

# LOOKING BACK

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- Chapter 1 -

## A GENERATIONAL VIEW OF LIFE

### A HIGH PRICE

The scruffy young man reached for his binoculars and started up the hill one more time, picking his way through the brush with the help of the full moon. He stopped short of the ridge and studied the shadows to be sure that he would not be silhouetted when he looked down on the freeway below. He moved to a little different spot than the one he had used at 11:00 p.m.

His first glance over the hill showed that the flashing red lights had been turned off and traffic was flowing freely through the INS checkpoint on Interstate 15. He turned the binoculars onto the Border Patrol parking lot and studied the cars: four impounded cars that had not yet been picked up, half a dozen empty patrol cars, three other cars—which was one too many for the skeleton crew that stayed there between active shifts. He studied the compound for additional clues. Were they truly done for the night, or was it a trap—just a temporary closure to lure people back to the highway?

He scanned the area repeatedly without finding any more evidence, then decided to trust his instincts. Without setting the binoculars down, he reached for his cell phone and punched a programmed number. When a sleepy voice answered on the other end, he simply said, “*!Listo!*” Ready!

For the next hour, a loaded car rolled out of San Ysidro every ten minutes or so. The first vehicle was an old painting van. Twelve men were seated on the floor in the back. Alfredo was one of them. His extended family had worked hard and scrimped for years to save the \$2,000 necessary for him to be smuggled across the border. He had come legally from Guatemala to Tijuana. Crossing the border from Mexico to America with the “coyote” had been simple. Now he just had to get past the last highway checkpoint before Los Angeles.

On one hand, he resented that someone was making \$24,000 in two nights for something that seemed so easy. On the other hand, if you had never been to California before, there was no way to know how to beat the system. What else could he do but pay?

The recon man on the hill was right. The checkpoint was unmanned when they drove through and they arrived in the slums of East Los Angeles without an incident. There Alfredo met his neighbor's second cousin's godfather who had offered him a spot to sleep in the garage with other men in similar circumstances. The next day he began a whole new life, one that in many ways was more brutal than the life he left in Central America.

### A HIGHER PRICE

As an illegal alien, there was little work he could get and what he found paid poorly. He learned to ride the bus long hours to a miserable job as he struggled to make his way in a foreign land. In time, he acquired some phony documents which helped the job situation a little, but he still faced the twin barriers of no job skills and no English.

Within ten years he had saved enough money to bring his wife and two daughters over the border to live in the ghetto with him. Eventually he bought an old car, but since he had no driver's license or insurance he was at risk of being apprehended every time he drove it. Being stopped for a single traffic violation could get him sent back across the border. He wept bitterly when his mother died and he was not able to go home for the funeral.

When he was in his fifties, the American government offered one of their periodic amnesty programs and he managed to obtain legal residency for his whole family. Alfredo promptly used all his savings plus borrowed money for the family to return to Guatemala for two months to see his relatives for the first time in decades.

Alfredo never learned to speak good English. He never progressed beyond menial labor for poor wages. He never had a car that wasn't a worn out clunker. The best housing they ever had was a two bedroom upstairs apartment that sizzled in the summer. When he retired, he moved back to Guatemala, living on his \$287 monthly Social Security check.

## THE PRIZE

What makes Alfredo and hundreds of thousands more like him pay the terrible price to come to the U.S. illegally? What causes a man to trade his freedom and dignity for a lifestyle of dishonor, of being abused and of hiding from the law? What is the prize that would cause a man to spend the best years of his life far from the land of his birth, but never far from his heart? What is there in the squalor, crime and brokenness of an American slum that is so superior to life in a small, quiet village in Central America?

For many, admittedly, it is the hope of making money. There are some illegal immigrants who manage to parlay their hard work and opportunism into a legal, middle-class lifestyle. Those who dream of coming to America choose to focus on the stories of the few who find comfort and security here instead of weighing the statistical probability that they won't be one of them.

My experience has been, however, that the most universal driving force behind illegal immigration is a desire for their children to have a better life. The parents come, pay a high price, grow old and die without ever having tasted the good life. Their gratification comes primarily from knowing that their children, who are born here, are U.S. citizens. Their children will learn the language from the cradle. Their children will have a fighting chance to get a decent education. Their children may have more possessions at age 25 than the parents will have after a lifetime of toil.

## A GENERATIONAL WORLD VIEW

I do not endorse or justify lawlessness in any context. The end does not justify the means. However, in a world stained deeply by selfishness and immediacy, there is something elegant, profound and compelling about any generational view of life, regardless of the package it comes in.

Hispanic immigrants are not the only expression in our world of one generation living for the next one. I stood on a bridge over the Feather River recently and watched the salmon swim upstream. There was no self-gratification in the long swim in from the ocean. After days of hard work, these once-strong fish would spawn, then die. There was no thought for themselves. God did not wire them to think about their “rights” or to seek a way of birthing the

next generation that was not so costly for them. They were compelled by divine design to sacrifice their comfort so the next generation could have the best possible chance of survival.

Wherever you see a generational view of life, you are seeing the fingerprints of God. It may be violent and ugly like a mother cat fighting a pack of dogs to protect her kittens. It may be involuntary such as a retired couple raising a second batch of children in an attempt to salvage their latchkey grandchildren. It may be politically incorrect and socially complex such as Latinos coming to the U.S. for the sake of their children's future, but wherever you see that mindset you are seeing a reflection of God's heart.

God first revealed this facet of His heart in the Garden. Although the Garden was flawless, it was not at maximum potential either in size or quality. He placed Adam and Eve in a very enjoyable, pleasant, life-giving context. Many Americans dream of retiring in a place like that so they can close out their lives with focused, intentional self-absorption.

God, however, did not give the first parents instructions on how to achieve maximum personal pleasure in the Garden. Rather, He told them to live generationally. They were to have children and extend the Garden to the non-Garden part of the world. Their focal point in life was to be building into the future, not extracting value from what was there before them.

Adam and Eve dismally failed to incarnate God's heart. They lived for themselves at the expense of all future generations. Their son went a step further by overtly cutting off Abel's life with his own hands in order to gain a few seconds of pleasurable revenge.

## GOD'S PROVISION

Fortunately, all man's iniquity does not change the heart of God. He is still seeking to partner with us to cause each generation to surpass the one before it. To this end, He offers many tools. This book is about one of those tools: generational blessings.

In the same way that the children of immigrants often receive much "free money" from the sacrifices of their parents, so God has arranged a fascinating system whereby our children can benefit because of the generational blessings we accrue for them. In addition to the blessings they reap from a good seed they have sown, they can also receive substantial blessings from the way we live our lives.

The first half of this book is a look back. We will examine the nature of generational blessings and see how we can appropriate what has already been stored up for us. The second part of the book looks forward to see what we can do in our lifetime to widen and deepen the stream of generational blessings flowing from our lives so that our children have more to draw from than we had.

Obedience alone does not necessarily enlarge the stream. We will study some marginally obedient people in Scripture who were highly effective in accruing generational blessings that relentlessly pursued their children.

They did this by using the secret tool. There is one choice above all other choices that determines whether your children will receive more generational blessings than you did. It is a choice that you and I are making day after day, whether we realize it or not.

But first, let us look at the nature of this powerful, yet invisible force called generational blessings.