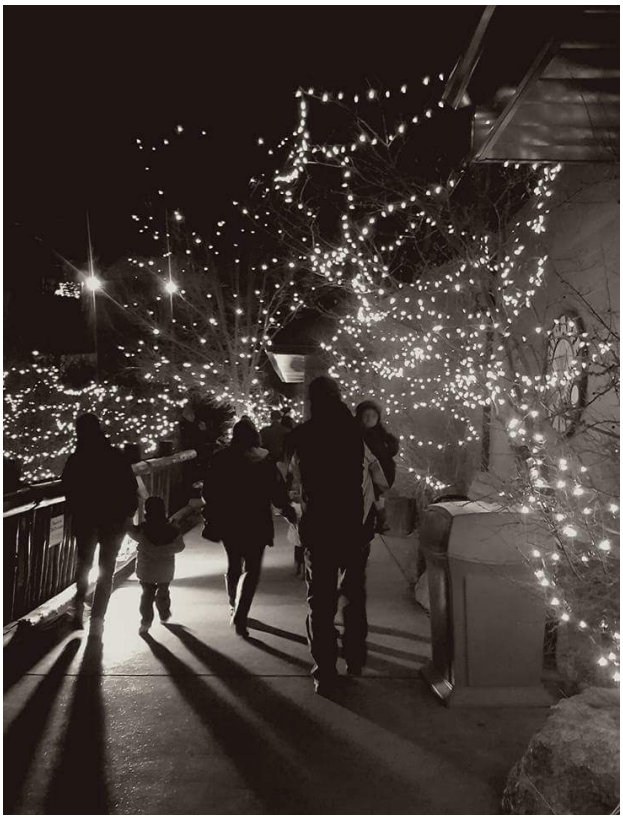
the GIVER: *Chapter 4 (continued...see previous)*

John 3:16 "For here is the way God loved the world—He gave! He gave His only, unique Son as a gift. So now everyone who believes in Him will never perish but will experience everlasting life."

It couldn't be more excellent, Frank thought to himself! Snow floated through the air, perfect flakes lighting on frozen surfaces. Jack Frost had been hard at work, painting window panes all over town. Welcoming yellow lights flickered merrily from within homes as a cascade of twinkling, colorful lights pirouetted across icy banks like ballerinas. Christmas was in the air, and in mere hours, many hopes and dreams, as well as visions of sugarplum fairies would dance through children's heads. Frank had been a busy man, and after dropping off his final box of gifts which he left on the porch of a rundown shack for the little inhabitants within, he felt such a sense of joy and relief. A tear slid from his eye, slowly journeying on his cheek, while an oxymoronic giggle escaped his lips. Like an adrenaline rush, his emotions clashed across his face, the bittersweet battle of the past, present and future, at war in his car. He had one more gift to give, and this, the grand finale, left him in awe of a God who was always working all things out. While he drove, he remembered.

He and his siblings had less than nothing. They were accustomed to Christmas being just another day. While everyone else dreamt of a white Christmas and two front teeth and had stockings hung by the chimney with care, Frank's mom tried extra hard just to make a hot meal that filled her kids' bellies. Frank recalled the hunger pains, the yearning, the sadness that settled in his soul like cold camping in one's bones. Not because of what everyone else had, but because his mom tried so hard, working endlessly to provide and care for her children the best she could. Still, social services was always just beyond the door, criticizing her, threatening to take her babies, judging her on every movement she made. They were latchkey kids with a mom who hadn't a choice and a dad in prison, so Frank would raise his siblings and be the only father they'd ever know. No wonder he'd never had kids of his own; he'd already reared a family. How they had never been removed from the home by Child Protective Services was a miracle in itself.

That Christmas changed everything. They'd awakened to a miracle. Frank had slapped himself, thinking he was still dreaming. The tree ate their tiny living room, but o my, how it smelled like evergreen while its branches glistened with colorful and shimmering lights. They'd food for a week and presents they opened for an entire year; it was so overwhelming. The act, however, had birthed something in their home they'd never experienced before. And that was joy. Joy and Jesus. That was the true gift he and his siblings received that year. The gift of God's Son, the real reason for the season. And Frank had never forgotten. That's why he did...all...this...



Frank stopped at the curb and Teddy jumped into his car, a slight grin playing with his lips. "Where are we going, Mr. Frank?!" he asked excitedly. Frank could tell he wasn't used to special treatment which made this even more amazing. "I've never been invited to be a part of a secret before, Mr Frank!" Teddy cried.

If Frank could have cried then, he would have. The joy emanating from this child was pure elation. Palpable wonder transcended the hard work, the endless hours, and the kind of compassion that could break a person's spirit when one cared about someone else more than oneself. "Do me a favor, Teddy," Frank smiled. "Close your eyes and I'll tell you when to open them. We will be there soon!"

To be continued....