

CULTIVATING YOUR
giving journey

A spiritual discernment exercise



A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT



National Christian
FOUNDATION® North Texas



EDEN PROJECT



This book belongs to

AUTHORS

JOEL SMYER & DUKE REVARO

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the New International Version (NIV).

Let's begin >

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Welcome!

Welcome to *Cultivating Your Giving Journey!* You're embarking on an exciting journey to rediscover the good works in which God has planned for you to walk. This spiritual exercise is designed to be a meeting with the Holy Spirit around your current giving. It will be both new and familiar. New because you will gain insights from this meeting with the Lord. Familiar because God is faithful to guide us with his presence along our giving journey through life.

You were created in the image of a triune God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always existed as a community of love—with each person seeking the highest good of the other. God has generously invited you into this divine reality.

God wants to know you and is committed to walking with you. He has sacrificed immensely to adopt you into His family. He desires to lead you like a good Father who gives good gifts to his kids and promises wise counsel every time we seek it. That's good news!

The Cultivating Your Giving Journey exercise will connect you with God relationally. Discovering what God is leading you to do is the foundation of cultivating your giving passions and stewardship objectives. As you walk in sync with the Holy Spirit through this exercise you will begin to discern next steps.

We hope that you find this spiritual exercise refreshing to your soul. We are excited to hear the stories of what God does in you and for the renewal of your family, your community and the world.

Discovering God's better future,

Joel Smyer & Duke Revard



CULTIVATING YOUR *giving portfolio*

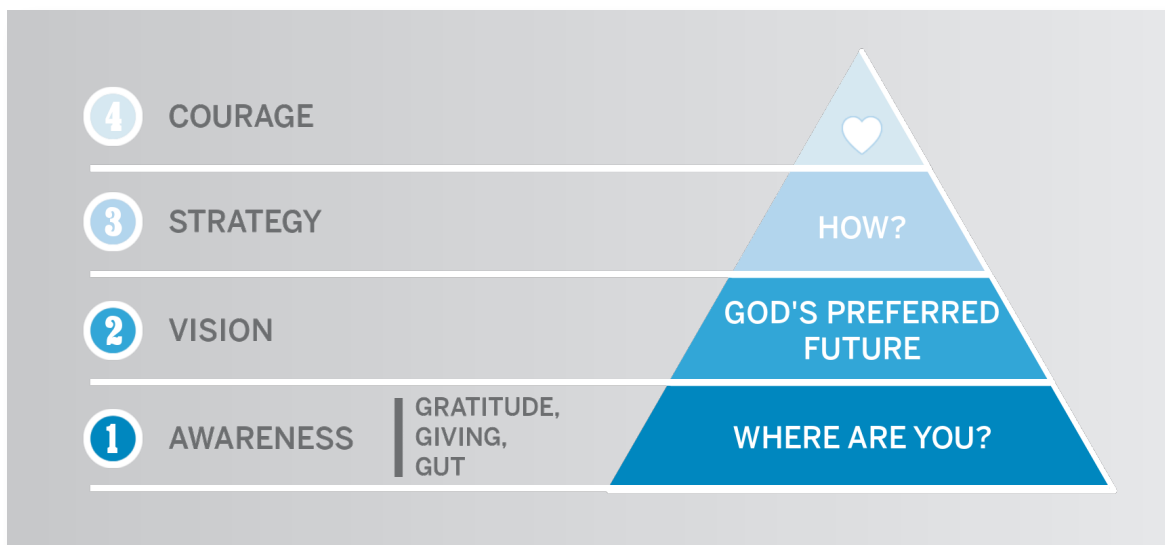


Every successful journey requires us to pause and ask “Where are we? Are we still on the right route?” Secular philanthropy and the world’s thinking often pressure us to search for visible impact from our giving based upon human reasoning alone. Believers have different values and access to the Holy Spirit to guide us as we advance the Kingdom with the resources God entrusts to us. This spiritual guide is designed to facilitate connection and prayerful conversation with Jesus as you discern the good works God specifically prepared for you before the beginning of time (**Ephesians 2:10**).

