

Humble & Hungry: Obedience and Abundance

Aaron Brockett | 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Alright, good morning! It is good to see you. Happy Mother's Day to all the moms out there, we are so thankful for all of you. You can clap. One person tried and it didn't catch on. My pickup truck is full of mulch so you know what I'm doing later today, happy to do it.

I want to welcome all the moms, all the families who are here. I also want you to know, last week I was thinking about this, I know this day can be tough for many people for a variety of reasons. I just want you to know I am thinking of and praying for you as well.

I'm glad you are here if this is your first time to be with us. I want to welcome anyone who may be tuning in online as well. If you have a Bible, go ahead and grab it and get to 2 Corinthians 8. That is our passage today and we are going to be studying the first 15 verses of chapter 8 together. If you have missed out on the first two weeks of this series, we are in week number three and we are going to finish this up next weekend, I encourage you to jump online or on the church app and get caught up with where we have been, maybe sometime later today, because we've covered a lot of ground.

Two weeks ago I made the announcement that we are going to be launching our first multisite location on the north side of Indianapolis sometime this fall. That means we are going to be one church in multiple locations. So it's the same church, the same DNA, the same philosophy of ministry, the same kid's ministry and worship ministry, just in different locations.

The reason is not because we want to cut people's drive time down or for convenience. The reason is because we have the core conviction that discipleship works best when you can worship close to where you live, when you can get connected, when you can meet people, when you can invite your friends. So we've just tried to identify the areas of our city where we have a lot of people who reside, who drive from more than 20 to 25 minutes away, and say, "We need to go there."

Last week we looked at the Book of Acts together. This fall season we are going to study through much of the Book of Acts. One of the things you see right away in Acts, like in Acts 1, is that Jesus kind of casts a multisite vision Himself. He said, "You are going to be my witnesses starting off in Jerusalem, then Judea, Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth." You see that's really the vision behind multisite. That's the heart behind what it means to be *Humble and Hungry*.

So this fall we'll launch a portable setup and teardown church at Creekside Middle School. Our team went over there last Wednesday to walk through the facility and take a few pictures and we'll throw some of the pictures up on the screen behind me so you can kind of get a feel for what that facility looks like. The auditorium kind of looks like a miniature version of what we have here. It's going to be a great setup and teardown scenario.

Lots of cool stories have been pouring in. It's just cool to see how God is at work in ways we didn't even imagine. Last weekend after the 11 o'clock service I was standing in the lobby trying to meet as many people as I could. This lady was waiting to talk to me and she just wanted to share with me that she had

been having a difficult time at work. She was just sharing with me some of the struggles she has been having. She wanted me to know that the sermon really encouraged her.

She said, "From Acts 8, as I was sitting there and I just have a heart for my co-workers and am trying to be a light there, when you said, 'Find your identity in Christ and just like Philip, be willing to go.' Philip went after the Ethiopian eunuch and I really need to have a heart for my co-workers." She said, "I'm really wrestling with that and I really felt God was ministering to my heart through all of that. Then at the very end you said we were going to be launching a setup and teardown at Creekside." And she said, "Aaron, that's where I work." She held up a key ring and said, "Here are the keys to the building." I am like, "How much do you want for that?" But she said, just through tears, "I'm in. I'm in." She said, "I never thought that God would take my church to my work."

The really, really cool thing about that is, if you could be a fly on the wall at the meetings we've been in, we have spent hours and hours of discussion and prayer where we've been seeking out the Lord and saying, "God, is it this? God, do you want us to go over here?" And with the number of doors God has just kept closed, we were like, "Okay, we only want to go if You open up a door." Honestly, at first, I didn't know why He led us up to the north side and why a door opened up at Creekside. But now I think that, with stories like this, God is in control of this whole thing.

That's really what *Humble and Hungry* is all about. To not be so ambitious that we say, "God, here is a vision. We want You to bless what we are trying to do for You," but it's actually, "God, we want to listen. Where do You want us to go?"

Being humble means realizing that we've been saved by grace, and may we never forget that, and may that never fall on deaf ears anymore. To say, "You know what? I didn't do anything to earn this. I didn't do anything to work for this. In fact, I may not have even been seeking God out, but just like the Ethiopian eunuch, God sent somebody after me. I've been saved by grace, and now I can't just keep that to myself. In fact, if I keep that grace to myself, it turns into this sort of toxic religion."

