

# THE FOREST IN THE SEED

*A Biblical Perspective on Resources and Development*

SCOTT D. ALLEN AND DARROW L. MILLER

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*You can count the number of seeds in a mango  
but you can't count the number of mangos in a seed.*

– TRADITIONAL KENYAN PROVERB

## FOREWORD

The widespread practice of humanitarian assistance around the world today is encouraging. While such assistance increasingly comes from all corners of the globe, the fact that people from affluent Western nations continue to share their wealth with the poor, in some cases even leaving their homes to serve the needy directly in foreign lands, is evidence of how deep the teachings of Jesus Christ remain rooted in their culture.

Yet the way in which humanitarian assistance (or “relief and development” as it is sometimes described) is practiced tends to reproduce the life perspective of donor nations and agencies that provide the largest share of resources. These donor values and expectations influence the practices of implementing development agencies. They influence how aid programs are shaped and operate, what messages are communicated directly or indirectly to the poor, how long the help will continue, and which objectives should have priority in implementation.

In many cases, foreign aid is mediated through legal contracts which reflect the interests of donor agencies, and thus, humanitarian assistance, in practice, is governed by the ideals and values of these agencies. The largest share of financial investment in helping the poor,

nowadays, responds to the strategic decisions of corporate donors or to the personal and cultural perceptions of individual donors.

With this in mind, a critical reflection on the topic of resources and development is fundamental if we are to evaluate and improve upon present models and practices of humanitarian assistance. While affluent Western nations continue to be influenced by the older Christian ideas that defined their cultural life in past generations, today, these same nations are predominantly shaped by values rooted in materialism, multiculturalism and pragmatism. The former Christian values continue to exert influence as reflected in the continuing motivation to help the poor. But how that help is carried out today is thoroughly shaped by modern/post-modern beliefs and values. These values, in turn, shape the Western understanding of resources, be they financial, human or technological.

The assumptions that underpin modern/post-modern culture cannot produce nor facilitate real development and wholistic transformation. Human beings are created to develop through the wise stewardship of the resources God has entrusted them, in their own person, in their network of relationships and in the physical environment they live in. Any serious approach to foster wholistic transformation of the poor must learn its way from the wisdom of God as revealed in the Bible. Without this wisdom, all efforts and results are doomed to be superficial and reversible.

It is this wisdom from God, regarding the resources that are available to everyone – rich and poor alike – and how these resources are to be stewarded for development that Darrow and Scott masterfully explore here. This booklet is a solid exposition of a Christian worldview that, if understood and applied, will help us all better obey Christ’s command to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Luis Sena  
Country Director  
Food for the Hungry, Dominican Republic  
November 2006

## INTRODUCTION

### *Seeing the Forest in a Seed*

On a recent trip to Kenya, Darrow shared dinner with an agronomist who was working for a local Christian relief and development organization. He explained how he would go from village to village, teaching impoverished, subsistence farmers how to improve their farming practices.

“What are you currently teaching them?” Darrow asked. His answer was surprising.

“I’m teaching them how to see the forest in a seed.”

Darrow had expected a different answer, something along the lines of new seed varieties, crop rotation techniques or the like.

“What do you mean?”

“I’m trying to change their mindset. I’m trying to help them see resources that are right in front of their eyes, but are so common they are often unnoticed or taken for granted.”

This young agronomist was committed to something more fundamental than teaching the latest farming techniques and technologies. He was going after bigger game: He wanted to change their paradigm about farming altogether. There is a Chinese proverb that is often quoted in community development circles. It goes like this: “Give a man a fish and he has food for the day, but teach a man

to fish and he will have food for a lifetime.” While this proverb provides an important insight on the distinction between hand-outs and training, it doesn’t go far enough. Teaching a man to fish will not lead to his transformation. Darrow’s dinner companion understood that the goal of development must be nothing less than the transformation of lives, families, communities and nations. Such transformation will ultimately not depend on money, technology or technique. It *will* require new ways of thinking – fresh perspectives. In fact, this Chinese proverb needs to be extended:

- Give a man a fish and he has food for the day (Relief)
- Teach a man to fish and he has food for a lifetime (Development)
- Empower a man to *think* about fishing in new ways and his life will be changed forever! (Transformation)

How people think, how they see and understand the world (in other words, their mindset or *worldview*) is the single most important factor in contributing to or hindering the development of healthy, prosperous societies. Our position is that only the biblical worldview – the way of understanding reality presented in Scripture and embodied in the life of Jesus Christ, the most perfectly developed person the world has ever known – has the power to lead to positive transformation for individuals and nations.

The Bible has a great deal to say about the power of ideas and the importance of the *mind*. The great commandment entreats us to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind (Lu. 10:27). The Apostle Paul admonishes us to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Co. 10:5). There are ways of thinking that align with the fallen systems of this world, and a way of thinking that aligns with God and his Kingdom. As Christians, our faith must go beyond a mental assent to Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross for our sins. We are to understand all of reality in a new way – the way Jesus sees it. To use the words of Christian scholar Harry Blamires, we are called to think of even the most unspiritual things “Christianly.”<sup>1</sup> How we think about marriage, family, science,

government, the arts, development and resources, needs to be rooted in a thoroughly biblical understanding of reality. Yet all too often, as Christians, we fail at this very point. Christians working in the realm of development and social reform have often unknowingly failed to think and operate from a biblical worldview. Unless there is an intentional commitment to apply God's Word to all areas of life, those who name the Name of Christ will, by default, think and operate according to the systems of the world. This is serious business. There will always be incentives to entice us to operate according to worldly ideas and standards. The way of Christ is always costly – and it must be deliberate.

There was another agriculturalist, one that you may be familiar with – not an African, but an African-American. His name was George Washington Carver, and he has a great deal to teach us today about living fully for Christ in all areas of life. He also has much to teach us about a biblical view of resources, development and transformation.

Carver was born to a single mother in 1864 near Diamond Grove, Missouri. As an infant, George and his mother were kidnapped by Confederate night-raiders and sent away to Arkansas. A relation, Moses Carver, found and reclaimed George some time later, but his mother had disappeared forever and the identity of Carver's father remains unknown. Moses and Susan Carver reared the orphaned George and his brother as their own children. It was on Moses' farm where George first fell in love with nature, and collected in earnest all manner of rocks and plants.<sup>2</sup> Carver is a living example of how someone born amongst the "poorest of the poor" can contribute to the transformation of those around him through having his mindset enlightened by God's revelation in both Scripture and creation. God used this man of humble roots to impact an entire nation.

Carver understood the wonder of God's revelation. When God's Word said in Genesis 1:29, "Behold, I give you every herb yielding seed, which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for [food]..." (KJV), Carver, in childlike wonder, commented, "Behold' there means

'look,' 'search,' 'find out'... That to me is the most wonderful thing in life."<sup>3</sup> Carver took the Bible seriously. He understood that it is to inform our entire lives, including our work. Carver also understood that he was to "read" the book of God's world: "To me, Nature in its varied forms is the little window through which God permits me to commune with Him, and to see much of His glory, by simply lifting the curtain and looking in. I love to think of Nature as wireless telegraph stations through which God speaks to us every day, every hour, and every moment of our lives."<sup>4</sup>

Carver came to creation to discover the purpose of a thing and then put it to use for the benefit of mankind. When asked by an agricultural journalist what prompted him to study the simple peanut, he responded:

"Why, I just took a handful of peanuts and looked at them. 'Great Creator,' I said, 'why did you make the peanut? Why?' With such knowledge as I had of chemistry and physics I set to work to take the peanut apart. I separated the water, the fats, the oils, the gums, the resins, sugars, starches pectoses, pentoses, pentosans, legume, lysine, and amino acids. There! I had the parts of the peanut all spread out before me. Then I merely went on to try different combinations of those parts, under different conditions of temperature, pressure, and so forth.

The result was what you see – these 202 different products, all made from peanuts!"<sup>5</sup>

When George Washington Carver looked at the simple peanut, he saw its potential. He recognized that God had made the peanut for a purpose; so he looked for the common miracle in the seed.

How do we help people see the forest in the seed? How do we help open their eyes to the incredible array of resources that come into view when we see the world from the perspective of God and His Kingdom? How do we foster within them an inquisitiveness

and hunger to discover the untapped potential hidden within these resources?

Our intention in writing this booklet is to challenge certain contemporary assumptions about the process of community development and social reform, and to offer a reflection on how these important endeavors would be shaped if built on the foundation of a biblical worldview – particularly as it relates to the topic of resources.

In the first section, we'll examine the importance of ideas and beliefs which foster or hinder development. Here, we will touch on two influential non-biblical perspectives on resources – the first rooted in a materialistic paradigm, and the second, flowing from ideas associated with animism.

In the second section, we'll open the Bible to see how Scripture shapes our thinking about resources. The Christian worldview opens up an incredibly expansive understanding of resources – internal resources available to all men and women, resources found in the environment and even more resources available to those who have put their faith in the saving work of Christ. We'll look at the resources in each of these categories in some detail. Throughout this study, we will provide opportunities for you to reflect on your own understanding of resources.

Like you, we are learners, and our understanding of resources, transformation, and God's Word is still very much "in process." Our desire with this small book is to share some of our reflections and engender discussion. It would be our joy for you to share your comments, concerns and reflections. We hope you will catch a sense of our excitement that flows from our ever-expanding understanding of the Scriptures. For us, the Bible is truly God's "transforming story," offering hope, wisdom and truth for all people, and for the expansion of freedom, justice, beauty and righteousness in communities and nations.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Ideas Have Consequences!*

*...A man reaps what he sows.*

– GALATIANS 6:7

The Bible reveals a fundamental principle, "For as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Pr. 23:7 KJV). This principle applies to individuals as well as entire cultures. The key to cultural transformation, therefore, lies in the transformation of the mindset or worldview of a people. The late evangelist and apologist, Francis Schaeffer, said: "I believe people are as they think. The choices we make...will mold irrevocably the direction of our culture ... and the lives of our children."<sup>6</sup> There is a relationship between the spiritual and physical realms and culture. The spiritual realm impacts the physical realm at the level of culture. Or to put it differently, we build societies like the God or god(s) that we worship (Ps. 115:4-8).

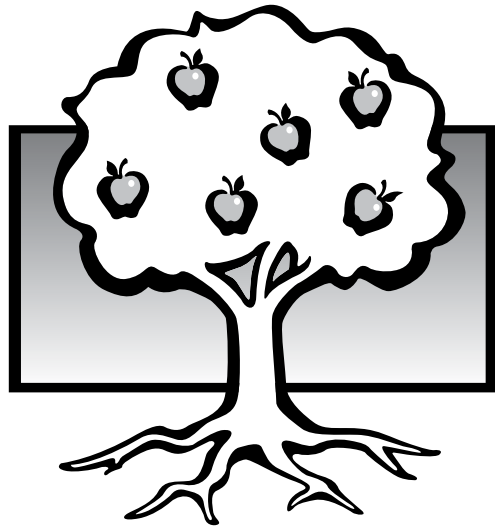
Two agricultural analogies from the Bible show the relationship between ideas and the real-life, culture-shaping consequences that flow from them. The first analogy of sowing and reaping is found in the book of Galatians. "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Gal. 6:7). The seed (idea, belief) that

you sow will determine the fruit (consequences) that you reap. The second analogy in found is the book of Matthew where Jesus said:

*“By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

*Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”*

MATTHEW: 7:16-20



Just as the quality of the soil and roots of a tree determine the quality and variety of the fruit produced, so it is with our ideas. To use Richard Weaver’s famous phrase, *ideas have consequences*.<sup>7</sup> Stated another way, the deepest beliefs, assumptions and convictions of a people will determine their values, feelings and emotions. These, in turn, establish their patterns of behavior; and finally, their behavior

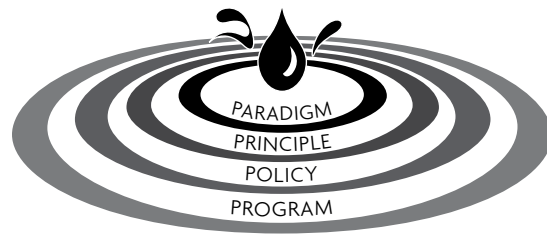
has consequences for their lives, the lives of their families and their society. As a formula it may be expressed as follows:

BELIEFS ►► VALUES ►► BEHAVIOR ►► CONSEQUENCES

We can relate this to the image of the tree we just looked at. The beliefs of a people correspond to the roots. The values of the people correspond to the trunk. The behavior of a people corresponds to the branches. The consequence of a person’s or culture’s behavior corresponds to the fruit. Different roots (beliefs) *inevitably* produce different fruit (consequences in society).

When we speak of *worldview*, we are speaking of the total set of beliefs or assumptions that comprise the mindset of an individual and determine what they value and how they behave. Synonyms for worldview include paradigm, mindset or meta-narrative. Worldviews act like the computer software that runs the hardware of our lives. Worldviews are not only personal, they are also corporate. Consider an organization that you are affiliated with, perhaps your church, or a Christian organization – or even your family. Within any group or organization, there are a *dominant* set of ideas, beliefs, assumptions and convictions that shapes its “corporate culture.” In many cases, these ideas operate below the surface. That is, people are not consciously aware of their influence in their lives or organizations. They are often “caught” (as someone catches a cold virus) from other similar organizations, professional associations, “industry” standards, or the culture at large. These dominant ideas will determine the values and principles by which the organization functions. These values may be the same or different than those written down in corporate values document. Yet these *operational* values – stated or unstated – inform the day-to-day practices, programs and activities of the organization. Perhaps another picture will be helpful here.





### WORLDVIEW IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONS

The various programs and activities an organization carries out (and how they are carried out) are reflective of its core beliefs or paradigm. For Christians, then, nothing could be more important than becoming aware of these beliefs and discovering if they are consistent with revealed truth in Scripture. How tragic it is when Christians, often with the best of motives, think and operate from unbiblical presuppositions. For example, in our arena of Christian development and social reform, do we think of recipients of our aid as “target populations” or image-bearers of God? Do we assume that poverty-stricken people in poor communities have no resources because we see resources in exclusively monetary terms? Do we fail to leave space for the supernatural in our aid programs? Or do we fail to see the connection between the demonic and structural evil that contributes to poverty?