The human story began with God including us in his work. “Then the LORD God took the man & put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it & keep it” (**Genesis 2:15**). You’re a farmer and a keeper. God has given you gifts to grow and cultivate his creation, and you are good at it. He has asked you to manage what he has entrusted to you.

As you expand your awareness of this truth as it applies to your journey of giving, you will gain fresh vision for God’s preferred future for your giving. You may also find that your current giving is right in line with where God has you on this journey. We’ll then explore the courage you will need to stay the course as you follow through on the new that God reveals, and the old that God affirms. Much like board meetings require key partners, preparation and time, this guide invites God into the stewardship process. You may want to block 2–5 hours to fully engage with the Holy Spirit as he leads.

Here is an overview of the exercise:



SECTION 1: AWARENESS

What are you cultivating?

“Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and tend it.”

–Genesis 2:15 (NASB)

If we are called to collaborate with God in cultivating and keeping his creation, then the perennial question is: What are you cultivating? What are the particular ways you’re partnering with the Holy Spirit to extend God’s good creation for the benefit of others? We must quiet the internal noise to notice more about what is going on in our interior life.

- Cultivating Gratitude
 - Cultivating my Giving Interests
 - Cultivating & Keeping
-

SECTION 1



NOTES

Cultivating Gratitude

“Gratitude is the ability to experience life as a gift.”
-John Ortberg

The following three truths will help us cultivate gratitude in our lives and in the lives of our families.

First, we recognize God has been very gracious with us. Colossians 1:17 reveals “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” In James 1:17, we are reminded “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father.” This means God sustains us and provides for us. Romans 8:32, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

Second, gratitude is invited in scripture. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, “Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” It’s God’s will for you because he knows how very good it is for you. Gratitude is a discipline to decide to set your sights on “what’s right” in your life and not simply “what’s wrong.”

Third, gratitude is beneficial to human flourishing. The article “Why Gratitude is Good”¹ from the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley, highlights that regular expression of gratitude is associated with improved well-being, increased positive emotions, better physical health, and strengthened social connections (Greater Good Science Center, 2023), emphasizing the pivotal role of gratitude in fostering personal happiness and fulfillment.

REFLECTION & PRAYER

Take a few minutes to share with God what you’re grateful for. “God, I am grateful for . . .”

No doubt, God was honored and grateful for your expression of gratitude. Now it is his turn to speak. This particular exercise involves talking and listening, since this is the way healthy relationships work. It is encouraging to remember God, as a perfect parent, is never distracted, but fully attentive to you. We’ll now create some space for you to hear from God. *Spend three minutes listening to how God might be responding to your expression of gratitude . . .*

¹ Emmons, Robert. “Why Gratitude is Good.” Greater Good Science Center, University of California, Davis, 16 Nov. 2010.

Cultivating my Giving Interests

Discovering our spiritual gifts is one of the best ways for disciples of Jesus to learn how God partners with us to help build his Kingdom. There are all types of spiritual gift tests to help in the discovery process. But one of the best ways to discover our spiritual gift wiring is by learning what the various spiritual gifts are. A similar approach can be used to discover our giving passions and areas of giving interests. Scripture is clear that God places desires and burdens in our hearts to drive the desire to want to invest according to his purposes and callings in our life.

“Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” – Psalm 37:4. God conditions our heart for giving where he wants us to give because of the passions that he places in our heart to accomplish the good work opportunities that the Holy Spirit brings into our lives.

REFLECTION EXERCISE:

DISCOVER YOUR CAUSES AND PASSIONS

In this next exercise, you will review a list of giving causes. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to the grant making causes where he has put passion or burden in your heart. Please make notes about your passions on the following page as needed. You will explore these causes further in our next exercise. This exercise is an excerpt from the National Christian Foundation’s (NCF’s) *Giving Strategy Guidebook*. You can learn more about the *Giving Strategy Guidebook* in Appendix II.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, you have good work which you’ve prepared in advance for me to walk in (Eph 2:10). As I engage this exercise - What are you inviting me to notice? I want to be indifferent to anything but your will. I desire to be fully aligned with your Kingdom.