That's what most of the world thinks Christianity is. And God says, "No. Remove unnecessary barriers that might keep people from Jesus. And if you are not willing to go, if you are not hungry to share that with others who may not even necessarily act like they're interested or want to hear it, it just shows Me that you really don't know what it is that I've truly given to you."

And so two weeks ago we started off this whole series just looking at the mission behind this thing. We looked at Mark 2 where these four buddies take their paralyzed friend to Jesus. When they get to the house in Capernaum, it's full. They can't get in. So in boldness, and innovation, and courage they literally tore a hole in the roof. They wrecked it. That's not figurative, that's literal. They punched a hole in somebody's roof. How rude. How expensive. And they lowered this guy down to Jesus and Jesus heals the guy and Jesus forgives his sins.

I asked you, "Who's your paralytic man? What kind of roof exists? What unnecessary barriers are keeping your family member, or your friend, or your co-worker from Jesus? And what are you willing to do to wreck the roof?"

Last week we walked through Acts 8 and we saw that Jesus said to us, "You'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem," and the church was content to stay in Jerusalem. But then Saul comes and starts to persecute the church and so he scatters them into Judea and into Samaria.

God was doing some tremendous ministry through a guy named Philip in Samaria. In fact, if I would have been Philip, I would have wanted to stay right there in Samaria and just build up the new converts into a really great church. But God had other plans and He said, "Philip, I need you to hit the road. Philip, I need you to take the desert road down to Africa because there's an Ethiopian eunuch who has been seeking me out, but he couldn't get into the temple because he was a black, castrated man from Africa. So go after him, Philip. Knock down those unnecessary barriers.

That's been the heart behind all of this. Over the last several weeks I've asked our church to be doing three things. The first is to pray. Every day at 1:07 p.m. set your cell phone alarms and when they go off, pray. We just said, "What would God do if thousands of people prayed every day at the same time for the same thing?" And some really cool stories have been coming in where you've met some new friends out at restaurants, out at the gym, because their cell phone went off. You didn't even know they went to Traders Point. You've made some new friends and you've prayed. So if you've not been a part of that, set your alarm and every day pray at 1:07.

The second thing I've asked you to consider doing is to go. And we've said it would be great if 500 people would be willing to become part of the core of that first multisite location and to make that Traders Point location their permanent location where they would serve, they would give, and they would invite their friends especially if they live closer to that location. We do three services each weekend so that would be 166 people per service who would just be willing to go. Over the last two weeks we've had 141 people so far who have said, "We're in. We'd like to go. We'd like to serve."

I wanted to know, out of those 141, how long had they'd been here at our church and if they are already serving. And many of those people who have already volunteered to go have been at our church less than two years. So I don't know what that says other than maybe they are the freshest recipients of the mission, and now maybe they are really hungry to share it with others.

And many of them are not currently serving. Maybe it's because of distance, maybe it's because that is a barrier that is there or maybe they have just not been able to find the on ramps to serve. But they see this as a new opportunity to get in the game and to get ready to serve. That's exactly what the heart behind multisite is.

The third thing I've asked you to do is to give. This is going to require our church to be generous. So I want you to know that next weekend, as we wrap this whole series up, as part of our time of worship, we are going to be turning in our financial commitment cards for the next two years. We're not doing a capital campaign. We're doing something called *one fund*.

This is the part of the vision that may present the most opportunities for misunderstanding so it's important that you understand and, if you don't, that you would ask for clarity and ask your questions sometime this week. Let me try to make it as clear as I can, and Jake will come up later and try to reinforce this. What *one fund* is, it's a budget for two years. And we've said, "What is the budget for our church to operate this campus for two years? And then what would it cost to operate our first multisite campus for two years? Let's put one number on it."

Our operating expenses here for a year are about \$9.6 million. We've multiplied that by two and then added our multisite budget of \$8.5 million, and it's a number of \$29 million. And I know that number sounds really, really big. I should pull out my Austin Powers pinky and be like, "Twenty-nine million [with accent]," (and if you haven't seen that movie you are totally lost right now). I'm okay with that. I know it

sounds big. Just to give you a frame of reference that we're not overreaching, in 2013 and 2014 our church gave over \$24 million in total.

