It’s likely you’ve read or heard the biblical accounts of the Prodigal Son, the Widow’s Mite and Abraham and Isaac. But have you seen artwork that portrays these stories? Sometimes art provides fresh insights and brings these narratives to life in a way that words can’t always do.

“At Thrivent, we believe there is a powerful connection between art and religion,” says Joanna Reiling Lindell, director and curator of the Thrivent Collection of Religious Art. “Our experiences with art can help us explore and think about things differently—our faith, generosity, even our relationship with money. In preserving these historic objects, we also honor a shared history and humanity.”


Co-authored by Lindell, Ed Klodt and John Busacker as a way to share the collection with more members across the country, the book gives varying perspectives on generosity and Scripture. The following briefly highlights four works of art in it.

**Abraham and Isaac Going to the Sacrifice**
Abraham and Isaac journey up the mountain in this 1558 etching by Hieronymus Cock. A multifaceted image, this artwork contains several different moments within one scene.

“We see Abraham and Isaac along their path; the journey we take visually is meant to encourage contemplation of the story,” Lindell says. “In the upper right portion of the image, a tiny scene shows the angel of the Lord swooping down to halt this sacrifice and generously affirm Abraham’s faith.

“The story of Abraham and Isaac is one of the most challenging stories in the book (and in the Bible). Sometimes our own journey is challenging, even our faith and relationship with God. But just as God was with Abraham, God is with us on our journey.”

**The Prodigal Son**
Albrecht Dürer shows the Prodigal Son’s moment of repentance in an engraving created around 1496. The piece demonstrates one of his core artistic beliefs: Nature and animals—God’s perfect creation—should be depicted accurately to honor God.

“It’s the story of a son who squandered his inheritance and wound up living among pigs (meticulously rendered here) and a father who is generous in his forgiveness.

“Imagine the desperation of this wayward son. He’s knee-deep in sludge. He’s so hungry, he’d eat the fibrous carob pods the pigs eat. There appears to be no hope,” says Klodt, a theologian and manager in Thrivent’s Mission Support group. “The son doesn’t yet know the ending to his story. He has no reason to expect—or even imagine—the lavish reception he is about to receive from his gracious father.”

**Interior of the Church of Saint Maria Magdalena with the Parable of the Offering of the Widow**
This etching, created by German artist Daniel Hopfer in 1530, portrays a powerful example of sacrificial giving. Amid the regular activity within the Church of Saint Maria Magdalena in Augsburg, Germany, a poor widow gives two small coins, everything she has.

“At times we may feel dwarfed in our ability to give, like the tiny figure overshadowed by the massive edifice in the etching,” says Busacker, founder of Life-Worth. “…God wants us to understand that real generosity begins when compulsory, showy giving leaves off. It is ultimately steeped in the sacrifice, not the size, of the gift.”

**Jesu Via et Vita Nostra/Jesu Thesaurus Fidelium (Jesus, Our Path and Light/Jesus, Treasure of the Faithful)**
French artist Charles-Marie Dulac was strongly influenced by St. Francis of Assisi’s views of nature and care of God’s creation, demonstrated in this 1894 lithograph.

“The image of a farmer tilling the soil in the midst of a swirling cosmos reminds us of the importance of vocation,” Klodt says, “not just as a way of putting food on the table but also as a way of living out God’s calling in a distinct way through the work we do.”

**THE BOOK**
*Inspiring Generosity: Stories of Faith and Grace in Art* features 40 artworks from the Thrivent Collection of Religious Art. The collection has more than 1,200 objects ranging from the 13th to 21st centuries.

In the recently released book, readers are invited to engage with the art through the perspectives of three authors:
- Joanna Reiling Lindell, director and curator of the Thrivent Collection of Religious Art, gives an art historical background for each piece.
- Ed Klodt, theologian and a manager in Thrivent’s Mission Support group, offers a deeper look at the theological significance of each piece.
- John Busacker, founder of Life-Worth, reflects on the contemporary and personal relevance of the messages portrayed by each.

To learn more about *Inspiring Generosity* and to order a copy ($35), visit ThriventInspiringGenerosity.com.