In Jesus Name,
Amen.

CAUSES

Look through the list of causes below, and follow each of these four prompts.

1. Draw a \$ next to any cause(s) you have supported financially.
2. Draw a ★ next to any cause(s) you have supported with time, skills, or influence.
3. Draw a ✓ next to any cause(s) God may be calling or equipping you to begin supporting.
4. Draw a ♥ next to the causes you feel most passionate about. These could be causes that bring you great joy, break your heart, or draw you nearer to God.

Addiction	Disaster Relief	Legal Services	Public Policy
Adoption & Foster Care	Domestic Violence	Marketplace Ministry	Retreat Centers & Camps
Animal Protection & Welfare	Education	Marriage	Refugee Support
Apologetics	Environment	Media & Publishing	Right to Life
Arts & Humanities	Evangelism & Missions	Medical Care	Single Parents & Widows
Bible Translation	Family	Medical Research	Slavery
Children's & Youth Ministry	Food Supply	Men's Ministry	Social Justice
Christian Persecution	Giving & Generosity	Mental Health	Spiritual Development
Church	History	Microfinance	Sports & Recreation
Church Planting	Homelessness	Military Support	Student Ministry
Church Planting	Housing	Museums	Water Quality & Supply
Civil Rights	Human Rights	Orphan Care	Women's Ministry
Colleges & Universities	Human Trafficking	Pastoral Care	
Community Development	Humanitarian Aid & Development	Police & Fire Department	
Developmental Disabilities	Jobs & Workplace	Prayer	
	Leadership Development	Prison Ministry	

What does this tell you about where you want to allocate your resources in the future?

Identify and Classify my Giving

In the worksheet below, Identify the top five churches and non-profit organizations that you currently support financially, along with the total amount gifted to each over the last 5 years (estimates are okay). Appendix I contains an additional copy of this chart for additional organizations. NCF can provide you with a Strategic Fund Review that includes a breakdown according to the categories or causes for gifts made from your NCF Giving Fund. **Some answers may be a simple yes or no, or you might rank each on a scale of 1-5.**

	Organization #1	Organization #2	Organization #3	Organization #4	Organization #5
Organization Name					
Total amount gifted over the last 5 years					
Is the organization faith-based?					
Is the organization advancing the gospel?					
Is the organization secular (e.g. a public university)?					
If secular, is it furthering a Kingdom objective (e.g. feeding the poor)?					
Have you experienced God in or around giving to this organization?					
Do you experience joy giving here?					
Do you sense the Holy Spirit with you as you give here?					
Why are you currently giving here?					
Do you invest time or talents beyond financial giving here?					
What giving passions or interests are represented?					
Does this organization fall outside your giving interests?					

SECTION 2: VISION

God's preferred future

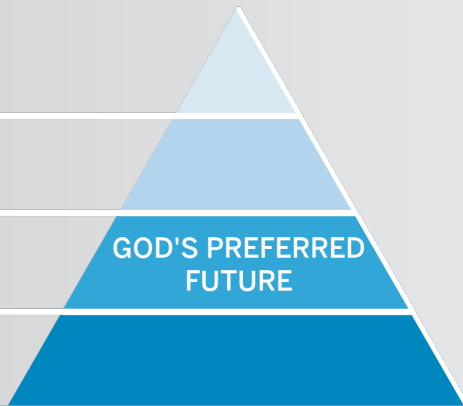
“For we are God’s handiwork,
created in Christ Jesus to do good works,
which God prepared in advance for us to do.”
-Ephesians 2:10

God has intent. He is a designer and created you for specific work in collaborative cultivation with him.

He is personally interested in you and your family’s legacy, and the leveraging of your resources. There are good works God has prepared in advance for you.