So what we are going to be doing on June 6 and 7 is a first-fruits offering to get this kind of kick started. I want you to know that we've had 95 financial commitments come in from our leadership so far. So that's elders, staff, and a handful of church members. Out of those first 95 commitments is about \$2.5 million toward the \$29 million. So that is a great start.

I'm always encouraged whenever we go through seasons like this as a church because what financial stewardship is, it's a discipleship issue. This is usually the last area of our lives that we are willing to surrender to the Lord. I don't know about your story. I realize that all of us are kind of in different spots with the Lord. Maybe some of you would say, "I wouldn't necessarily call myself a Christian, I'm still kind of checking all this out." Some of you are new believers. Some of you are seasoned believers.

This particular area, financial stewardship, was the last area of my life that I was willing to surrender to the Lord. In fact, I was willing to trust God with my eternal life long before I was willing to trust Him with my earthly one because my earthly one is wrapped up in my treasure. When I was baptized as a young man, you might as well have baptized me with my checkbook hanging up out of the water because I wasn't ready to baptize that yet. I wasn't ready to fully give that to the Lord.

Now here's the thing. I grew up in church and my mom and dad, they taught me to tithe and taught me that it was a good thing, but I didn't really take it seriously. It was kind of like one of those things where they said, "Now Aaron, if you make \$10, make sure you give \$1 back to the Lord." I treated that like it was some sort of a fairytale. I didn't really take it seriously, nor did I understand the spiritual implications behind it.

So, as a young man, when I graduated high school and moved out of my mom and dad's house, I began to walk freshly with the Lord. I made my faith my own. But I still did not surrender this area of my life to Him. Here is the kicker. I was in Bible College studying to go into the ministry, yet I wasn't tithing. I had two excuses for why I wasn't.

The first was: I didn't make very much money. I thought, "I'm working a part-time job at a store as a cashier and I only make enough money to put enough gas in the gas tank and to go on a date every eight or nine months," (or whenever I could get one). It was a depressing time. So I was like, "I don't think God's even missing my 10 percent. I don't think that it's that much. I don't think the church needs it." That was my first excuse.

My second excuse, and this is going to sound really, really lame because it was. I justified it by saying, "You know what? I'm in Bible College and I'm studying to give my life to the Lord in fulltime vocational ministry. I'm spending thousands of dollars on books and tuition to go into the ministry. I think that's good enough. I think that's actually more than a tithe."

It wasn't until God sent a few really godly men into my life to challenge me in this area, and to hold me accountable in this area, and to help me to see that this is actually a spiritual issue that God really took me to the mat on this one. You know what? God continues to take me to the mat on this one.

So I want to look at 2 Corinthians 8 and I just want to read the first 15 verses in our time together. Paul is writing a letter to the church in Corinth. In this particular part of 2 Corinthians, this is kind of like Paul's

version of a first century commitment card because he is urging the Corinthian church to be generous toward the poor in Jerusalem. What you have to understand about the Corinthian church is that they were well off financially, but they weren't very generous yet.

Paul says, "You know what? There is a church down the road in Macedonia. The Macedonians are really generous, but their economy is falling apart. Something doesn't compute here." So Paul writes to them, and in these 15 verses there are seven principles that help us develop a framework for healthy, biblical stewardship that I want us to go over together.

I realize not everybody is a note taker, but you might just jot down the principles as I go over them because you'll forget them by the time the service is over. In fact, you'll only remember probably the last one or two. I want you to discuss these in your Life Group and just kind of think of these for a minute. Look at what it says in verse 1. Paul says, "We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia."

So here is principle number one: Generosity has to be a response to God's grace. If it's not, we have a tendency to give, as the Bible says, begrudgingly, or maybe out of pride, or maybe just out of religious legalism. Notice that he frames up this teaching by first of all talking about the grace of God.

The Macedonian church is mentioned four times in the New Testament as a model of generosity. The Macedonians kind of set the standard and he says, "Here's how they did it. They gave themselves first to the Lord, and then they wrote the check, then they gave themselves to us." That's really important to understand and that's what sets this section apart from every other red letter plea for resources that might be out there.