If you are a Christian father or mother, a pastor, or the president of a Christian organization, it is critical that you examine your assumptions and hold them up to the light of Scripture. This is the very essence of what the Apostle Paul encourages when he says “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2).

### SECULAR AND ANIMISTIC PERSPECTIVES ON RESOURCES

Now, let’s turn our attention to how different worldviews impact one’s understanding of resources.

### *Materialism*

In our travels around the world, two questions shed light on how people think about resources and development. They are: “What do nations (or communities, or families) need to develop?” And “Where do resources come from to enable them to develop?” Before reading further, take a moment to reflect on how you would answer these two questions. Write your answers in the space below.

What do poverty-stricken nations need in order to develop?

Where do the resources come from to enable such development?

A typical answer to the first question involves money, technical training, or various forms of technology. A frequent answer to the second question is “from governments, transnational organizations (such as the United Nations or the World Bank), or international development NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations).” People from developing nations in the global South are, with few exceptions, looking for resources to develop *from outside their community or nation*. Many people from materially wealthy nations likewise believe that for poorer nations to develop, it will require money and technical training from affluent nations. Indeed, a multi-billion dollar aid industry has formed around the consensus answers to these two questions. If the poor are poor because they lack resources and

training, and if others of more substantial means can supply their lack, they will no longer be poor! What could be more logical than this? Yet the problem isn't that simple.

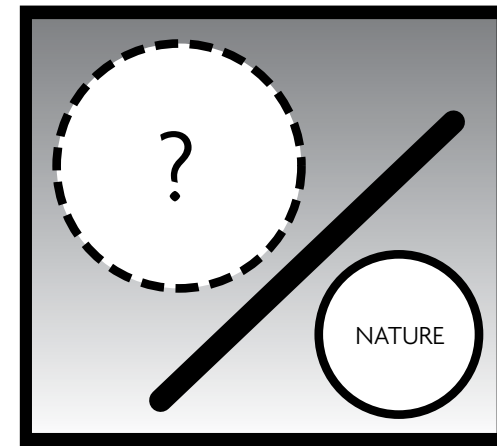
Consider the failed "War on Poverty" in the United States. In a comment that perfectly captured the mindset of so many well-intentioned government officials of the time, one Johnson Administration aid quipped "The way to eliminate poverty is to give the poor enough money so they won't be poor anymore."<sup>8</sup> Armed with this perspective, the government spent billions of dollars on welfare programs between 1960 and 1990. And yet the number of poor people in America actually *increased* during these three decades, thus leading to the elimination of the welfare experiment during the Clinton Administration.

Or take the continent of Africa.

Africa is the largest per capita recipient of foreign aid in the world. Between 1980 and 1988, sub-Saharan Africa received U.S. 83 billion dollars in foreign aid. And yet during that same period of time, living standards and GDP actually declined in the same region.<sup>9</sup> Syndicated Columnist Walter Williams has noted that "Nearly every sub-Saharan African nation is poorer now than when they became independent during the '60s and '70s. Since that time, food production has fallen by roughly 20 percent. Since 1975, per capita gross domestic product has fallen at a rate of half of 1 percent annually. Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo estimated, 'Corrupt African leaders have stolen at least \$140 billion from their people in the [four] decades since independence.'<sup>10</sup>

Sadly, this perspective has proven quite durable. Even today, the belief system underpinning much of modern, Western relief and development is *materialism*. This is not to say that all its practitioners subscribe to this belief system; but rather that it provides the ideological framework in which modern relief and development operates. Materialism rests on the presupposition that the universe is comprised of one substance and one substance only – physical matter. It tacitly assumes that God does not exist. There is no transcendence "out there" (illustrated by the question mark in the upper circle in

the following diagram). The physical universe (Nature) is all there is, thus it is "closed" to any imaginary outside intervention whether on the part of God, angels or demons. Every effect *must* have a *natural* cause. Indeed, everything can – and must – be explained through the impersonal workings and chance combinations and interactions of matter. Mankind is part of this system, a ghost trapped in the machinery of the universe. According to economist Arnold Kling, "From Karl Marx's *Das Capital* to Jered Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel*, the materialist belief has captured people's imaginations."<sup>11</sup>



MATERIALISM

The common denominator of so much modern development is the transfer of wealth, resources, technology and know-how from the more well-off to the less well-off. While well-intentioned, many foreign aid initiatives have actually been shown to increase poverty and dependency. An exclusive focus on transferring money and technology says to the impoverished, in effect, "Yes, you are poor, and there's very little you can do to improve your circumstances without our help." This, in turn, has the unintended effect of narrowing the vision of the poverty-stricken with regards to their resources. It does this in two ways: First, it reinforces the belief that what really matters are material resources. Intangible resources such as the

mind, spirit, creativity, beliefs and culture are downplayed, ignored or neglected. Second, it encourages needy individuals to look outside of themselves or their communities for resources first, thus limiting their ability to see the bountiful resources in their midst.

We are not arguing here for the cessation of foreign aid. Resources of all kinds are needed to help in the fight against poverty. Our point is that material resources, while important, are by themselves inadequate to effect real transformation, and as such, they are of secondary or tertiary importance. If our solutions to poverty focus exclusively on money and technology, we are not going to the root of the problem. The root cause of poverty is spiritual, moral and metaphysical. Money and technology may help – or it may harm – but it will never reach the root problem.

Furthermore, when foreign aid results in the poor being hindered in their God-given ability to discover their own resources and potential, we need to see it for what it is – a grave tragedy. Again, it is important to be clear about what we are saying, and what we are not saying. We are not saying that wealthy people and nations should not give of their prosperity to alleviate poverty and suffering in the world! We are questioning how these resources are used. All too often, poverty-stricken people in developing nations have their own sense of helplessness reinforced by well-intentioned humanitarian assistance. Many traditional aid recipients as well as leaders of international aid organizations are beginning to realize the dependency fostered by well-motivated but ill-designed development efforts. Kenyan economist James Shikwati put a fine point on it during an interview for the German periodical *Der Spiegel*:

Huge bureaucracies are financed with [foreign aid] money, corruption and complacency are promoted, Africans are taught to be beggars and not to be independent... Development aid weakens the local markets everywhere and dampens the spirit of entrepreneurship that we so desperately need. As absurd as it may sound: Development aid is one of the reasons for Africa's problems.<sup>12</sup>

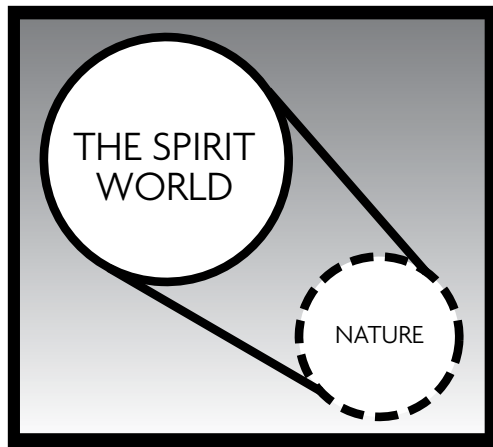
The problem does not lie in the act of giving to the poor. In fact, we would argue that more should be given towards alleviating poverty. The question we are raising is this: Will the resources that are given have the effect of empowering the poor to discover their own resources or will they hinder them?

A helpful insight into the distinctions we must make in our application of aid resources comes from 1 Thessalonians 5:14 which reads, “And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak...” Those who are idle – who are not willing to work – should not receive money, but rather a stern admonition. Those who are timid, who are struggling with loss of confidence or hope, require encouragement and support. We must walk alongside these. But to those who are weak – literally beaten down and oppressed, who cannot help themselves, we must tenderly come underneath them, support them, and lift them up. In such situations, outside resources will be required. As Christians, we are commanded repeatedly in Scripture to show compassion for the poor. God is compassionate (Ex. 34:5-7) and has a tender heart towards the downtrodden, neglected, and cast-aside (Ps. 72:12-14). His anger is stirred at perpetrators of injustice (Ezk. 16:49-50). In times of disaster – floods, earthquakes, and wars – rapid relief in the form of food, clothing, shelter, and medicine is the godly and compassionate response. Even in times of social stability, the Bible's instructions are clear: “Be openhanded towards...the poor and needy” (Deu. 15:11). We are indeed our brother's keeper. But our care for the poor needs to be rooted in a biblical worldview that grasps the full humanity and potential of people – wealthy and poor alike.

We've looked here at how a materialistic worldview, and the foreign aid industry that is influenced by it, can result in the unintended consequence of limiting the ability of the poor to discover their own resources. Now, we'll turn our attention to an equally destructive belief-system found widely in less developed nations – one that similarly contributes to a limited view of resources. This is the worldview category known as Animism.

### *Animism*

In direct contrast to materialism, which sees reality in exclusively *physical* terms, animism is based on the notion that the supernatural pervades and controls every area of life. The world is animated by gods, demons, witches and the spirits of deceased ancestors. Illnesses and other misfortunes are said to be the result of curses placed by other people and carried out by the spirits.



ANIMISM

Animism has three dominant social characteristics: Fatalism, spiritism and ancestor-worship. For the animist, spiritual forces and ancestors control all areas of life, leading to a sense of resignation and hopelessness. Fatalism is the belief that nothing ever changes, or that change is something that is predetermined by some higher power to which humans are wholly subservient. Fatalistic thinking says, “Our forefathers were poor, our parents were poor, we are poor, and our children will be poor. *There is nothing we can do to change our situation* and it is foolish to try.” In Buddhist and Hindu cultures, this power is called *karma*. In Islamic cultures, it is *Inshallah* – as Allah wills. For people bound within an animistic framework, the universe is an unpredictable and chaotic place. Societies built on an

animistic foundation often reflect this chaos in their social order, where corruption, bribery and poverty are sadly all-too-common.

As with all worldviews, animistic beliefs lead to a certain perspective of resources. The view shaped by Animism can be described using two closely related concepts – “limited good” and “zero-sum.” The notion of limited good assumes that wealth and resources are basically static and restricted – limited – with only so much to go around. Zero-sum, describes a situation in which a person’s (or group’s or nation’s) gain is exactly balanced by the losses of another person (or group or nation). Simply stated, it is the idea that in order for someone to win, someone else must lose. When a limited-good, zero-sum mentality takes hold in an individual or culture, it pits people and nations against each other and fosters a spirit of envy and victimization. Further, it blinds people from seeing their own wealth of resources and wealth-creation potential. Rather than seeing the potential that exists inside of and around them, they envy others who appear to have more, falsely believing that their only hope for prosperity will be if that other person provides for them. Kim Cone, a missionary with experience in animistic contexts in Africa shares these insights:

[A] root problem [in animistic cultures] is jealousy. And jealousy is fired by a cultural belief in the limited good... Animistic cultures believe the pie is only so big. So when one person sees that his neighbor is doing better than he is, he can only conclude that the neighbor has manipulated the spirit world so as to steal an unfair share of the pie... Jealousy concerning a perceived loss of their share of the pie pushes the person...to try to diminish his compatriot who is doing well... If they are competent and successful, all too often they must confront those who are jealous and trying to undermine them with gossip, theft, and outright witchcraft.<sup>13</sup>

These ideas are tragically illustrated in this story from veteran development worker Buck Deines who served for many years in

Mozambique. According to Deines, many rural Mozambicans believe that “luck” is a limited good. As a result, people devise elaborate rituals involving prayer to ancestors and secretly burying rice at night on trails in order to “steal” the luck of those who step on it. If someone prospers economically or otherwise, others in the community may plot against them, assuming that their portion of luck has been stolen and used to the advantage of another.

During a project evaluation that Deines participated in, one farmer explained that he was doing very well economically, yet his house was a hovel. When asked about this, he explained that he was fearful that if he repaired his house, his less well-off neighbors would initiate witchcraft against him, blaming him for their poverty. This same evaluation revealed that although agricultural yields had increased throughout the community and most households had experienced increased incomes, many households did not reap the benefits because the men spent the income on beer. The increased income tragically also led to increases in alcoholism, drug use and sexual violence. Deines went on to explain that this evaluation process, which he helped to design, was a watershed moment for him. He was convicted and convinced that economic development does not equate with transformation.

According to Dr. Jan Kunene of the Christian Medical Fellowship in South Africa:

It is important to realize that money or resources will be given to whatever is considered valuable and important; thus through the flow of resources to chiefs and witchdoctors we can see that they are the power centers in [animistic] society. Another facet of their view of economics is that prosperity is the result of ancestors blessing you. This has very large ramifications. It means that the blessing of what are ultimately demonic spirits is sought, causing only greater poverty, and a fatalistic view is taken that makes them powerless to change. Thus such things as diligence, hard work, planning

and research are not considered solutions [in overcoming poverty].<sup>14</sup>

We are concerned both with the materialist mindset that permeates modern Western development and with the animistic belief-systems common throughout the global south. Both tend to view the poor as a class of helpless victims whose only hope rests with those outside the community, from the West or other economically prosperous regions. This view does violence to the humanity of people who are poor. It fails to recognize their incredible gifts, wisdom, promise and potential. Our compassion in light of their need is appropriate and right, but it needs to respond to the full humanity of those who are poor. It needs to be directed at helping them maximize their God-given potential.

There is a way of thinking that opens up a fresh perspective of resources, development, and transformation – one that will ennoble and empower rich and poor alike to overcome poverty and to discover and create new resources. This, as we will see, is exactly what the biblical worldview provides.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *“Resources” from a Biblical Perspective*

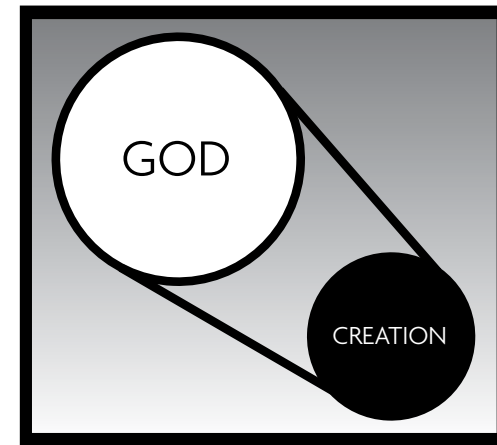
*By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*

– HEBREWS 11:3

#### THE PHYSICAL PROCEEDS FROM THE SPIRITUAL

The four most important words in the Bible may well be, “In the beginning God...” (Gen. 1:1). These words tell us that ultimate reality begins with the infinite, personal God and must be seen entirely in relationship to Him. In the Bible, God describes Himself as the “Alpha and the Omega,” or the beginning and the end (Rev. 1:8). He existed before the universe was formed. He created it, and He will exist after it ends. Whereas the materialistic worldview is centered on a “closed system” view of reality, where ultimate reality is seen strictly in terms of a cause-and-effect interaction of matter, the biblical worldview presents a God-centered open system. The physical world exists, *but it is not all that exists* nor is it ultimate. A spiritual world also exists and interacts with the material realm. Indeed, the physical realm springs forth, and is sustained by the spiritual realm. This is a profound truth and worthy of deep reflection.

