material needs of the underprivileged, but to do so without the Gospel is to leave out the greatest cause for hope that we have to offer. “Exclusively working to bring personal salvation may leave institutional injustice unresolved, while working purely for social justice without addressing personal sin and salvation would be a ministry devoid of eternal significance. We must do both” (183).

Alignment with Personal Ministry Calling

As a Christian, we are all called to serve God and love others, but individually our callings may be quite diverse. “From our overarching call to the ministry of reconciliation, we must individually consider our gifts, our financial circumstances, local needs, and what giving opportunities are available in forming a personal vision for our giving” (187).

Developing specialized giving for a small number of specific causes could create a superior impact over the long-term, rather than donating widely.

Maximum Effectiveness

It is easy to measure giving by a simple percent-of-income total. When we do this, we fail to contribute the value of our abilities and knowledge to the giving process. The authors learned from “giving veterans” who offer their abilities and in turn “maximize the Kingdom-utility of the dollars God allows to pass through our hands” (192).

A Final Note: When Should We Not Give?

In Luke 11:42 Jesus admonishes the Pharisees: “But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, but neglect justice and the love of God! These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.” These verses highlight the fact that while generosity is a critical spiritual discipline, it is subordinate to maintaining right relations with both God and our fellow man. He wants us to be generous, but only for the right reasons – to honor Him and to serve others.

Chapter 9: Stewardship in Community

While God clearly values wealth management based on scripture, the authors question why Christians talk so little about it. “Acts 2:42-47 demonstrates that openness about our stewardship can be an important driver of life-giving, joyful Christian community” (212).

Financial Transparency in Action

Of the many of the generous families the authors spoke with, some model financial transparency, and all of them describe it as one of the best decisions they have ever made, both spiritually and financially. “Following are three strategies for incorporating financial transparency into our own lives” (212):

1. Publish an Annual Financial Report
2. Form a Personal Board of Directors
3. Share with Your Community Group

Community Giving

“The power of communal giving is demonstrated in Acts 2 and reiterated by Paul in 2 Corinthians 8. We believe there is significant opportunity to generate higher return on investment through community giving in the Church today” (217):

1. Group Gifts
2. Giving Ministries at Local Churches
3. Generosity Education

Solidarity with Our Fellow Man

Most of us spend a lot more time conducting “upward” comparisons than “downward” comparisons. This habit foments out culture of materialism – the proverbial “keeping up with the Joneses.” Focusing “upwards” diminishes our ability to truly empathize with “the least of these,” which severely restricts our capacity to be generous (224).

If we are not intentional, we will naturally gravitate towards people similar to ourselves. This separation prevents us from maintaining empathy for those God calls us to have compassion on. “Ultimately, we seek to empathize with our fellow man for the sake of the Gospel and as a result of the Gospel in us” (226).

Chapter 10: Our Conclusions

What causes someone to become radically generous?

“There are three primary catalysts for embracing a lifestyle of radical generosity. First is a deep understanding of God’s Word on the subject. Second is direct exposure to the joy that comes from a life of generosity. This exposure is often gained through relationships with close friends or fellow church members who are living very generous lives” (235). Third is a personal experience or witness of the deep need for generosity in our broken, sinful world.

What tactical day-to-day beliefs or behaviors fuel their generosity over time?

First, these individuals view their money and possessions as truly belonging to God. Additionally, they have developed a very high level of expectancy around the joy they will receive from their generosity. Finally, their generosity is deeply rooted in their faith in Christ. “That is to say, generosity is simply one component of their transformed life in Christ” (237).

About the Authors

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After launching his career in the Texas oil fields, John Cortines decided to advance the biblical message of generosity full-time, joining the leadership team of Generous Giving. He holds engineering degrees from Texas A&M University (BS, 2010), KAUST (MS, 2011), and an MBA from Harvard Business School (2015).

John lives in Orlando, Florida, with his wife Megan and their two children.

Gregory Baumer

A native of Indianapolis, Indiana, Greg Baumer earned his BS in finance, business economics, and public policy from Indiana University in 2008 before starting his career at McKinsey & Company then Advent International. After earning his MBA from Harvard Business School in 2015, Greg joined Nashville-based healthcare technology startup naviHealth as vice president of product development and innovation.

Greg lives in Nashville, Tennessee with his wife Alison and their young son (and another child on the way!)