SECTION 2

NOTES



2 VISION

Considering my Giving as a Portfolio

Charitable giving done in partnership with God to help build his Kingdom is similar to investing in the physical realm. While there are certainly some exceptions, most high net worth Christian givers financially support multiple churches and organizations at the same time. Similar to considering your worldly investments from a portfolio perspective, it is often helpful for the Kingdom investor to consider the various organizations you financially support from a portfolio perspective. This is also why identifying Jesus-inspired giving passions or causes is so important to keeping your Kingdom investment strategy on course.

REFLECTION

What giving passions are represented by the organizations that I currently support?

Do any organizations where I currently give fall outside my areas of giving passion?

What giving passions are not represented by any of the organizations making up my giving portfolio?

Where am I “overweight” in giving and where am I “underweight”?

How does investing in this portfolio as-is further my spiritual journey with the Holy Spirit?

God's preferred future (continued)

Below is a list of questions to consider with God. Scan this list and ask the Holy Spirit which one or two he would like to have a conversation with you about.

SELECTED QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Calling: How does your giving portfolio align with your values and purpose, and how can you adjust it to better reflect your calling?

Change: In what areas of your giving do you see the need for personal growth, and what steps can you take to bring about meaningful changes?

Community: Which community issues resonate deeply with your values, and how can you tailor your giving to address them effectively?

Emotion: How do your acts of giving affect your emotional well-being, and what patterns in your giving behavior reflect underlying emotions that need more understanding?

Family: How does your family history influence your giving, and how can you ensure your wealth legacy impacts future generations positively?

Fear: What concerns do you associate with your giving, and how can you build confidence in your giving to overcome these fears?

Priority: How do you prioritize causes when faced with various options, and what criteria guide your decision-making in your giving portfolio?

Spiritual: How does your spirituality shape your giving, and how can you deepen this connection in your giving journey?

Tension: What conflicts do you encounter in your giving, and how do they affect your decision-making and resource allocation?

Vision: What long-term impact do you aim to achieve through your giving, and how can you articulate and refine this vision for greater inspiration and action?

PERSONAL OR FAMILY REFLECTION

What two questions stood out to you?

What conversation did you have with God? What was that like for you?

What do you sense comes next in this conversation or from this conversation?

SECTION 3: STRATEGY

How will you cultivate?

“Vocation does not come from willfulness. It comes from listening.”

–Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*

“Jesus gave them this answer: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed.”

–*John 5:19-20*

- Where Is God calling you to **cut** your giving?
- Where is God calling you to **prune** for greater fruitfulness by deepening connection & support?
- Where is God calling you to **plant** with new giving opportunities or building deeper with organizations you already support?

SECTION 3

3

STRATEGY

HOW?

NOTES

What will you need to cut or prune?

Henry Cloud in his book *Necessary Endings* defines “pruning” as “a function of cutting away to reduce the extent or reach of something by taking away unfruitful or superfluous parts.” Faithful stewards remove giving in their portfolio that is spiritually unfruitful or superfluous. In some cases a branch is already dead. Pruning also involves trimming or adapting branches that are fruitful to ensure even greater fruitfulness. As you gain more clarity about your values, the needs/opportunities in this moment in biblical history and the effectiveness of partners in ministry, you will be prepared to prune as the Holy Spirit directs.

There are 4 Basic Pruning Principles:

1. Know when to prune.
2. Know where to cut.
3. Remove problematic branches first.
4. Prune regularly.

REFLECTION

To what extent do you believe pruning is a necessary step in pursuing greater fruitfulness?

What is your emotional response to pruning? Does it turn your stomach? Does it feel mean or uncaring when people are involved? Is it freeing or energizing? If you’re making this decision as a couple or as a family, what are the various emotions members are experiencing?

Look back over your giving portfolio and areas of giving interest that you selected. Where is your heart and mind guiding you to continue investing with deepened conviction? How might you come alongside the organization to ensure even more fruitfulness?