The Bible describes God as “Spirit” (Jn. 4:24), and this same God created the physical and material realm. Psalm 33:9 says, “For [God] spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm.” Similarly, Hebrews 11:3 states: “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, *so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible*” (author’s italics added.) Note two important truths that these verses teach: First, God created by speaking. A.W. Tozer described it this way: “The Voice of God is the most powerful force in nature, indeed the only force in nature, for all energy is here only because the power-filled Word is being spoken.”<sup>15</sup> The universe was formed at His spoken command. Secondly, the visible (physical, material) *proceeds from* the invisible (the spirit, the mind.) This is true not only with God, but also with God’s image-bearer, man. These twin truths form the very bedrock of a biblical view of resources.



BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

The high point of God’s creation is described in Genesis 1:26-27:

Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the

birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Men and women – all of us – are similar to the rest of creation in this important aspect: We are *created* by God. We owe our existence entirely to Him. And yet, the Bible is clear that we are set apart from the rest of the created order in one crucial way: only we are created in God’s image and likeness. Understanding these twin truths is central to a Biblical understanding of humanity. God, as Spirit, does not dwell in a body, so our bearing His image does not refer to physical resemblances. Rather we share God’s nonphysical qualities. As with God, we also have a spirit. God can think, reflect and choose, and so can we. He is moral, and so are we. Within the Godhead– Father, Son and Holy Spirit– there is relationship, and we are likewise relational. He is creative, and so are we. God spoke and created the heavens and the earth. We, as His image-bearers, use our word-making capacity to form cultures and shape the world God has made. We are imbued with His creativity. We are able to conceive of and craft new innovations. This is not to imply that we are able to create on the same order as God. He creates out of nothing! We take the stuff of His creation and form and fashion it into new creations – things such as music, art, literature, and technology. Catholic economist and theologian Michael Novak captured this well:

Countless parts of God’s creation lay fallow for millennia until human intelligence saw value in them. Many of the things we today describe as resources were not known to be resources a hundred years ago. Many of those which may come to be of value still lie fallow today.<sup>16</sup>

Could this be what the writer of Proverbs had in mind when he said “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings” (Pr. 25:2)?

In the biblical worldview, there is a close – indeed an inseparable connection between the physical and spiritual realms. The physical realm *flows from* the spiritual realm – from the mind of God first and foremost, and from the mind and spirit of human beings created *imago Dei* secondarily. Not only was the physical world created by God, it is sustained by God. He literally holds it together moment by moment. Colossians 1:16-17 says, “For by [Christ] all things were created... and *in him all things hold together*” (author’s italics added). This passage provides an accurate picture of reality, not just in the past when God created, but in the present, as He “holds all things together.” Pause and reflect on this. Your next breath is utterly dependent on God’s sustaining mercy – the beat of your heart, the rising and falling of your lungs. Indeed, the rising and setting of the sun and the motion of the planets and galaxies. All is held together by our awesome and gracious God. He is no passive, deistic deity who created the physical world and then withdrew to the back-rooms of heaven. He is actively involved – and not merely in what we may consider “miraculous” events. He is actively involved everywhere, in everything, at every moment. As we ponder this, our heart cries out:

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgments,  
and his paths beyond tracing out!  
Who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been his counselor?  
Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay him?  
For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen.  
– ROMANS 11:33-36*

From the vantage point of Scripture, the universe is a place of amazing wonder, meaning, purpose, beauty and potential. It is not, as the materialistic worldview would hold, merely a closed system

of cause-and-effect interactions of physical particles and energy. It is rather, to borrow a phrase from English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, a universe “charged with the grandeur of God.”<sup>17</sup> Even now, on this side of the Fall, the Apostle Paul’s statement holds true: “Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made” (Rom. 1:20). If your perspective of reality is shaped by materialism, then you will tend to see resources as static, limited, and “in the earth.” Likewise, you will tend to see people as *resource consumers* – or to use a popular phrase, as “mouths to feed.” However, from a biblical worldview, resources are not static, nor are they primarily in the ground. Rather, they find their origin in the invisible realm – in the mind and spirit – in the Spirit of God, and in the spirit of man made in God’s image. Likewise, you will see people not primarily as *resource consumers*, but as *resource creators* and *resource stewards*. When you grasp this – and when people around the world do – hope dawns. The biblical worldview is not just any worldview – it is the Truth! It accurately reflects reality, and when people understand this and order their lives according to it they are transformed, and the world around them is as well.

#### “RESOURCES” DEFINED

Thus far, we’ve taken a brief survey of three worldview perspectives and how they understand resources – secularism, animism and the biblical worldview. With this backdrop, let’s now turn to defining the word “resources.” Before we offer a definition, take a moment and using the space below, jot down a definition for resources in your own words.

The word “resource” contains the prefix “re,” which means “back” or “return” and the root word “source,” which refers to a spring or fountain from which something proceeds. The “source” is the first cause that gives rise to something. Thus, resource literally refers to a returning to the first cause. The image of a mountain spring from which a stream or river gushes forth is helpful in conceiving of “resources.” Rather than fixed, resources are dynamic. Furthermore, the source from which they spring is the invisible realm – the limitless realm of mind and spirit. What a liberating truth for the poor! Resources do not come fundamentally from rich people or affluent nations. They come from the mind of everyone who bears God’s image – rich or poor alike. It was this very understanding of resources that caused George Washington Carver, one of the poorest of the poor, to prayerfully ponder a seemingly insignificant part of God’s creation – the peanut – and from the limitless wellspring of his imagination sprang forth literally hundreds of new creations. With these innovations came new products, and from these products came vast wealth. From the vantage point of the biblical view of creation, resources are limited by only two things: Human imagination and man’s moral stewardship over creation. We’ll come back to the critical topic of stewardship later, but for now, reflect back on your definition of resources. How does this understanding of resources differ from the one you wrote down?

#### GOD’S BOUNTIFUL PROVISION

Not only has God created us, He has bountifully blessed us and provided for our needs. Let’s return to Genesis chapter one. “Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food.’ And so it was” (Gen. 1:29-30). This passage not only reveals God’s gracious provision for mankind, it also reveals a central aspect of



the nature of that provision. God could have simply said “I give you every plant for food,” but instead, He speaks about seeds. I give you every seed-bearing plant. I give you every tree that has fruit with seed in it. When was the last time you stopped and pondered a common miracle that is a seed? Seeds are the archetypal resource – a wellspring from which an unlimited supply issues forth. The quintessential nature of a seed is its potential to multiply indefinitely. This is captured wonderfully in a Kenyan proverb: “You can count the number of seeds in a mango, but you can’t count the number of mangos in a seed.”

Imagine for a moment an alternative universe where a seed is planted, a seedling sprouts and matures into a full-grown tree. During the lifetime of the tree, it produces only one piece of fruit, and within that fruit is only one seed. What would happen to life in our imaginary world? It would quickly cease. Thankfully this is not the real universe – the one that God created and orders. God is El Shaddai – the provider, the Bountiful One. From one seed issues forth a plant – perhaps a lovely Valencia orange tree – and until it dies, that tree will issue forth an abundance of oranges in season – fruit which people can enjoy and receive nourishment from. And inside each one of these oranges is a number of seeds. From one seed comes many, and from the many, yet more plants and more seeds issue forth. Where does it stop? What is the limit? Only God can say.

With this biblical perspective on resources in mind, consider now God’s intentions as revealed in Genesis 1:21-22:

So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.”

And a few verses later in Genesis 1:28 we read:

God blessed [Adam and Eve] and said to them, “be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth...”

This same command was given again by God to Noah and his sons after the flood:

Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth” (Gen. 9:1).

All three of these nearly identical passages contain the phrase “God blessed...” God *blessed* the things He created – the animals as well as man. It is important to deeply reflect on the many facets of this blessing when considering the topic of resources. The passages also contain a similar decree: *Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth*. Note the word *multiply* and consider again the common miracle of the seed. God has embedded within His created order an ability to multiply. This can be thought of as the “hardware” of God’s creation. And then to this hardware, He writes software – His instructions for how the hardware should function. His intention is that its multiplicative nature would be maximized – that His good creation would indeed “fill the earth.” It is important to realize that this command was given before the Fall, and reaffirmed *after* the Fall. So even today, in our broken and rebellious world, God’s intention still stands. He delights in and values what He has created (He declares it to be “good” or “very good” seven times in Genesis chapter one alone). He created it with the innate ability to multiply, and He desires – indeed commands – this to happen. Again, how does this view of creation shape your understanding of resources, and how does this view contrast with a materialistic or animistic view? Take a few moments and write your thoughts below.

## CHAPTER THREE

### “God Blessed Them...”

#### Discovering our Resources

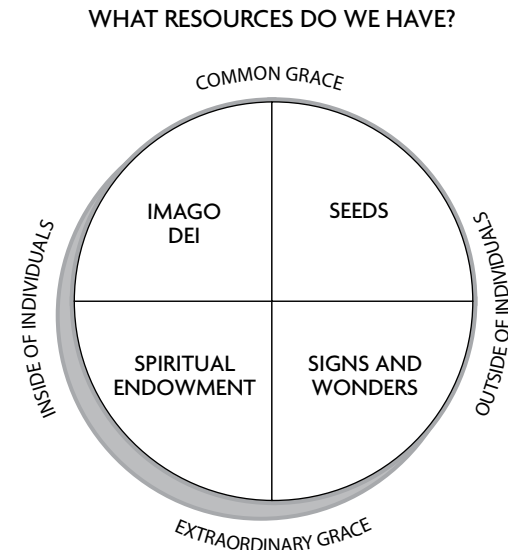
*God blessed them and said to them,  
 “Be fruitful and increase in number;  
 fill the earth and subdue it.  
 Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air  
 and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”  
 Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant  
 on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has  
 fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.  
 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air  
 and all the creatures that move on the ground –  
 everything that has the breath of life in it –  
 I give every green plant for food.”  
 And it was so. God saw all that he had made,  
 and it was very good.  
 – GENESIS 1:28-31*

Consider again the simple statement of Genesis 1: 22, 28 and 9:1, “God blessed them...” Indeed, this statement is so simple, that it

can be glossed over, almost taken as a tacit “given” or dismissed out of hand. Yet it is loaded with such significance that we do so at our peril. Until people gain the eyes to see their God-given blessings, endowments and provisions, development will be next to impossible.

What blessings – what resources exist *within* the community? This is a vital question that often goes unasked by both poverty-stricken “beneficiaries” and materially wealthy “donors.” The modern development industry has trained beneficiaries and donors alike to look *outside* of the impoverished community or nation for resources, thus hindering their ability to see the wealth in their midst. Perhaps the greatest single reason for the continuation of poverty in so much of the world is this simple lack of *vision* – the inability to see and steward God’s overwhelmingly abundant provision that exist in every community – even the materially poorest.

In this section, we want to probe the many facets of God’s blessing and provision that come into view as we look through the lenses of a biblical worldview. To help us, we will use the following diagram as a framework.



The diagram is divided into four quadrants. The top two deal with resources that are common to *all people* – whether they be rich, poor, Asian, African, or European, male, female, righteous or wicked. We will use the phrase “common grace” to describe these endowments. The bottom two quadrants focus on extraordinary or particular blessings, endowments or resources that are experienced by some people, but not everyone. We will use the phrase “extraordinary grace” to describe these. The two quadrants on the left side of the diagram spotlight resources that are *internal* or inside of people. The two quadrants on the right focus on blessings that are *external*, found in the surrounding environment. Let’s examine each quadrant starting in the upper left, which is the intersection of “common grace” and “inside of man.” We’ll call this quadrant “Imago Dei.”

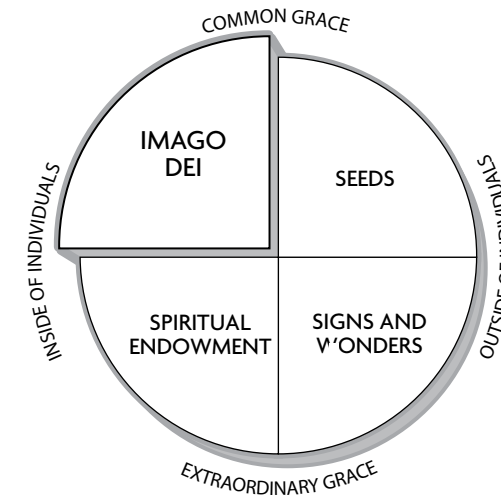
#### IMAGO DEI

The Bible makes the bold and profound claim that all men and women are created *imago Dei* – in the image and likeness of God. Naturally, not everyone shares this view. When the late British journalist and essayist Malcolm Muggeridge met Mother Teresa of Calcutta for the first time, the result was a classic clash of worldviews. Muggeridge posed a question that continues to reflect popular opinion in Britain and the industrialized West: Were there not too many people in India? Was it worth it to salvage a few abandoned children or dying old men from the gutters – people who might otherwise be allowed to die “of natural causes” such as malnutrition or disease? Muggeridge, who eventually came to faith in Christ as a result of his encounters with Mother Teresa, later wrote:

[It was a question] so remote from her whole way of looking at life that she had difficulty grasping it. The notion that there could in any circumstance be too many children was, to her, as inconceivable as suggesting that there are too many [flowers] in the woods or stars in the sky.<sup>18</sup>

Mother Teresa’s view of people, drawn from her biblical perspective, was that all human life, from the moment of conception to the last breath, has immeasurable value and dignity. God created humans in His image, whether male or female, rich or poor, and regardless of race, caste, creed or disability. In every society where this truth has penetrated, the results have been nothing short of transformational. When sociologist Rodney Stark wrote about the distinctive characteristic of early Christianity, he concluded that, “above all else, Christianity brought a new conception of humanity to a world saturated with...cruelty and the...love of death. What Christianity gave to its converts was nothing less than their humanity.”<sup>19</sup>

#### WHAT RESOURCES DO WE HAVE?



The psalmist David painted magnificent word-pictures that have helped us to grasp the mystery, dignity and glory of man, and of his place in the created order:

*When I consider your heavens,  
 the work of your fingers,  
 the moon and the stars,  
 which you have set in place,  
 what is man that you are mindful of him,  
 the son of man that you care for him?  
 You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
 and crowned him with glory and honor.  
 You made him ruler over the works of your hands;  
 you put everything under his feet:  
 all flocks and herds,  
 and the beasts of the field,  
 the birds of the air,  
 and the fish of the sea,  
 all that swim the paths of the seas.*  
 – PSALM 8:3-8

*For you created my inmost being;  
 you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
 your works are wonderful,  
 I know that full well.  
 My frame was not hidden from you  
 when I was made in the secret place.  
 When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,  
 your eyes saw my unformed body.  
 All the days ordained for me  
 were written in your book  
 before one of them came to be.*  
 – PSALM 139:13-16

Educator and founder of Chrysalis International,<sup>20</sup> Dr. Elizabeth Youmans, summarizes her understanding of the biblical view of humanity this way:

*Every child has a name  
 Every child has a purpose  
 Every child has a story  
 Every child has a place in HISTory  
 There are no ordinary children*

As image-bearers of God, all of us are given an incredible array of natural endowments. We are not merely mouths – consumers of scarce resources. Rather, we are filled with potential. When a culture believes that a person is a “mouth to feed”, it is easy to conclude that they have little to contribute to the development of the community or nation. When a culture believes that an individual is filled with potential, it will educate that person and structure the society (its institutions and policies) to draw out that potential for the development of the community and society. The following story, shared by veteran development worker Buck Deines, wonderfully illustrates this.