You see if you don't understand that when the Bible teaches about stewardship, and generosity, and tithing that it does so within the framework of our response to the gospel then you will misunderstand it, misapply it, or just dismiss it. In fact Martin Luther said it really, really well. He said, "What the Bible teaches about this subject either gets obstructed, meaning, 'I don't want to hear it,' or corrupted, meaning, 'I'm communicating it for false motives,' by the human heart."

So, a significant percentage of what the Bible teaches about money and stewardship can only be applied, and perhaps even understood, by somebody who has responded to the grace of Jesus Christ. And that's why, very honestly, there are very few topics or subjects that I get nervous about preaching anymore. Now please understand me, I get nervous every time I preach. Usually for the first three or four minutes I'm a little bit nervous up here. My hands are clammy. And then when I begin to see that you guys are actually listening and nodding, then I start to calm down a little bit and I'm okay.

But there are very few topics that I'm like, "I don't know if I want to touch that." A few months ago I preached on the subject of sex. I was good with it. You weren't, but I was good with it. So, there are very few topics—but when it comes to this topic, and I was even looking at the schedule and was like, "I'm preaching on money on Mother's Day. Way to go pastor." That was a miss.

So I get really nervous about this because it is so easy to misunderstand, especially if you don't know me and especially if this is your first weekend here, because many times our radars go up over this. But here is the biggest reason. My money, my treasure, is my biggest idol. It's what I look to for security. It's what I look to for purpose. It's what I look to for definition. When somebody starts messing with my idol, then I get really nervous about that. So I know that I'm kind of navigating through a little bit of a minefield.

Now I'm not ashamed of what the Bible teaches about this. And I've been around long enough to know that, oftentimes, whenever my spiritual life has reached a plateau it's in direct correlation to how my heart is responding to generosity. But I do want you to know this. If you're outside of Christ or if you wouldn't consider this to be your home church, then I'm not asking you for a dime. In fact I'm trying to remove the barriers, not develop new ones. But I would encourage you to take what the Bible says about it and apply it somewhere else. Give it somewhere else. Be generous somewhere else. And see if God doesn't do something in your heart.

You see here is the thing. It's more than financial stewardship. Did you know the Bible has a tremendous amount of knowledge, just when it comes to money management? Twenty-five percent of what Jesus taught in the gospels had to do with money and treasure because He knows—not because He wants our money but because He knows that money has our heart and He wants our heart.

And if you haven't been there already, you will be. Eventually every one of us finds ourselves in a season of life where we are facing money problems. And maybe those problems were because of factors that we didn't have anything to do with. Or maybe they are because of foolish decisions we've made.

Maybe you have gone through a season of unemployment. Maybe you're a single parent. Maybe you have unexpected medical bills and you find yourself upside down financially and it's not your fault. But sometimes it is our fault. Sometimes we go out to get bottled water and bananas and we come home with an 80 inch TV encrusted with diamonds and we are like, "Oops." Now we have money problems, right? Just read the book of Proverbs. Just read Matthew 25. Just read the book of James, because the Bible has this tremendous amount of practical knowledge when it comes to finances.

I do want you to know that when we talk about tithing, stewardship, and generosity, that it only applies to the heart of the believer. That it only applies if you have responded to the grace of God.

So Paul goes on in verse 2, he says, "For in a severe test of affliction," notice this verse. It doesn't even sound like it makes logical sense. "For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty," I didn't know those two things went together, "have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part." In other words, God's math doesn't make a whole lot of sense to our logical minds.

So here is principle number two: Generosity is not dependent upon my circumstances. And for a long time I thought that it was. For a long time I thought, "You know what? When I make more money, I'll give more money. When God blesses me in this area, then I'll trust this particular area of my life to Him." But when I'm going through a hard time, then I interpret that as, "I finally have a way out."

But the word that Paul uses here for affliction is the word *thlipsis*, and it's this idea of the crushing of grapes. It's this intense pressure from poverty and persecution. That's what the Macedonian church was experiencing, but they didn't say, "Paul, leave us alone. Stop asking us. We have problems of our own." That's what human sin and insecurity says, but they had the Holy Spirit living within them that enabled them to rise above their circumstances.

What I've found is that I am often more willing to trust God with my heart than I am my treasure. Why? Well because when I trust God with my treasure, that's when things get real. That's when this faith thing becomes tangible. That's when following Jesus becomes much more than lip service. Because money, more than anything else, becomes God's cheap competition for the throne in our hearts and we find

security in it rather than in Him. It becomes our functional savior. God meant for us to worship with our wealth, not worship our wealth. And there is a difference.