Where is your heart and mind guiding you to stop or reduce giving?

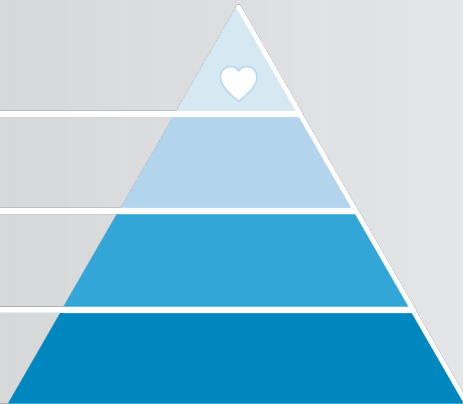
SECTION 4: COURAGE

How do I endure faithfully?

Courage is the strength to carry on in spite of danger or difficulty. Listen to the Apostle Paul's courage in Acts 20:22-24, "And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."

SECTION 4

4 COURAGE



NOTES

Where do I go from here?

Paul was no stranger to “troubles, hardships and distresses...beatings, imprisonments and riots...sleepless nights and hunger” (2 Corinthians 6:4-5). But Paul continued to entrust himself to God and to stay the course through resistance. While you may not encounter anything as intense as the Apostle Paul faced, you will no doubt be challenged in your giving journey with distractions, difficulties and frustrations.

REFLECTION & PRAYER

What resistance do you anticipate as you chart this new course? *Additional note space on the next page.*

- Personal internal resistance? If there is a battle within you, what is it?
- Within your family? Is there tension or disagreement?
- With your partnerships? What difficulties have you encountered with the organizations you currently support?
- What difficulties have you had in discovering fruitful organizations aligned with your giving passions?
- Our spiritual enemy is the father of lies, an accuser who kills, steals and destroys. How might he attempt to thwart your plans?
- What else makes this difficult? What will it take to endure faithfully in light of these challenges?
- What is your plan for prayer? What would it sound like to process this with your Heavenly Father right now? Take a few minutes to do so.

You weren't meant to walk this journey alone.

Who will walk with you as you cultivate faithfulness?

- Spouse
- Spiritual Friends:
- Mentor(s):
- Professional Support:
- Who else?

Who will you take with you to mentor or disciple along the way?

- Proteges
- Next Generation/Children
- Who else?

How often will you check on the progress of your investments?

- Monthly?
- Quarterly?
- Annually?

Identify and Classify my Giving (continued)

	Organization #1	Organization #2	Organization #3	Organization #4	Organization #5
Organization Name					
Total amount gifted over the last 5 years					
Is the organization faith-based?					
Is the organization advancing the gospel?					
Is the organization secular (e.g. a public university)?					
If secular, is it furthering a Kingdom objective (e.g. feeding the poor)?					
Have you experienced God in or around giving to this organization?					
Do you experience joy giving here?					
Do you sense the Holy Spirit with you as you give here?					
Why are you currently giving here?*					
Do you invest time or talents beyond financial giving here?					
What giving passions or interests are represented?					
Does this organization fall outside my giving interests?					

Discover your Giving Strategy

Pursuing God's story for your generosity

What will I pass on to future generations?

- Make kingdom impact an enduring trait of your legacy
- Maximize charitable giving during your lifetime and through your estate
- Explore and set a financial finish line

Where is God calling me to give and why?

- Clarify the causes and issues God has put on your heart
- Maximize your impact with creative grantmaking strategies
- Discover new causes and new ways to invest in your favorite causes

How do I foster a spirit of generosity?

- Give with purpose as you steward the resources God has entrusted to your family
- Invest in your family by involving them in your giving journey
- Create opportunities to give together

How do I make the most of what I've been given?