Beginning In 1975 I worked for three years with the Peace Corps in a small community in the Guatemala highlands known as Nebaj. I was part of a livestock development project, working with a poverty-stricken indigenous group known as the Ixil people. Many days, I would hike long distances from village to village, sometimes up to 24 miles in a day. I taught animal husbandry and helped with basic agricultural training. During these trips, I would often notice that children were out in the fields or tending their livestock rather than in school. I inquired with parents about this, but was told that the children were needed for labor, and that school just wasn't that important.

I was bothered by this, realizing there would be little hope for change if the children remained uneducated. I spoke with teachers, parents and children about my concerns. I tried to

impress on parents the importance of educating their children, but continually came up against the same barriers. Education was of little value. They had not been formally educated, nor had their parents. This attitude was particularly pronounced when it came to girls. The mind-set of the parents was that they were only going to get married off, so what was the point in investing in their education? The Ixil Indians are historically a very downtrodden group. They are treated as less “less than fully human” by many non-indigenous people (*mestizos*) in Guatemala and have come to believe in their hearts that they are indeed “lower” than non-indigenous people in Guatemala. As a result, they had very little hope for a better future. I tried my best to lobby and encourage the parents regarding the importance of education but for all my efforts, I never saw a change in their attitudes during the three years I lived among them.

In 1995 I returned to these same villages, this time working with the international relief and development organization Food for the Hungry. FH was involved in agriculture and health projects. As in the 70s, I noticed that many children were not enrolled in school. Little had changed in the 20 years since I had lived in the villages. Poverty was rampant, children were not in school, the villages were trash-strewn and disheveled, and the people continued to have very little hope for positive change. I came away from these visits very disappointed. There was so little evidence of change after so many years of well-intentioned development efforts. I began to question the value of the work we were doing that seemingly lacked impact.

In 2002 I returned to Nebaj, again with FH, this time as Regional Director of FH operations in Latin America. We had returned to conduct an impact evaluation. This time, to my great astonishment, things had radically changed. New school buildings had been built. Kids all over the place were

carrying books and seemed so excited about school. Before, when I asked kids about whether they wanted to go to school, a typical response was, “what’s the point? I’m only going to be a shepherd anyway.” Now, the kids were excited.

“We want to go to school!”

“Why?” I asked them. I was amazed by their answer.

“We want to go to school because we were created in the image and likeness of God. Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and with men. We want to grow in wisdom and in knowledge too. That’s why we want to go to school. We want to be like Jesus. We want to be creative, because God is creative. We want to do great things. God has a purpose for my life. I want to be educated so I can become a teacher or a lawyer and come back here and help my people.”

These kinds of responses were coming from young children! We spoke to their parents to try and uncover what was happening. They told how they would work extra hours and take additional jobs to earn money to put their children in the best schools they could afford. Their view of their children and the importance of education had radically changed! They too saw their children in a new light. They now saw them as image-bearers of God with lives full of dignity and purpose. I was astounded. I went back and talked to our staff, inquiring as to what they had been doing that made such a difference. They responded that they had begun teaching the parents and children the biblical worldview, and particularly a biblical understanding of human life and purpose. What we were seeing was the fruit of those efforts that had been a key focus for the past three years.

I then spoke with the community leaders and asked what

FH could do to better to serve them in their positions of leadership in the communities. In the past, such a question would have been an open invitation for the leaders to come out their shopping list of what they wanted: New buildings, new roads, etc. In this case, I asked this question of leaders in village after village and universally received the same answers: “We’ve been hearing some interesting ideas that FH staff are teaching in our villages. What we’d really like is for you to teach us those same ideas.” When I asked one leader for an example, he replied that FH had been teaching children and parents that the Lord is a God of order and as a result, they needed to live in an orderly way. This prompted the children to clean up their communities. They started campaigns to clean up the garbage around their own homes and to build cupboards for their homes to organize and protect food and clothes.

I saw the same results a few years later in communities in Nicaragua where our staff began teaching biblical principles, helping the people to understand that their lives were filled with purpose, dignity and destiny. As staff shared biblical worldview messages, the vision and then the behavior of the people in the community began to change. Pastors, parents, community leaders and teachers began to see their world in a new light, envision new and brighter possibilities for their communities and envision better lives for their children. Local school teachers began using the Bible extensively in school, as they did they found that attitudes and behaviors of children began to change radically. Not only could most of the children recite long sections of Scripture from memory, it was evident that Scripture had transformed their beliefs, behaviors, dreams and goals. Kids who otherwise would never have considered attending university now believed that doing so was not only possible, but it was God’s will for their lives. Little communities where folks recently believed children

had little potential were now sending their kids to college to become doctors, lawyers, teachers and nurses. Even more incredibly, the kids that were going off to university said their motivation for higher education was not profit or success, but rather a desire to learn more so they could return to their communities; to bless their communities and help them progress. As several of the children we interviewed put it, “This is part of God’s plan for our lives.”

This incredible transformation didn’t happen suddenly. It was a process that, in some cases, took several years of teaching. But as the spokesman for one group of community leaders informed us, “While many development programs in this area have failed in the past, the key to success here has been the impact of the Word of God and the way it has changed the way we understand God, ourselves and our world.”

As we listened to leaders, teachers, pastors and children in these remote rural communities I could only marvel at their many testimonies of ways in which biblical truth has transformed both individual lives and community life.<sup>21</sup>

### *Imago Dei Exercise*

Before we begin to examine the internal resources that are common to all people, take a few minutes to think about this yourself. Use the space below to write down as many internal resources common to all people as you can. One example would be “the mind.” If you are studying with a group, use this as an opportunity to brainstorm together.

### *Three Basic Aspects of Human Life*

Human life is a *wholistic* integration of at least three fundamental and inseparable aspects: *body*, *mind*, and *spirit*. Let's explore the bounty of internal resources that relate to each of these aspects, starting with the body.

We can think of our bodies as physical capital. The human body is without a doubt the most amazing piece of "machinery" on the face of the earth. The human brain, weighing just over three pounds, contains some 100 *billion* neurons! Functioning as a unit, these neurons make up the most complex and highly organized structure on earth.<sup>22</sup> No supercomputer yet developed can compare to its extraordinary analytic and creative powers. Or consider the human hand – truly a marvel of engineering. With our hands we can write literature, compose music, and fabricate technology. We can touch lovingly or harm others. Perhaps you don't think of your hands as a resource, but if I were to offer to buy your hands from you, how much would you sell them for? "No price" would be your likely response. They are too valuable! Indeed, they are an *invaluable* resource, but how often do we think of them this way? We could go on and extol the wonders of our feet, our eyes, and our ears as well as our senses: touch, taste, sight, sound and smell. Because our amazing body is always with us, so to speak, we often take it for granted.

Another feature of our embodied existence is our ability to *procreate*. As with any seed, our human "seed" has the innate ability to multiply ad infinitum from one generation to the next. I'll never forget the profound wonder my wife and I felt as we held our helpless newborn children in our arms.<sup>23</sup> As I looked into my daughter's new eyes and touched her small hand I was rendered speechless. To think that this incredible creation was woven together in my wife's womb in only nine months – and from the smallest of things, a human sperm and an egg! Truly we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14). I still look at my children, all of them made *imago Dei*, and am awestruck by the potential that each of them has to literally change the world.

Our physical bodies are a source of endless wonder in all their

complexity and perfection. But our physical bodies are just the start.

Our *mind* comprises our abilities to reason and analyze, to think and to feel. Our minds are formed by our thoughts, memories and perceptions, or "the ways in which we are conscious of things."<sup>24</sup> From these flow our belief systems or worldviews that function as the "software" that runs the hardware of our physical bodies. Our worldviews, as we have said, are crucial because ideas have consequences. How we think and feel will determine the choices we make which will in turn, shape our lives and the communities and nations we are part of. It has been said that when God spoke, He created the universe. When man speaks (and writes), he creates culture. Our minds and our words have the power to form and shape not only the world we live in, but also the world that our children and their children will inherit.

Our mind is the storehouse of our "intellectual capital." From our minds acting in concert with our tongues and hands, we form words, and in doing so, we are able to create poetry, literature and philosophy. With our minds we have "general knowledge" about things as diverse as fire, the wheel, nutrition and healthcare. Our mental capital also includes "technical knowledge" about such things as cooking, farming, carpentry, sewing, tool-making, and a host of other technical skills. All are invaluable resources, and all are rooted in the human mind.

The final inseparable and unique aspect of human life is *spirit*. Our spirit is at the very core of our being. It distinguishes us from all other forms of life and unites us with God. The human spirit is sometimes referred to as the "heart," not in the physical sense of the organ that pumps blood through our bodies, but in the metaphorical sense as that which is at the very core of our nature. In the words of Christian scholar and pastor Dallas Willard, the heart is the "executive center of a human life."<sup>25</sup> It guides and directs everything about us, and it does this through the "will" or our volitional ability. This ability to make moral choices sets us apart from the rest of creation.

Our will (heart, spirit) is that dimension of our being by which we become an underivative presence and source in the world. *What comes from it comes from nothing else but us.* This radical creativity is what makes the individual person absolutely unique and irreplaceable, and therefore an “end in itself...”

Will is the ability to originate...something: an act or a thing. It brings it into existence... Will is the capacity for *radical* and *underivative* origination of events and things...<sup>26</sup>

Our choices – our moral decisions – allow us to shape history. Our spiritual nature is the wellspring of our moral and volitional capital, and it is arguably the most valuable resource at our disposal. Only the biblical worldview holds this precious understanding of the human spirit. The materialist operates in a “closed-system” in which humans have no spiritual nature, and are thus trapped within a cause-and-effect machinery of the naturalistic cosmos. For the animist, there is only the fatalistic belief that everything is controlled by the mysterious and unpredictable spirit world. For both the materialist and the animist, history is not something you shape; it is something that happens to you.

From our spirit we derive our moral capital. Consider these examples: Our conscience (the ability to distinguish right from wrong), integrity, courage, fortitude, work, thrift and savings, charity and giving. These and many other things comprise our moral and volitional capital as human beings made in God’s image. Businessman Ken Eldred writes “Caring...friendship, trust, honesty, love, service, commitment and quality – these are all... principles that constitute value. When these principles emanate from a heartfelt conviction, they amount to *spiritual capital*.”<sup>27</sup> He rightly points out that such spiritual capital is required for successful commerce.

#### *The Stewardship Mandate*

God made us in His image, and gifted us with a wholistic nature

comprised of body, mind and spirit/heart/will. He did this, in part, to equip us to carry out His most basic intention for us – that of dominion. Under God’s all-encompassing Lordship (Mt. 28:18; Rom. 14:10) He has commanded his image-bearers to exercise stewardship over the created order, and in this task, we are directly accountable to Him (Lu. 19:11-15; Rom. 14:12). Genesis 1:26-28 lays out this “stewardship mandate.” A steward is an employee in a large household who oversees the owner’s domestic concerns, such as managing the servants, collecting rent and keeping accounts. *Stewardship* refers to the duties and obligations of a steward. In Genesis, we understand that mankind is given the roles of dominion (authority) and stewardship over creation. Moral stewardship of creation stands in contrast to the destruction of creation established by a materialistic, consumer-oriented paradigm, and the neglect of creation ordered by an animistic paradigm. Moral stewardship applies to all that God has created, including, most fundamentally, our own bodies, minds and spirits.

#### *Self-Government*

Contrary to popular opinion, we do not “own” ourselves. We owe our moment-by-moment existence to God and are accountable to Him for how we manage our lives – our bodies, minds and spirits. We have been speaking in this section about the various aspects of our lives as resources, as *physical capital* (the body), *intellectual capital* (the mind) and *moral and volitional capital* (the spirit). For this internal capital to be used in transforming our communities it must first be recognized as the gift that it is. If a person or a society does not see the incredible richness of these internal resources, their potential will be unrealized. However, once this internal wealth is recognized, there comes the obligation to steward it wisely. The stewardship of internal resources is foundational, for a person will not wisely manage *external* resources if he or she is not first stewarding *internal* resources. For true and lasting social reform to occur, individuals must be internally self-governed.