Going on in verse 3 it says, “For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—and this, not as we expected.”

So here is the third principle: Generosity is proportionate. He is talking about the Macedonians. He says, “They gave according to their means and then they even gave beyond their means.” But here is the thing: God didn’t expect them to give what they didn’t have. He says in verse 4, “They actually begged us to be a part of this.” They wanted to be a part of this but God wasn’t forcing it upon them. You see God was expecting them to give according to their opportunity, their ability, and their capability.

So, how much is generous? How much should we give to others? Paul couldn’t answer that specifically and I don’t have the authority to either. The reason why Scripture is really careful not to mandate a specific amount that we must give is that any time that you and I are told that we have to do anything that is almost an immediate recipe for not being cheerful about it, thus missing the whole point. If He says, “You have to do this,” then I am going to do it begrudgingly.

The other reason why generosity is proportionate is what was sacrificial for me as a poor college student is no longer sacrificial for me today. It has changed as my circumstances have changed. That’s why generosity is proportionate. So God never tells us an amount, but He does give us some guidelines.

Here’s the first guideline. For many of you this is review, for some of you this is a refresher: the tithe. What a tithe is—under the Old Testament law believers were required to give 10 percent of their income to the ministry of the Levitical priests, but it actually went beyond that. They had to give another 10 percent to fund the festivals, and then they had to give another 3.3 percent to the poor.

So, under the Old Testament law, a tithe was not 10 percent, it was nearly 25 percent of an annual income. Aren’t you glad we don’t live under Old Testament law anymore? Can I get an Amen for that? I’m very excited about that. Why? We live under the New Testament now. We live under grace—Romans 6:14.

You know there was a season of my life when I was like, “The New Testament doesn’t really talk specifically about a tithe. We’re under grace now. In fact in Luke 12, Jesus actually goes after the Pharisees for tithing. And you know what? I don’t want to be a Pharisee, so I just won’t tithe.” That’s how I justified it during a time in my life.

But you know what? In Luke 12, Jesus wasn’t doing away with the tithe. What was Jesus talking about? He was actually speaking to their hearts and their motivation. You see the Pharisees were tithing publically out of spiritual pride. The Pharisees were doing it legalistically. That’s what Jesus was talking about, and if you read the verse carefully, He wasn’t dismissing the tithe. He was saying, “No guys, actually the tithe should be sort of like the bare minimum.”

I like to say it this way. The tithe is the training wheels for generosity. The tithe structured generosity into my life and, for a long time, I thought I was being way more generous than I really was. Like if you were to ask me, “Hey Aaron, how much do you give?” I would have said, “Well, I don’t know if I am giving 10 percent but I think I’m probably like at seven or eight percent.” But then I went back and

actually looked at my tax returns and it was like two percent. Because we always think we are more generous than we really are. When we throw in the \$20 or we send a text to the number whenever there is a global disaster we think that we're being generous, but in actuality we aren't as generous as we think.

Do you want to know why I think 10 percent is a good number? Ten percent is not enough to ruin anyone of us financially but it's certainly enough to get our attention, especially the more money that we make. You start to look at that and you are like, "Oh my goodness, that's starting to become a considerable sum of money there." But what a tithe says to God is, "God, I trust that You can provide for me and my family on 90 percent of my income better that I could do to provide for my family on 100 percent of my income."

In fact God believes in it so much this is the only time God challenges His people and says, "Test Me in this." God never says that, but He does in this area. In Malachi 3, He says, "I know this doesn't seem to make a whole lot of sense to you, but test Me in this. Just try it, just try it for a period of time and see what I might do to expand your blessings in this area. But you have to trust Me."

So here is the second guideline and it is lifestyle. "The Macedonians gave beyond their means." That didn't mean they were maxing out credit cards to be generous. That meant that they were making some cuts, they were finding some margin in their lives to be generous.

More than likely, when it comes to our needs, they are fixed. You have to keep the lights on. You have to put clothes on your back. You have to get groceries. That's fixed. You can be good stewards but you can't cut into that too much. If you have debt, you need to go after it aggressively. Most of the time it's okay but we need to look at our lifestyle. Do we really need that? Do we really need to have that upgrade or can we go with a lesser amount? That's what it means.