- Integrate your Giving Strategy into your financial plan
- Turn tax dollars into giving dollars
- Give strategically from both cash and non-cash assets
- Simplify your giving

Family

Cultivate Unity

Passions

Give with kingdom impact

Legacy

Craft an enduring story

Wealth & Resources

Maximize your giving

Your biblical foundation for giving

GIVING IS MORE THAN A FINANCIAL TRANSACTION

Giving is a spiritual practice that can transform every major aspect of your life. At NCF, we help you create a Giving Strategy that applies a scriptural perspective to four areas of generosity – your Legacy, Family, Passions, and Wealth & Resources. Every Giving Strategy is unique, so you can start your approach in any of these areas.

FOR FURTHER READING

If you are looking for further reading on the subject, consider the following recommended resources:

Pursuing God's Will Together

by Ruth Haley Barton

Church boards and other Christian leadership teams have long relied on models adapted from the business world. Ruth Haley Barton, president of the Transforming Center, helps teams transition to a much more suitable model—the spiritual community that discerns God's will together. In these pages you will discover personal and group practices that will lead you into a new way of experiencing community and listening to God together.

The Discerning Life

by Stephen Macchia

In *The Discerning Life*, Stephen A. Macchia seeks to upend the one-eyed and limited Christian understandings of spiritual discernment and invite readers and leaders to reconsider how they prioritize the care of their souls, the grace of their communities, and the mission of their lives, churches, and organizations. When we have a fuller understanding of how spiritual discernment matters to the whole of our lives, we will in turn encourage others to follow likewise and then lean fully into the mission, mandate, and message of the whole counsel of God.

Visions of Vocation

by Steven Garber

Vocation is when we come to know the world in all its joy and pain and still love it. Vocation is following our calling to seek the welfare of the world we live in. And in helping the world to flourish, strangely, mysteriously, we find that we flourish too. Garber offers a book for everyone everywhere—for students, for parents, for those in the arts, in the academy, in public service, in the trades and in commerce—for all who want to discover the virtue of vocation.

Desiring God's Will

by David Benner

In *Desiring God's Will*, psychologist and spiritual director David G. Benner explores the transformation of the will in Christian spirituality. He examines why our desires are disordered and how our human volition can be brought into alignment with God's intentions so that we willingly choose that which God wants for us. In so doing, Benner shows us that cultivating discernment and being attuned to God's desires is the path to true life, spiritual health and freedom.

Necessary Endings

by Henry Cloud

Henry Cloud, the bestselling author of *Integrity* and *The One-Life Solution*, offers this mindset-altering method for proactively correcting the bad and the broken in our businesses and our lives. Cloud challenges readers to achieve the personal and professional growth they both desire and deserve—and gives crucial insight on how to make those tough decisions that are standing in the way of a more successful business and, ultimately, a better life.

About



Joel Smyer guides NCF – North Texas as President and General Counsel, sowing seeds of generosity and offering customized solutions for givers to maximize the amount and impact of their giving as they pursue their God-directed callings. Prior to joining the Foundation, Joel was a partner in the Fort Worth law firm of Anderson, Smyer, Riddle & Kuehler, LLP, where he practiced law in various areas of civil litigation. Joel is a graduate of Baylor University (1990) and Baylor University School of Law (1993). The National Christian Foundation of North Texas was formed in 2008 with the mission to serve and encourage givers to grow as faithful stewards who excel in giving to further the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Its heart and real essence is a community of generous Christian givers from the North Texas area.



Joel Smyer
President and General Counsel
jsmyer@ncfgiving.com



A serial church planter and entrepreneur, Duke Revard has served in a variety of start-ups as founder, executive director of church planting, coach, and consultant. He brings a strong background in lean startup methodology, discernment, and execution to the Eden Project. Duke received his Masters of Theology (ThM) from Dallas Theological Seminary. The Eden Project's mission is to help you connect deeply with God, yourself, and others. They will help you slow down, audit your current reality, and intentionally establish a pace and practices for deep connection. As you connect directly with God, engage in a gracious community, gain new awareness, and attend to key practices you'll deepen in every relationship. You'll come back to the home you were made for.



Duke Revard
Co-Founder and President
drevard@edenteam.org