The word “government” refers to the power or authority to control



or regulate. The most fundamental form of government is internal self-government. When individuals govern themselves according to God's laws, they are the most free. When they steward their internal resources, they, their families and communities are the most prosperous. Austrian pastor and educator Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) captured the imperative to begin with internal self-government when he wrote:

He knows not how to rule a kingdom, that cannot manage a Province; nor can he wield a Province, that cannot order a City; nor he order a City, that knows not how to regulate a Village; nor he a Village, that cannot guide a Family; nor can that man Govern well a Family that knows not how to Govern himself; neither can any Govern himself unless his Reason be Lord, Will and Appetite her Vassals; nor can Reason rule unless herself be ruled by God and (wholly) be obedient to Him.<sup>28</sup>

Dallas Willard provides these helpful insights on the practice of internal self-government. "My body is the original and primary place of *my dominion* and my responsibility.<sup>29</sup> It is to be properly honored and cared for...because it is owned...by God."<sup>30</sup> This care entails proper nourishment, exercise and rest. The same holds true for our minds and thought-life. We must recognize our minds as the invaluable resources they are, and as such, properly steward them. We do not live in a deterministic "closed-system" universe. "The ultimate freedom we have as human beings is the power to select what we will allow or require our minds to dwell upon."<sup>31</sup>

Our God-given ability to control our thought-life is the very core of self-control. This is true for Christian and non-Christian alike; however, for the believer, the stakes are even higher. Our sanctification is dependent largely on our willingness to be transformed through the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). In Philippians 4:8, followers of Christ are exhorted to let their minds dwell on things that are true, honorable, right, pure, and lovely, of good repute, and of excellence. In 2 Corinthians we are similarly urged to "[take] every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." We must learn to think critically

about the presuppositions that shape our societies and reject those that are opposed to biblical truth.

Stewardship of our minds means moving from a posture of passive consumerism of thoughts, images and ideas, to one of active, critical engagement. As Christians, our thought-life must be formed by the view of reality presented in Scripture, and this will not happen unless there is a determined effort to read, study, and understand the Scriptures, and to adhere to its account of God, creation, and humanity, and then to order feelings and actions accordingly. This indeed is our first and most fundamental freedom. This is internal self-government.

#### COMMON GRACE

Before moving on to the next quadrant, it will be helpful to take a short theological detour in order to explore the Christian doctrine of "common grace." This doctrine arose in answer to the question: How can we explain the good things in our lives and in the world when all of creation lies under the curse of sin? Perhaps this is a question you are asking yourself right now. If so, you are in good company. Many sincere Christians have pondered this for centuries. In the words of theologian Louis Berkhof:

How is it that the earth yields fruit in rich abundance and does not simply bring forth thorns and thistles? How can we account for it that sinful man still retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and shows some regard for virtue and for good outward behavior? What explanation can be given of the special gifts and talents with which the natural man is endowed, and of the development of science and art by those who are entirely devoid of the new life that is in Christ Jesus? How can we explain the religious aspirations of men everywhere, even of those who did not come in touch with the Christian religion? How can the unregenerate still speak

the truth, do good to others, and lead outwardly virtuous lives? These are some of the questions to which the doctrine of common grace seeks to supply the answer.<sup>32</sup>

Common grace describes God's unmerited goodness and kindness towards all of creation – including men and women that are in rebellion against Him. Jesus spoke of this grace in Matthew 5:44-45: “But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. *He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous*” (author's italics added).

God's common grace was evident in the moments following Adam and Eve's rebellion described in Genesis chapter 3. Rather than destroying Adam and Eve for their willful disobedience, God graciously allowed them to live, and even offered hope for future redemption (Gen. 3:15). To be sure, the first couple's rebellion had disastrous consequences for them personally and for all mankind down through the ages. From their disobedience sprang all the evil, suffering, corruption, injustice, poverty, hatred and violence the world has ever known. According to British theologian and scholar John Stott, “The Fall led to total depravity.” Total, because every part of human nature, and indeed, all of creation was affected (Rom. 8:22). Yet, for Stott, total depravity “has never meant that every human being is as depraved as he could possibly be, but rather that every part of our humanness [our minds, bodies and spirits] were distorted by the Fall.”<sup>33</sup> Adam and Eve (and their descendants) retain their unique status as God's image-bearers. This image was not destroyed, but it was *distorted*. We still have the ability to choose, but now, in our fallen condition, we are inclined to choose on the side of evil. We still are able to love, but instead of loving God, we are inclined towards self-worship or other forms of idol worship. We retain our God-given creativity, but all too often it is employed to plot murders, despoil the environment, create atomic weapons or devise terrorist attacks.

And yet, as John Stott said, people are not as depraved as they

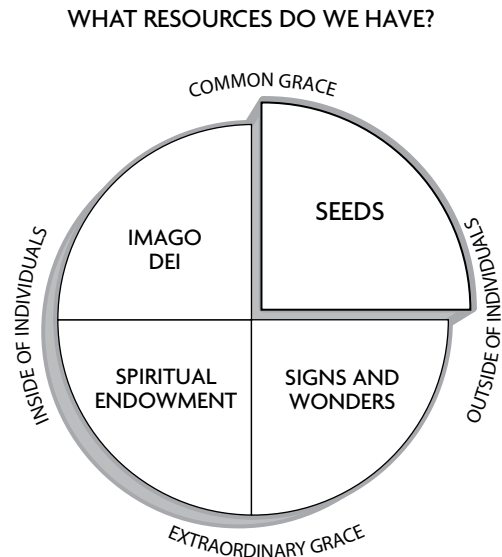
could be. Jesus indicated as much when He said, “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, *though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children*, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Mt. 7:9-11, author's italics added). Our God-given ability to think and reason are – by God's grace – still intact, and even nonbelievers are able to use these internal resources to the benefit of themselves and mankind. This was recognized by none other than the great Protestant reformer John Calvin (1509-1564):

When we observe this gift of natural reason at work in secular writers we should let that admirable light of truth shining in them teach us that the mind of man, though fallen, and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God's excellent gifts. If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it where it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God. Those men whom Scripture calls natural men, were indeed sharp and penetrating in their investigation of inferior things, let us accordingly, learn by their example, how many gifts the Lord left to human nature even after it was despoiled of its true good.<sup>34</sup>

Calvin calls the mind and the human capacity for reason “excellent gifts” of God and indeed they are. They are blessings given to all men, both the saved and the lost. They are also *resources* – what we have called *intellectual capital*, and part of the internal endowment given to all men. The question remains: Do we have the eyes to see these resources? And if so, are we exercising wise stewardship of them?

Let's return now to our diagram and examine the next area of resources available to all people. In the previous section we looked at *internal* resources available to all people by virtue of their being

created *imago Dei*. Now, we'll turn our attention to the quadrant that lies at the intersection of "common grace" and "external." We'll call this quadrant "Seeds."



### SEEDS

"Seeds" refers to God-given resources that are external to man in the environment. Genesis 1:29-30, which we quoted earlier, serves as a good key verse to get us started.

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

#### *Seeds Exercise*

Before we begin to examine external resources that are common to all people, take a few minutes to think about this yourself. Use

the space below to write down as many of these resources as you can. If you are studying with a group, use this as an opportunity to brainstorm together.

Genesis 1:29-30 speaks to God's bountiful provision found in the physical environment – plants bearing the common miracle of seeds. Not only plants, but also the sun and the rain which allow them to grow – the sun, which He graciously causes to "rise on the evil and the good," and the rain which He sends "on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Mt. 5:45). Sun, rain, plants and seeds – all of them are examples of common grace found in the environment, and this is only the beginning. As we begin to unpack the resources in this category, we'll divide them into four areas: (1) Environmental capital (resources in our physical environment), (2) Social capital, (3) Physical capital (or infrastructure capital), and (4) Institutional capital. Not every community or nation enjoys all of these resources in equal proportion. Still, most communities share many of these resources in common. Let's look first at Environmental capital. We've already mentioned plants, seeds, water, and the sun. Let's flesh this list out a bit further.

#### *Environmental Capital*

- Water (rain, rivers, lakes, seas, oceans)
- The sun (energy, heat, light)

- The moon and stars (which help man govern creation – both space and time)
- Rocks, minerals and precious gems from which come steel, iron, ceramics, and a host of other raw materials useful for everything from building and manufacturing to the crafting of silicon computer chips
- Plants (forests, jungles, gardens, farms, fruits, vegetables, seeds) from which come lumber used for construction, a host of foods, the common miracle of seeds, beauty, medicines, and the list goes on and on
- Animals (wildlife, fish, fowl, livestock, pets and microorganisms in all of their marvelous and God-created diversity)
- Colors and textures in their nearly unlimited diversity
- Time, which is to be “redeemed” (Eph. 5:15-16) and stewarded for the purpose of developing our world, not wasted. Minutes, hours, days, weeks and years.

The biblical worldview makes three revolutionary claims: First, man is made in God’s image, with the capacity to envision and create. Second, God has created a world of unimaginable beauty, diversity, and richness, all of which was declared by its Creator to be “good.” Third, God has given man a place of dominion and stewardship within His created order. Man’s relationship towards creation is to “work it and take care of it” (Gen. 2:15), and to apply his creativity to the raw materials supplied by God and fashion new innovations and new forms of beauty for his own well-being and the good of society and creation. When these truths are understood and applied, the results are indeed revolutionary.

The potential wealth that springs from the cornucopia of God-given resources found in our surrounding environment is so vast that our minds cannot begin to comprehend it. Consider again what George Washington Carver, with his sanctified imagination, was able to do with the simple peanut – over 200 new and unique products beneficial to mankind – and this from one who was born among the poorest of the poor, the son of slaves. Carver ordered his life

around these three revolutionary truths. He had eyes to see, a mind to imagine, hands to create, and the will to steward the resources God had given him. The fruit of his life speaks for itself.

Even the humblest of resources when combined with human creativity and ingenuity has the potential to produce incredible wealth – even something as that most people would never consider a resource such as common trash. Here is a true story that comes out of one of the most broken and hopeless places on earth: The slums of Nairobi, Kenya.

What do you see when you pass by a rubbish heap? Filth? An eyesore? A nuisance? Not so for a few young men from Mutumba, a slum in Nairobi Kenya. They have embarked on a creative and ambitious program of collecting organic garbage and processing it into fertilizer.

John Mwangi, the group’s founder, grew up in the slum and was destined to a life of hopelessness and despair. However, after completing high school, he was sponsored to study organic farming for six months. When he returned home, he decided that he needed to help alleviate the suffering of those around him, especially the young men. He got together with a few friends and started a youth group which staged educational dramas in slums throughout Nairobi. However, drama was not able to sustain the group financially, so after some brainstorming, they decided to begin collecting garbage with the intention of processing it into fertilizer.

The journey from garbage to fertilizer is a long one. The youth gather refuse from various neighborhoods and take it to collection points. Here it is sorted and the organic garbage (mostly made up of foodstuffs) is separated from the plastics, glass and metal. It is then put in a compost heap where it decomposes for 21 days. After this, it is mixed with cow dung and sieved. What goes through the sieve is mixed with raw

phosphate and extract from the Neem tree. It is then packed in 50-kg bags ready for retailing. The Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) carried out an analysis of the fertilizer and the summary of its findings were: The sample contains adequate amounts of both major and minor nutrient elements, although the calcium content is slightly high compared to usual manure nutrient composition. It is recommended for horticultural farming.

This project has the additional benefit of providing employment to slums youth who would normally be condemned to a life of poverty. John Mwangi began training youths in other slums how to make the fertilizer and the progress has been phenomenal. So far, there are 15 groups producing the compost in seven different slums throughout Nairobi. John is hoping to bring on 10 other groups in the near future. John Mwangi and his friends are determined to make their lives count. They see a bright future ahead for them and their families and they are making money from what most of us would rather avoid at any cost, garbage. Their motto is “taka ni pato, nipe” (Garbage is income, give it to me).<sup>35</sup>

The power of God-given human creativity when combined with a resource as unexceptional and ordinary as the trash strewn about in a Nairobi slum produces both income and a valuable resource. Do we have eyes to see? Here’s another illustration: If you were approached by a man on the street with a bag of sand that he wished to sell to you, how much money would you pay for it? Your reaction would probably be one of incredulity. “If I want sand,” you might reply, “I don’t need to buy it; I can go down to the river or sea shore and get it myself free of charge!” Yes, but what if that same man were to take that bag of sand, apply his God-given creativity and craft a silicon computer chip, how much would you pay for that? We live in an “information age” powered by high-speed computers that allow

us to process and access information at ever greater speeds. The “high tech” revolution continues to generate enormous quantities of wealth. What is at the center of it? Computers made of circuit boards and computer chips, which, in turn are made from silicon – which is derived from sand. Do we have the eyes to see the wealth that can come from resources as ordinary as sand?

Here’s another example. What is crude oil? We all know it as the elixir of our modern industrial world – the source of energy that powers our cars and trucks and heats our homes. Crude oil is so valuable that companies take huge risks to search the remotest, most inhospitable places on land or sea to find more. But two hundred years ago, if you were to ask someone the same question, their first thought might be something like this: “Oil? It’s gunk. It’s gooey black stuff that bubbles up out of the ground.” Far from a resource, oil was considered a dirty nuisance. Imagine someone sitting at home one evening, contentedly reading by the dim, greasy light of a whale-oil lamp. Without warning, the lamp’s small flame flickers and then dies. Upset (because he is at a particularly good spot in his book) the man rummages around the house for more whale oil – or even for a candle. None can be found. In desperation, he gets an idea. He wanders outside and grabs a handful of that black gunk. He puts it into the lamp, places the wick into it and lights it. Wonder of wonders, it burns! He returns to his chair and goes back to his book. A resource is discovered.

Or consider this example. In the beautiful Italian city of Florence one can visit numerous museums and view paintings and sculptures from some of the greatest artists of all time – yet one stands out from the rest – the breathtaking statue of Michelangelo’s David. The David is a marble sculpture of Israel’s most famous king in the prime of his youth. Before he was a king, David was a shepherd who defended his flock against attacks by lions and bears, but he is most famous for defeating another enemy. In a story that continues to inspire to this day, David placed his life in the hands of the living God, then single handedly faced down and vanquished the Philistine giant Goliath. It was this very moment in David’s life that the famous Italian artist

sought to capture in his masterpiece. The David is an artistic tour de force. It is not only a national treasure; it is a priceless world treasure. But what was it before the artist's chisel formed it? It was an ordinary piece of rock in a mountain. One day, a man went out to that mountain and carved out that hunk of rock. It was no simple task. He probably worked his calloused hands for months. Where the rock had been nearly worthless before, now it had value – the cost of the labor of the man who cut it out. Then another man came along with a team of horses, placed the marble on his wagon and hauled it into the city of Florence, where it eventually ended up in Michelangelo's studio. The great artist had it placed on a pedestal and began to study it – day after day he inspected it. He walked round and round it until he knew its every detail. At one moment, he'd be in a corner of his workshop chiseling another sculpture, and pause, and look again at the slab of stone on the pedestal. Then he'd move over to the easel and start sketching, still looking over the rock out of the corner of his eye. Then one day he saw David. He walked up to the marble monolith, and moved his hands slowly over its uneven surface. He picked up his chisel in one hand and his hammer in the other and started to work. Slowly a form began to emerge. Days turned into weeks, then months. At last the hammer strokes ceased and the chisel lay silent. It was finished. There stood David in all of his glory. At that moment, that humble piece of rock had become priceless. What was it that turned a nearly worthless piece of rock into a treasure of immeasurable worth? An artist made in the image of God.

