



From Grief and Grudges to Gratitude and Giving Circles

Susan Patton had been married to Phil, her high school sweetheart, for over 30 years. They lived with their three children in Nashville, Tennessee. Phil worked as an executive for a large hospital chain, and Susan, a nurse by trade, had been a stay at home mother since the birth of their first child.

Susan had what she calls “traditional roles” in the family. Phil handled all the finances, including the family giving, and he had a gift for generosity. “It’s not that he didn’t try to explain our finances,” Susan says. “I just wasn’t interested, and my heart was not yet drawn toward generosity the way Phil’s was.”

In late 2003, Susan’s world was flipped upside down. Phil, a hobbyist pilot, took his single-engine plane for a brief flight one morning, and when he failed to show up for an appointment, red flags began to go up. The next morning, search crews discovered the wreckage of Phil’s plane in the woods.

The following days were a fog, Susan recounts. Coping with the sudden loss, she was angry with God and overwhelmed by the responsibility now on her shoulders, including giving.

In her grief, charitable giving was very mechanical for Susan. She would write the same checks, for the same amounts, for the same charities as Phil had the year before. Intellectually, Susan understood God owned it all, and she was called to steward His money faithfully, but her heart was not yet fully committed to generosity.

New Seasons

Phil and Susan had the same financial advisor, Bruce, for 20 years. Before Phil's passing, Bruce would ask Phil to bring Susan with him to their meetings. After Phil's death, Susan recalls breaking down and crying in Bruce's office when he would ask her how she was doing. A believer himself, Bruce encouraged Susan to attend a conference on generosity in Atlanta. At the conference, Susan met speaker Bill High, CEO of The Signatry, who encouraged her to start thinking about the heart of generosity as opposed to giving out of obligation. He then invited Susan to a women's conference in Kansas City.

At the women's conference, Susan heard about giving circles for the first time. She began to wonder what it would look like if she started a giving circle in Nashville. When Susan returned home she met with a close friend to discuss the idea of forming a giving circle in their city. They recruited two more friends to join them and put together a list of one hundred women they thought would be interested. Then, they invited all one hundred to an introductory gathering.

"The Signatry has made giving simple. We work on the calendar year, and our fund is continuously full and then emptied. It frees us up to focus on giving and not worry about the administrative aspects of tax returns and forming a nonprofit. We do not have to write individual checks for each contribution or grant. We push a couple of buttons, and our blessing is on its way. They make the act of sending out money effortless." -Susan Patton

The Giving Circle

At their first meeting, attendees discussed their longing to find a community to solve problems they could not solve on their own. They set up a donor advised fund to facilitate their giving and established processes. The members would nominate different ministries and causes. Once finalists were chosen by a vetting committee, the entire group would vote for which organizations to support that year.

Now, the giving circle has over eighty women who come together and nominate local, national, and international ministries to bless as a group. Through a donor advised fund with The Signatry, the giving circle is able to support four to seven ministries based on the amount of funding needed. "We hear a lot of women say they feel empowered to give and study their hearts," says Susan. "As a group, we are making a bigger impact than we might make on our own."

Take Your Next Steps

As Susan's story illustrates, God will always continue to grow our hearts. Starting a giving circle is a simple step you can take toward practicing generosity with a like-minded community. Learn more about using a donor advised fund at thesignatry.com/DAF or contact our Donor Care team to talk about your next steps at donorcare@thesignatry.com.

For more information, visit www.thesignatry.com.