#### *Social, Physical and Institutional Capital*

We are dealing here with resources that are common to all men and found in the surrounding environment. Resources like oil, sand and stone. Thus far, we've looked at "Environmental Capital." Let's turn now to "Social Capital."

Social capital encompasses all of our interpersonal relationships including those to our immediate families – our mother, father, siblings, wife, husband and children. As with all things on this side of

the Fall, our social relationships are not always an unalloyed "good." We all struggle with conflict, and in some cases, with abuse and neglect in our relationships. For a sad minority, the negatives far outweigh the positives. Yet for most, our relationships, particularly to our families, are a source of great strength and blessing.

Strong families also play a foundational role in the development of healthy, prosperous communities and nations. This is due to the simple fact that the family is the most basic social unit in any society. The role that strong families play in transformation holds the potential for ongoing, multi-generational impact as the values of the parents are passed successfully to their children and grandchildren. One study done on the decedents of the famous eighteenth century American pastor, theologian and intellectual Jonathan Edwards and his wife Sarah Pierrepont reveals a multi-generational impact of vast proportions on the formation of American life and culture. The Edwards family "produced scores of clergymen, thirteen presidents of institutions of higher learning, sixty-five professors, and many other persons of notable achievements."<sup>36</sup> The destiny of the nations truly does lie in the hands of our children – perhaps the most valuable form of social capital that exists.

Beyond our immediate and extended family, other forms of social capital include:

- Friends
- Teachers and mentors
- Employers and coworkers
- Communities
- Voluntary organizations such as churches, mosques, synagogues, clubs, advocacy and service groups and sports or recreational associations
- Community services, including schools, libraries, museums, galleries, hospitals and health clinics

All of these form a web of social relationships that, for most, are of great value and a source of support, inspiration, comfort, wisdom, knowledge and growth.

Lastly, there is the infrastructure and institutional capital that many of us rely on each day. Infrastructure capital takes the form of buildings, roads, bridges, dams, water and waste systems, electricity, telecommunications, computers and information technology. It also encompasses personal possessions such as housing, clothes, tools, vehicles and other labor-saving devices. Then there is “institutional capital” including government services, laws, justice systems, civil defense, property rights, markets, banks, securities and currencies.

#### *Where is the Wealth of Nations?*

A recent landmark study by the World Bank titled “Where is the Wealth of Nations?” examined three categories of capital in measuring the relative wealth or poverty of nations: The first two: natural capital and manufactured capital, are what we have called “Seeds” (natural resources in the environment as well as physical and infrastructure resources.) The third measure they refer to as human capital. These are the resources found within people (in their minds and belief systems). The World Bank was founded after World War II to promote economic development primarily through the provision of large infrastructure development loans to poor countries. In an eye-opening reversal for an organization with this history, this recent study claimed that:

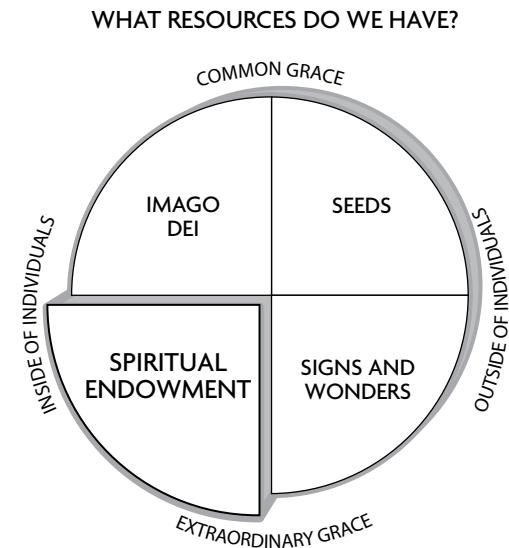
Most of a country’s wealth is captured by what we term intangible [a.k.a. non-material] capital...Intangible assets include the skills and know-how embodied in the labor force. The category also includes social capital, that is, the trust among people in a society and their ability to work together for a common purpose. [It] also accounts for all those governance elements which boost the productivity of labor. For example, if an economy has a very efficient judicial system, clear property-rights, and an effective government, the effects will result in higher total wealth and thus a higher intangible capital residual.<sup>37</sup>

The report estimates that 59 percent of the wealth in developed countries comes from immaterial human capital, while only 25 percent comes from its natural resources and 16 percent from its manufactured capital. In short, the World Bank concluded that “in the [materially] wealthiest nations, human capital accounts for three-quarters of the producible forms of wealth.”<sup>38</sup> This helps to explain why nations like Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore, with little in the way of material resources, can develop vast amounts of wealth.

The word “capital,” interestingly, refers literally to the head, or the uppermost part of the body and the highest part of man. The head of man, including his mind and beliefs, is thus the true fount of material capital, resources and wealth. The material proceeds from the immaterial. Physical resources find their origin in the mind and Spirit of God, and secondarily, in the mind and spirit of imago Dei human beings.

#### SPIRITUAL ENDOWMENT

Next, let’s turn our attention to the quadrant labeled “Spiritual Endowment.



Our world is very fond of categorizing and classifying people. We sort based on sex, race, nationality, age group, social standing, and political affiliation, to name just a few. But ultimately there are only two categories that matter: Those who have been saved by faith in Jesus Christ and have had their relationship with God restored, and those who have not.

Up to this point, we've been discussing resources that are common to all people – both the saved and the unsaved. Now we want to examine the special grace of God to those who have surrendered their lives to Christ. Those who have experienced the joy of a restored relationship with their Creator have a whole new world of resources open to them.

#### *Spiritual Endowment Exercise*

Before we begin to examine the spiritual endowment granted by God to all followers of Christ, take a few minutes to think about this yourself. Use the space below to write down as many of these “resources” as you can. One example would be “the Holy Spirit.” If you are studying with a group, use this as an opportunity to brainstorm together.

The human job description found in chapter 1 of Genesis, put simply, is this: God collectively assigned people to rule over creation (vs. 28-30). His intention is that we exercise this rule with Him as He acts in and through us. This was God's intention before the Fall and it remains His intention today. The consequence of the Fall is not that we have lost our job description, but that, tragically, we attempt to exercise dominion without the help of God. People, by virtue of their being made *imago Dei*, have certain innate abilities to govern and rule, many of which we explored earlier. These include a body (hands, eyes, senses), a mind, will, spirit and creativity. As a result of the Fall, these were not lost but distorted. The good news of the Gospel is that now, through Christ, we are able to experience reconciliation with God (Rom. 5:1) and a day-by-day renewal of our inner man (Col. 3:8-10). In being reunited with God, we are able to once again exercise dominion as He intended (Eph. 1:15-23).

[God's intention is that He be] our constant companion or coworker in the creative enterprise of life on earth... Now what we can do by our unassisted strength is very small. What we can do acting with mechanical, electrical or atomic power is much greater...but what we can do with these means is still very small compared to what we could do acting in union with God Himself, who created and ultimately controls all other forces.<sup>39</sup> (Author's italics added).

As Dallas Willard rightly says, man apart from God is able to do “very little.” However, when we are reunited with God through Christ, we begin to experience something new and exhilarating – the supernatural power of God flowing in and through us. We experience what the Apostle Paul described as “[God's] energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Col. 1:29). This energy – the same that created the sun and the stars – is quite literally the most powerful force in the universe.

#### *Salvation*

Respected theologian J.I. Packer calls “salvation” the “master theme of the Christian gospel.”<sup>40</sup> It is synonymous with the concept of rescue from a place of peril and despair to a place of safety. The Bible



makes abundantly clear that as a result of Adam and Eve's revolt, all people are born into a condition of enmity with God (Rom. 3:23). Because of this, we are, in the words of the Apostle Paul, "objects of [God's] wrath" (Eph. 2:3). God, the Creator of the Universe, the most awesomely powerful force in existence, is not a person we should want to be in a conflict with! Alienation from God results in multiple tragic consequences described starkly in Romans chapter one, verses 21-23 and 28-32:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles...

Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

This is the bad news. The good news is that God has opened a way of rescue to us. We can be saved from the awful consequences of God's wrath and from a life enslaved to sin through faith in Christ. "...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23-24). Believers are saved from sin and death "through faith in Jesus Christ" (Rom. 3:22), but what are they saved

for? Returning to J.I. Packer, they are saved in order to "live for time and eternity in love to God – Father, Son, and Spirit – and to their neighbors."<sup>41</sup> We are saved to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28:18) and work to advance God's Kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt. 6:10). This salvation is indeed "good news" (Ac. 17:18). It is truly amazing grace.

According to Indian scholar and activist Vishal Mangalwadi, in Christian development and social reform circles, many "are oblivious to the power that God has ...given us to dispel darkness."<sup>42</sup> This power, according to Mangalwadi, is the Gospel – the very power of God to supernaturally transform human hearts and minds. From the vantage point of the biblical worldview, nothing but the Gospel can dispel the darkness and lead to transformed societies. Pastor Grover Gunn rightly reminds us that, as Christians, "Our primary means of [transforming] the world is through proclaiming the Gospel message of Jesus in word and deed...We today must never question the effectiveness of the Gospel message as the cutting edge of positive social change."<sup>43</sup>

At the point of faith, when an individual recognizes and acknowledges his or her sinfulness with sorrowful repentance and places trust in Christ, a miraculous transformation occurs – a rebirth from spiritual death to spiritual life (Jn. 5:24). The Apostle Paul describes this transformation in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" This renovation affects everything about us. It enlightens our mind, restores our heart, renews our will and changes our inclinations. Where in our fallen condition we were inclined towards evil, we are now inclined towards good. Sin becomes offensive rather than something craved. This doesn't mean sinful behaviors are completely eliminated. According to theologian Loraine Boettner:

But so long as people remain in this world they are subject to temptations and they still have the remnants of the old nature clinging to them. Hence they are often deluded, and commit sin; yet these sins are only the death struggles

and frenzied writhings of the old nature which has already received the death blow. The [saved] also suffer pain, disease, discouragement and even death itself, although they are steadily advancing towards complete salvation.<sup>44</sup>

The Apostle Paul put it this way:

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Co. 4:16-17).

Let’s begin now to explore the new vistas of resources that are opened to the believer in Christ Jesus, beginning with the Holy Spirit.

### *The Holy Spirit*

In preparing His disciples for His imminent crucifixion, Jesus comforted them by promising that they would not be left alone. He would send them help after His departure. This promised resource help is the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Triune God, who serves as “counselor, advocate, helper, comforter, ally and supporter”<sup>45</sup> of the believer. The Holy Spirit is the very power of God indwelling the believer and enabling him to live a life of purity, holiness and righteousness. This indwelling power produces certain character qualities within the life of the believer that are described in Galatians 5:22-23 as the fruit of the Spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...” Imagine how different your family, your church, your office or organization, or even your nation would be if interpersonal relationships were marked by patience, kindness and gentleness. If there were no malicious talk, divisiveness or gossip because people were able to control their anger and their tongues? If there were no hatred, loneliness, bitterness or malice, but instead there were genuine love for one another? Sounds heavenly, doesn’t it? And praise God it is so in heaven. Here on earth, God has empowered

His children with the Holy Spirit, enabling them to experience, at least to a limited degree, the same here in our lives, families and relationships. The Holy Spirit is God’s very power in the life of a believer, conforming him into the image of Christ.

The Holy Spirit also equips believers with new abilities and aptitudes at the moment of conversion. These “spiritual gifts” are a further layer of resource available to the follower of Christ. They are spiritual in the sense that they are Holy Spirit-given. They are “above and beyond” the endowments given at birth such as temperament, personality, and aptitudes. They are given to enable the believer to “express, celebrate, display and so communicate Christ.”<sup>46</sup> In Romans 12:6-8 Paul provided a partial list of the spiritual gifts covered in the New Testament.

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

The gifts listed here fall into two categories: gifts of speech (prophesy, teaching, exhorting) and of “loving, practical helpfulness” (serving, giving, leading, and showing mercy). J.I. Packer points out that in listing these gifts, Paul alternates between the two categories in order to imply that “no thought of superiority of one gift over another may enter in. However much gifts differ as forms of human activity, all are of equal dignity, and the only question is whether one properly uses the gifts one has (1 Pe. 4:10-11).”<sup>47</sup>

Followers of Christ have been granted the ability to choose to live according to the ways of the Spirit or to rely on human power – what the Bible calls “the flesh” (Jn. 6:63) or “the sinful nature.” These two – the flesh and the Spirit – are, as the Apostle Paul revealed, in enmity with each other.

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want (Gal. 5:16-17).

In my own spiritual journey, I have found it important to continually reckon on the fact that God's Spirit abides inside of me (1 Co. 6:19) and then consciously surrender myself to His supernatural power.<sup>48</sup> In this way, anything "good" that comes from me is acknowledged as the direct result of the Holy Spirit working through me. God gets the credit. Secondly, walking in the Spirit entails a constant willingness to recognize the fruits of the flesh as sin and confess them to God. This happens initially at conversion, but it doesn't end there! It must become a lifestyle. In his profound little book *The Calvary Road*, British evangelist Dr. Roy Hession offers these insights:

Only one thing prevents [the power of the Holy Spirit from being unleashed in our lives], and this is sin in one of its thousand forms... Anything that springs from [the flesh], however small it may be is sin. Self-energy or self complacency in service is sin. Self-pity in trials or difficulties, self-seeking in business or Christian work, self-indulgence in one's spare time, sensitiveness, touchiness, resentment and self-defense when we are hurt or injured by others, self-consciousness, reserve, worry, fear, all spring from [the flesh] and all are sin... [But] if we will allow [Jesus] to show us [our sin] and then give it to Him, He will cleanse them in the precious blood that still flows for sin...and as He cleanses [us], so He fills [us] to overflowing with His Holy Spirit.<sup>49</sup>

#### *The Word of God*

God's revealed Word in Scripture is a priceless treasure for it opens

to us an understanding of the world as it truly exists. In the words of Francis Schaeffer, the Bible contains "true truth," absolute, bedrock truth on which healthy, whole lives can be built as well as free, just and prosperous societies. Theologian David Wells likewise describes God's Word as absolute truth and a reliable guide to reality.

The historic confession of the Church has been that [the Bible] gives us truth in the sense that it gives us an accurate account of what is 'out there,' whether we are considering the character of God or His purposes, or the nature of created life, or the end to which human history is going. It correspondence to what is there is secured by the fact that it is God who has given it...[and] if it is God who has revealed it, then in its reach it is both unvarying and universal, the same for all people in all places and all times.<sup>50</sup>

The Bible is truly the only reliable guidebook for life. As such, it is a priceless treasure. Its principles and ordinances lead to fullness of life. In the timeless words of King David:

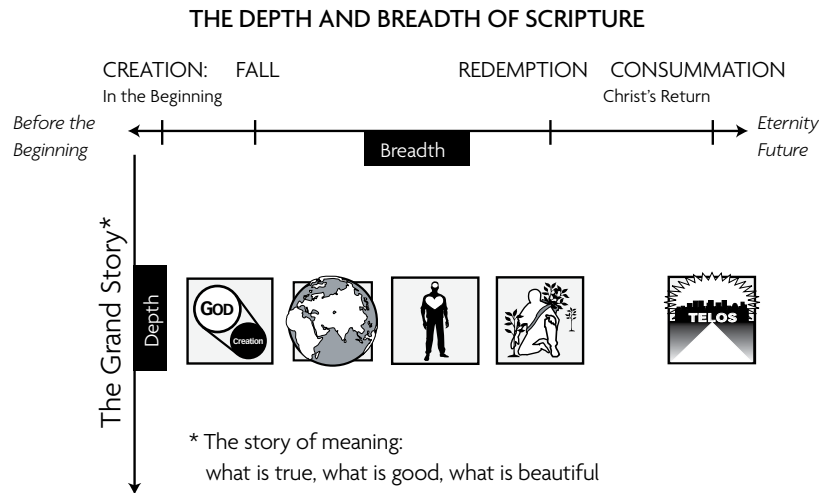
*The ordinances of the LORD are sure  
and altogether righteous.  
They are more precious than gold,  
than much pure gold;  
they are sweeter than honey,  
than honey from the comb.  
By them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.*

PSALM 19:9-11

Throughout history, men and women of faith have shared David's passion for God's Word. Many sacrificed greatly, risking their lives that the Scriptures might be made available in their mother tongue – men such as Martin Luther (1483-1546) who translated the Bible into German, and William Tyndale (1494-1536) who

translated Scripture into English. Today thousands of Christians are striving in the remotest corners of the world to bring this most valuable of resources to peoples and language-groups who lack it – both in written and oral form. And while the Bible is widely available around the world today, only those who have come to faith in Christ and received the Holy Spirit have had their eyes opened to the riches that it contains (1 Co. 2:14).

The Bible is God’s “transforming story.” From Genesis to Revelation, its 66 books comprise a single, comprehensive narrative. Within this grand story, we come to understand the truth about God, creation, history and our lives.



There is a breadth and a depth to Scripture. The breadth deals with redemptive history. It reveals God actively working in history, carrying out a magnificent plan to bless, heal, and redeem everything broken through the Fall. This plan is the central theme of Scripture. It is the common thread that unites both Old and New Testaments. Why did God make his covenant with Abraham? Why did He create

and bless the nation of Israel? Why did He send His son, Jesus, to live among us and die on the cross? Why did He raise up the Church? What does He want to accomplish through His Church in our generation? What vision should guide and give purpose and meaning to our lives? For the answer to each of these questions, we need to understand God’s big agenda – His history-encompassing redemptive plan for the nations.

There is also a depth to Scripture that provides reliable answers to metaphysical questions such as “What is ultimately real?”; “Who is man?”; “How is man to live?”; “What is morally right, good and true?”; “Where does evil come from?”; “Where is history going?” The answers to these questions shape a biblical worldview. As individuals and societies begin to understand their place within the breadth of Scripture and begin to align themselves with the depth of Scripture, they are transformed. Despair is replaced with hope, apathy and cruelty with compassion, bondage with freedom, and corruption with justice. This is why, according to British theologian John Stott, we must have “a mind which has firmly grasped the basic presuppositions of Scripture and is thoroughly informed with biblical truth.”<sup>51</sup>

The Bible is also the storehouse of God’s “great and precious promises” (2 Pe. 1:4). Promises such as this one from Isaiah:

*So do not fear, for I am with you;  
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you;  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

ISAIAH 41:10

With these promises, the follower of Christ is able to step out boldly, assured that the almighty God whose word is “trustworthy and true” (Rev. 21:5) is going before them and will strengthen and uphold them through even the most challenging of trials. Since Abraham and his family departed Ur thousands of years ago, such faith, fixed on the promises of God, has been revolutionary.

### *Calling or Vocation*

Another dynamic that functions as a powerful “resource” for transformation is that of calling or vocation. Cultural critic and apologist Os Guinness describes calling this way:

Calling is the truth that Gods calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service. . . . Calling has been a driving force in many of the great “leaps forward” in world history – the constitution of the Jewish nation at Mount Sinai, the birth of the Christian movement in Galilee, and the sixteenth-century Reformation and its incalculable impetus to the rise of the modern world, to name a few.<sup>52</sup>

Calling is the antidote for an aimless, meaningless, visionless life of hedonistic self-absorption. It is the wellspring of a dynamism and energy that is radically outwardly focused. It brings purpose and meaning to life. It brings a reason to live, and even to die. It is, therefore, incredibly powerful.

As always, Jesus provides the perfect model of what a “called” life looks like. Before His ascension, Jesus appeared to His disciples and said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (Jn. 20:21). Jesus was given an assignment from the Father – a particular calling. His life was directed towards a single end, and He unwaveringly pursued that end until it was accomplished. He expressed His calling in these words: “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” (Lu. 12:49). Jesus was driven by a vision that aimed at a complete transformation of the world and everything in it. Christ’s all-consuming passion was to reestablish God’s intentions for creation that were disrupted through the Fall.

The road that Christ traveled to fulfill His calling led through the searing agony of Golgotha and into the glorious dawn of the resurrection and ascension. It involved training a small band of

devoted followers on whom would rest the extension of His calling through the generations. As His disciples grew in number and spread, they began to have a revolutionary impact on the nations and cultures they resided in. They were a “new humanity” filled with God’s Spirit. This, of course, is the Church – the Body of Christ (1 Co. 12:27). It is the Church that Jesus then sent to participate in the same calling that He received from the Father. In the words of J.I. Packer, “The universal church, and therefore every local congregation and every Christian in it, is sent into the world to fulfill a definite task. Jesus . . . has issued marching orders. Individually and corporately, all God’s people are now in the world on the King’s business.”<sup>53</sup> What is calling that all of us have in common? It is simply this: to extend the blessings of God’s Kingdom throughout creation. In the words of Francis Schaeffer, we should be working “on the basis of the finished work of Christ. . . [for] substantial healing now in every area where there are divisions because of the Fall.”<sup>54</sup> This healing will not be perfect or complete on this side of Christ’s return, yet it can be real, evident, and substantial.

Because Jesus is Lord of everything, His redemptive work is comprehensive, and so is His calling to us. It encompasses “every area” as Francis Schaeffer said – all areas of life and all spheres of society. This is a radical notion for many in the church today who tend to categorize things as either “spiritual” or “secular.” The spiritual category includes such things as prayer, Bible study, church attendance, and careers in “full-time Christian service.” Most other things fall into the secular category and are deemed to be outside the scope of concern for the church. But this idea runs counter to Scripture. God is both creator and sovereign Lord over all creation. “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it” (Ps. 24:1) proclaims the psalmist. God’s Kingdom encompasses everything (Ps. 47:2). There are no spiritual and secular categories – no higher and no lower. When we understand this truth, it brings a freshness and dynamism to our lives. Every event, every relationship, and every opportunity is charged with potential and purpose. Even simple, menial tasks take on a new importance and dignity. Our lives are no longer divided

between “spiritual” and “unspiritual” activities. Instead we infuse God’s truth into every area of life. Whatever we do, whether in word or deed, we seek to “do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:17). When a person, a church, or a whole society is infused with the dynamic of calling, transformational power is unleashed. Calling is indeed a powerful resource.

### *Koinonia*

Jesus issued this calling to us individually: Every single life counts in God’s big agenda of redemption. Every follower of Christ has a purpose and a destiny assigned by God. However, this calling is also corporate. We are all members of God’s family and parts of His Body. This “fellowship of the Saints” is also a powerful resource for the believer in Christ. Ephesians 4:16 says, “From [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” God never intended that we advance His kingdom on our own. Rather, He places each of us in the midst of a vast fellowship in which “each part does its work.”

“Community” is deeply rooted in the biblical worldview, finding its source within the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As image-bearers of God, we likewise are meant to live in community where one supplies for the others’ lack. At creation, God created mankind male and female (Gen. 2:18-25) with the purpose of each complimenting, and even completing the other. God’s chosen people in the Old Testament were to live out this community life. They were commanded to be “openhanded and freely lend” to those that lacked (Deu. 15:8). This same community life is God’s intention for His New Testament people – the Church. We see this most vividly in one of the earliest passages that describes the lifestyle of the early Church in Acts chapter 2:

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone

was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people (Ac. 2:42-47).

The word translated “fellowship” in this passage is the Greek word “koinonia,” a rich word that connotes deep fellowship, generosity and intimacy. It encompasses the sharing of burdens and the meeting of each others needs. To be part of such a community is to truly possess a valuable resource. So much poverty in the world results from the breaking of community – from alienation from family, friends and other social supports. This is never God’s intention. We were “wired” for community and we can never experience the fullness of life that God intends for us apart from it.

As Christians, this fellowship crosses boundaries of nationality, age, sex, and even time. Hebrews chapter 11 describes great men and women – heroes of faith – down through the ages who are part of our community, and who provide us with inspiration and encouragement to persevere through times of discouragement and trial. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Heb. 12:1).

The “communion of saints” and the “great cloud of witnesses” are ancient phrases to describe this powerful Spirit-filled community of which we are members. In establishing this community Jesus spoke these words to the Apostle Peter: “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Mt. 16:18.) The Church is God’s powerful agent of Kingdom transformation. It has a mission and calling that even Satan cannot thwart. Filled with the Holy Spirit, entrusted with the Scripture and the promises of God, it is truly a mighty force

for transformation. The inspired words of hymnist William W. How captures the majesty of the body of Christ through the generations, who though separated by time, are “all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.”

*For all the saints, who from their labors rest,  
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,  
Thy Name, O Jesus, be forever blessed.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*Thou wast their Rock, their Fortress and their Might;  
Thou, Lord, their Captain in the well fought fight;  
Thou, in the darkness drear, their one true Light.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*For the Apostles' glorious company,  
Who bearing forth the Cross o'er land and sea,  
Shook all the mighty world, we sing to Thee:  
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*For Martyrs, who with rapture kindled eye,  
Saw the bright crown descending from the sky,  
And seeing, grasped it, Thee we glorify.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*O blest communion, fellowship divine!  
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;  
All are one in Thee, for all are Thine.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

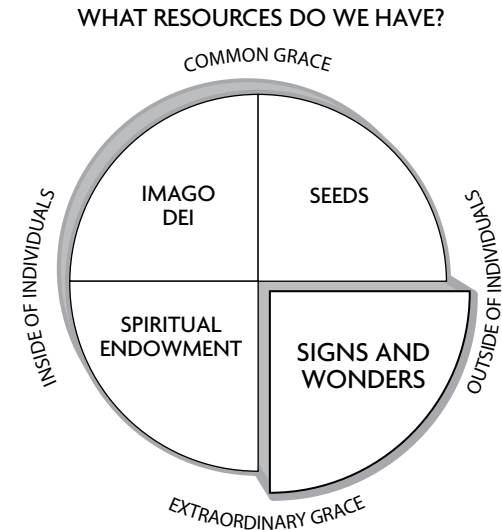
*And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,  
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,  
And hearts are brave, again, and arms are strong.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,  
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,  
And singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost:  
Alleluia, Alleluia!<sup>55</sup>*

For the believer in Christ, there is indeed a vast array of supernatural resources at his or her disposal. O, that each of us who confess the Lordship of Christ would “cast off the sin that so easily entangles us” (Heb. 12:1) and avail ourselves fully of all these resources. Truly this world would never be the same! And our list is not complete. Pages more could be written on the power of prayer, of worship, of solitude and meditation. All these resources, freely given by God to His elect, are given to accomplish His own purposes for creation. If you are a Christian, you are rich!

#### SIGNS AND WONDERS

The final area of resources we will investigate lies at the intersection of “special grace” and “external” – an area we’ve labeled “Signs and Wonders.”



### *Signs and Wonders Exercise*

Perhaps you are having a hard time regarding miracles, signs and wonders as “resources.” Yet when considered as factors that contribute to the transformation of a person, a community or a nation, miraculous events are indeed powerful resources! Before we begin to examine this area, take a few minutes to think about it yourself. What supernatural “signs and wonders” have you seen God use to open the door for transformation in a life, a community, or a nation? Write them out in the space below. If you are studying with a group, use this as an opportunity to brainstorm together.

Miracles are supernatural acts of God that disrupt the normally stable order of the material realm in such a way that God’s presence and power are clearly visible. Jesus’ incarnation and resurrection are perhaps the two supreme examples in Scripture, but others abound as well. There is Jesus’ miraculous multiplication of the fish and the loaves of bread in order to feed the 5000 (Mk. 6:30-44). There are examples of the dead returning to life (Jn. 11:38-43) and the crippled and diseased being made whole (Jn. 5:1-8). There are numerous Old Testament examples as well. In Exodus we read of the “signs and wonders” God performed through Moses before the watching eyes of Pharaoh and the people of Egypt (Ex. 7-11) including the miraculous deliverance of the Israelites through the parted Red Sea (Ex. 14).

The biblical worldview holds that God both created and sustains the material realm and it operates in a stable, orderly fashion according to “natural laws” (such as the law of gravity) imposed on it by God. For this reason, the biblical worldview uniquely provides the needed foundation for scientific investigation. And yet, as J.I. Packer writes, “There is nothing irrational about believing that God who made the world can still intrude creatively into it”<sup>56</sup> and He does this through miracles – signs and wonders – which still occur today.

The following true story comes from Bob Evans, a missions activist who has worked extensively in Cambodia.

Thang<sup>57</sup> had suffered for more than a year with an unknown wasting illness. He had lost his appetite, and when he did manage to put a bite or two in his mouth, he couldn’t hold it down. He and his wife were modest rural farmers who had recently moved to the dusty, congested city of Phnom Penh to seek out medical help. Sadly, what they found, they were unable to afford. Unable to eat, Thang’s body slowly deteriorated until one hot afternoon, he died.

A team of American missionaries had befriended Thang and his wife and had done what they could to help (including prayer for healing). While they were unable to prevent Thang’s death, their loving witness had impacted his wife, who accepted Christ as her Savior two weeks before his passing.

On the day of his death, according to local custom, a Buddhist priest came to prepare the body for burial. He tore down part of their house – a bamboo floored, thatched roof shack with scrap boards for walls – to build a coffin. As night fell, he stopped, promising to return in the morning to complete the funeral.

That evening, Thang’s grief-stricken wife was joined by



another woman, a leader at a nearby church. Their quiet conversation soon turned to prayer. They prayed over Thang's body through the night. About sunrise, to their great astonishment, Thang suddenly sat up, cleared his throat, and began slapping his legs saying "they're not broken." He then asked his wife for some food and several bowls of rice soup. He rose, washed, and went outside. Neighbors who had heard of Thang's passing stared in complete disbelief. Someone began shouting "A ghost, a ghost!" Thang, frightened by the outburst, ran back to his house. Then, he realized they were talking about him.

As of this writing, Thang is still alive. He became a follower of Christ and together with his wife, hosts a Bible study in their home. Many of Thang's neighbors have come to Christ, in part, through his dramatic testimony.

Because we live in a time, particularly in the industrialized West, where the materialistic worldview assumes a culturally dominant position, miracles such as this are seen as fantasies rooted in our imagination and fundamentally irrational. This mindset is so pervasive that it has, to some degree or another, affected us all – including those of us who name the Name of Christ. Harvard geneticist Richard Lewontin speaks for many when he says, "We exist as material beings in a material world, all of whose phenomena are the consequences of material relations among material entities."<sup>58</sup> To the degree that our mindset is influenced by this perspective, we will tend to minimize or deny the miraculous. When this happens, our eyes are closed to yet another source of Divine power. Dr. Bob Moffitt, President of the Harvest Foundation writes:

People who hold a secular worldview would call it nonsense to think that healing – especially the healing of a nation or a society – would come from obedience to God. For them, the physical world is the only real world. Healing would come from the mind of man...A biblical worldview, though, says

that a nation or society is not healed by human wisdom... but by God's intervention and man's obedience. As Scripture reminds us, the world's brokenness is healed when God supernaturally intervenes in lives, society, and history.<sup>59</sup>

### *Revivals and Reformations*

As Christians working for cultural transformation, we must take great care to recognize God's miraculous power at work today. This power is on display when a person acknowledges Jesus as Lord, turns from sin and supernaturally experiences conversion and regeneration. Only God has the power to transform human hearts, and when this happens, we rightly recognize it as miraculous. God's power is able to transform, not only individuals, but entire societies. In 2 Chronicles 7:14 we find this promise:

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Here we see God's desire to bring "healing" to broken lands. We also see His promise to supernaturally bring about this transformation – not through the government, international donors or the United Nations – but through "His people" – the Church, and specifically through their repentance and humble prayers.

We can see evidence of such "healings" at different times in history. We call these moments "revivals" or "reformations." The evangelical revivals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that impacted England and North America are an example. According to Dr. Moffitt, these revivals "renewed the church, brought spiritual conversion to thousands, enacted social reforms and launched the Protestant missionary movement."<sup>60</sup>

The Wesleyan Revival... brought about major transformation in England. Prior to this, England had been one of the most corrupt and immoral societies in the Western world. Women and children

were abused in the labor force. Immorality was rampant. Greed ruled the Empire and fueled the British slave trade, the largest commercial trading of human life the world had known.<sup>61</sup>

When revival swept through England, even crossing the Atlantic to America, the British culture experienced a remarkable transformation.

### *Prayer*

The same supernatural power that restored England over 200 years ago still exists today and we would be foolish to close our eyes to it. Instead, we must employ yet another miraculous resource – prayer – and repent of our sins, turn to Him with all our heart, cast off our idols, and petition God to bring healing to our land. Prayer is another practice that, because it becomes commonplace, we risk taking for granted. Pause for a moment and consider the incredible reality that the eternal, all-powerful God of the universe invites us to petition Him (Mt. 7:7-11). And even more astounding, He answers our prayers! Jesus taught that “we may properly press God hard with fervent persistence when we bring needs to Him (Lu. 11:5-13; 18:1-8), and that he will answer such prayer in positive terms.”<sup>62</sup> Having said this, we must remember that God may not always answer our prayers in the way we expect. He does what is best. We are always to, in the words of J.I. Packer, “surrender one’s own expressed preference to the Father’s wisdom as Jesus did in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39-44).”<sup>63</sup>

In his incisive book *Truth and Social Reform*, Vishal Mangalwadi conveys a remarkable story that illustrates the power of prayer.

One night, the chief of [the] village... came to our community to ask if any of us knew sorcery. One Brahmin woman, Ramkali, had been bitten by a snake. The sorcerers had been called and they were casting spells when she became unconscious. The government doctor, who was there, gave her intravenous glucose, because he didn’t have anti-venom. Her condition became more critical. When she was dying,

her friends were running around looking for witch doctors. I had said to the chief, “We don’t know sorcery, but we can pray.” He said, “Please come and at least pray.” Three of us Christians and one Muslim seeker went to pray. We knelt around Ramkali’s bed. Over 50 people, including the doctor watched us as we prayed for this virtually dead woman. In less than 10 minutes as we opened our eyes, she did too! On the third day she walked to our home three miles away to thank us and the living God who answers prayers.<sup>64</sup>

Truly there is power in prayer that we dare not take for granted. Through answered prayer, God’s power and glory are put on display, and this power has always rocked the status quo and opened the way for transformation. It is not an overstatement to suggest that the most strategic thing we can do for individual, social and cultural transformation is simply this: pray.

### *Angelic Protection*

A final supernatural resource we’ll touch on briefly is angelic protection. Angels are supernatural spiritual beings created by God who work in His service. They often function as messengers (“angel” means messenger) from God to men, as when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary announcing her as God’s choice to bear the promised Messiah (Lu. 1:26-33). They also serve to guard and protect believers. Psalm 91:11 indicates this: “For he will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways...” How thankful to God we should be for sending His angels to serve, guard and protect us.

The Divine resources available to all people, and particularly to the Church, are truly immense. Jesus gave His disciples the “authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness” (Mt. 10:1). The Apostle Peter reminded the early Church of their spiritual endowment when he said: “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness”

(2 Pe. 1:3). Paul wrote similarly in Ephesians 1:3: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” The use of the words “everything” and “every” in these passages underscore the comprehensive, abundant, and all-sufficient nature of this provision. When this spiritual endowment is combined with the other categories of resources we’ve explored – internal and external, common and extraordinary – it is clear that among belief-systems of this world, only the worldview revealed through Scripture opens up such a vast array of resources.

## CONCLUSION

### *Our Stewardship Mandate*

*Put this money to work...until I come back.*  
– LUKE 19:13

Because we have been so richly blessed, our attitude should continually be one of heartfelt gratitude to God. It should also cause us to pause and reflect soberly on our responsibility to wisely steward these resources towards God’s intended purposes. Shortly before His suffering, Jesus shared a parable with His disciples on the topic of stewardship. He wanted to give them a picture of God’s intentions for how they (and we) should understand and manage their God-given resources. In light of the vast scope of resources we’ve just explored, it will be helpful for us to reflect anew on this critical teaching.

A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. “Put this money to work,” he said, “until I come back...”

[When He returned] he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.

The first one came and said, “Sir, your mina has earned ten more.”

“Well done, my good servant!” his master replied. “Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.”

The second came and said, “Sir, your mina has earned five more.”

His master answered, “You take charge of five cities.”

Then another servant came and said, “Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.”

His master replied, “I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?”

Then he said to those standing by, “Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.”

“Sir,” they said, “he already has ten!”

He replied, “I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away (Lu. 19:11-26).”

Let’s unpack this parable and explore its implications for our discussion of resources. The main character is described as a “man of noble birth” who is about to depart to a distant land to be appointed king, and then return. Here, Jesus is describing Himself. He is the nobleman who would depart this world through His bodily resurrection, return again, appear to His traumatized, fear-filled, and then overjoyed disciples, give them final instructions, and ascend to heaven again. One day, He will return in great power and glory. On that great and awe-inspiring day, it will be evident to all that He has been crowned King (Mt. 24:30; Rev. 19:11-16) and “every knee [will] bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:10-11).

The other characters in the story are “the servants” of the nobleman. These, of course, are the disciples – the followers of Christ, both then and now. This parable, then, is Jesus teaching His followers how He expects them to think and live in this “in-between time” linking His final ascension and His future, glorious return.

Continuing with the parable, the nobleman gives his servants “talents” or money. I believe it is safe to interpret this provision as the entire range of God-given resources we have covered in this book. Along with the talents, he gives these instructions: “Put this money to work until I come back.” The King James Version translates this as “occupy till I come.” The word “occupy” is helpful because of its military connotation. It draws to our minds an occupation force that establishes a beachhead in enemy territory, holds it, and presses the enemy back, occupying more and more territory as it goes. Jesus wants us to put the resources He has given us to work in the task of “occupying,” but what are we to occupy?

Here we must understand that a real war is being waged in the spiritual realm – a war between two realms – the Kingdom of God and Satan’s kingdom of darkness. Satan’s first appearance in Scripture is as the serpent in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1) deceiving Adam and Eve and tempting them to disobey God. Their subsequent disobedience brings down upon the world a curse (Gen. 3:17-19). Satan infiltrates God’s world and usurps it. He can be found “roaming

through the earth and going back and forth in it” (Job 1:6). But God has the last word. Immediately after Adam and Eve’s rebellion, He hints towards a history-encompassing redemptive plan that would eventually lead to Satan’s destruction (Gen. 3:15). Jesus – the very centerpiece of God’s redemptive plan – decisively defeated His ancient enemy, “triumphing over [him] by the cross” (Col. 2:15).

The cross marks the central turning point in both human history and in the cosmic battle between the forces of light and darkness. God’s Kingdom began to advance in force through the newly established Church – the Church that “the gates of Hades will not overcome” (Mt. 16:18). Though it may sometimes not seem so, God’s Kingdom is on the march and Satan is in retreat! This occupation is a process that is occurring now – between Christ’s first and second comings. During this in-between time, Satan continues to harass and hamper (1 Pe. 5:8), though in the famous words of Martin Luther, “Lo his doom is sure.”<sup>65</sup> The process will culminate – the occupation will be complete – with the second coming of Christ. That time will witness Satan’s final destruction (Rev. 20:7-10) and the consummation of the Kingdom of God when “The kingdom of the world [will] become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).

In another parable, the “wheat and the tares” (Mt. 13:24-30), Jesus described the Kingdom of God as a field of wheat into which the enemy sowed tares or weeds. The picture provided in this parable – where both the works of God and the works of Satan are growing (or advancing) side-by-side in the same “field” comports well with reality as we see it in our world today. God’s Kingdom is growing and we rejoice with its expansion! We see evidence of it in the incredibly rapid growth of the Church, the global decrease in poverty and infant mortality, the collapse of communism and the expansion of freedom around the world. Yet alongside of these things, we also see great evil on the rise in the form of Islamic terror, the AIDS pandemic, the growing decadence and spiritual exhaustion in Europe and America. Yet a day will come when the tares will be separated from the wheat and destroyed. Today, the good continues to grow

alongside the evil. Yet we can take great hope in the certainty that God’s Kingdom will prevail.

The followers of Christ – the servants – are to steward their God-given resources in order to occupy enemy territory until Christ returns victorious. We advance on our knees through prayer. Our weapons are “not the weapons of the world” (2 Co. 10:4-5). Where the Fall brought disease, Christ’s servants are to apply their God-given creativity and discover cures. Where there is poverty, we are to seek ways to produce wealth. Where there is environmental destruction, we are to plant trees. Wherever there is evidence of the Fall, we must steward the resources that God has given us to reclaim territory for the Kingdom, for truly:

*The creation waits in eager expectation  
for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation  
was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice,  
but by the will of the one who subjected it,  
in hope that the creation itself will be liberated  
from its bondage to decay and brought  
into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*

ROMANS 8:19-21

Do we have eyes to see the resources God has gifted us with? Are we exercising strategic stewardship of these resources in the advance of God’s Kingdom? Are we serving as channels of blessing to the lost and the broken? Do our community development projects help those we aim to serve discover and steward their God-given resources, or do they hinder their discovery?

All of us will have to stand before the Lord and give an account of our stewardship of the resources He has given us – a sobering thought indeed! “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Lu. 12:48). Not everyone receives the same quantity – some receive five talents, and some receive only one, but the same mandate applies to both – and the same

commendation from the King of Kings for those who exercise godly stewardship in advance of His cause: “Well done my good servant” (Lu. 19:17). May we strive with all of the strength He has given us to be worthy of these marvelous words when we finally see Him face to face.

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The Disciple Nations Alliance (DNA) is a global movement of individuals, churches, and organizations with a common vision: to see engaged, credible, high-impact local churches effecting real transformation in their communities and in sufficient mass to disciple their nations.

DNA was founded in 1997 through a partnership between Food for the Hungry and Harvest. Our mission is to envision churches with a biblical worldview and equip them to practice a wholistic, incarnational ministry affecting all spheres of society. We provide simple tools that enable churches to begin the transformation process immediately with existing resources – no matter how materially poor they may be.

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