Then the third thing is: Enthusiasm. The Bible says, "Do not give begrudgingly. Don't give out of guilt. Don't give out of shame. But give with a cheerful spirit because it is an act of worship."

Going on in the passage he says, "But they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us."

Here's the fourth principle and this is really what sets the stage for everything: Everything is God's; we are simply the trustees. God owns it. I steward it. And when I start acting like an owner, that's when I start to cling to it. But God owns everything.

Psalms 24:1 and Job 41:11 remind us that God owns everything. He actually doesn't need our 10 percent. He doesn't need our money. In fact it's like small potatoes to Him. What God wants is our hearts and He knows the primary thing that owns our hearts is our treasure. So He says, "Look, I've given you this money for your joy, to meet your needs, now just entrust a little bit of it back to me. That way I'll know that I have your heart." And, oftentimes, whenever we cling to our money and we act like owners it hardens our hearts.

I've given this illustration before. I have four kids at home. They're all under the age of 12. As their dad, I love to buy things for them. In fact, whenever I take them to lunch at Chick-fil-A I never walk up to the cash register and say, "What do you say? Should we all go dutch?" I never do that. I never say, "Hey, guys, why don't you go ahead and pay for your own meal today? Dad's a little short."

And actually, they haven't reached the age yet when they would say, "Daddy, could we buy your lunch?" I'm waiting for that day. That's never happened. But I would actually fight them for the check. I want to buy them lunch. But every now and then, just to test their maturity and the condition of their heart, I'll say, "Can daddy have a waffle fry?" And you just see the look on their face and sometimes, most of the time, they'll be like, "No, these are mine."

And I'm kind of like, "Do you suffer from short term memory loss, child? Do you realize that just a few minutes ago daddy bought that whole meal for you and I don't even need your measly little waffle fry. I could go buy like 100 waffle fries. You could eat all those and I could go buy you some more. I don't even need that one. I just wanted to see if you were willing to let it go. And if you're not willing to let it go, that tells me that you are not far in your maturity."

You see that's the same thing. God blesses us with these resources and God's like, "Now that I have your heart, now that you realize I went to a cross for you, would you just entrust one of those to me—10 percent of that to me?" And most of the time I'm like, "God, this is mine. I have to take care of this." And He's like, "I don't even need that. I could actually buy a whole bunch more. I could bless you with so much more. I just want to see where your heart is."

You see capitalism says, "It's my money and I can do with it what I want." Socialism and Communism say, "It's the people's money and you must do with it as the community needs." Gospel centered Christianity says, "It's God's money and I must do as He directs."

I know in my own experience I've said, "I've worked for this," and God's like, "Yeah, who gave you the ability to work? You didn't have a say over where you were born, when you were born, who you were born to, and what time in history you would be born. Actually way more is out of your control than you think. It's all mine. Just entrust it back to me."

In verse 6 he says, "Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also."

So here is the fifth principle: Generosity is cultivated. It's like a muscle. It's like a spiritual gift. And some of you (I know you); you have the spiritual gift of generosity. I've met you. You love to give. You love to be generous to people. Then others of you, maybe you don't necessarily have that gift. It's harder for you to be generous. I always find it really amusing when you guys find each other and get married. That's always fun. Because one of you is always giving stuff away and the other one is freaking out about it.

And here is the thing. All of us, it's like a muscle to be cultivated just like faith, just like intellect, just like the ability to teach or to sing. Generosity is a muscle to be developed. That's why've we've given you the generosity ladder on your commitment card. That thing is only for you, for your eyes, for you to do an evaluation. To simply say, "I don't know if I can go from here all the way over to here. In fact, Aaron, I'm a single parent, I'm strapped with bills, whatever." The issue is: what's a step for you? How do you cultivate that generosity muscle in your life? How do you say, "God, I want to be better at this?"

I remember when I was in college and I did an internship at a church in Los Angeles one summer. I stayed with one of the elders of that church and his wife, Betty and Wendell Skelton. And he was a quality manager at Dryer's Ice Cream in Los Angeles. It was awesome staying with him because every

morning he would say, “What flavor of ice cream do you want?” And I would tell him and he would come home with a new thing of ice cream every night. I gained a little weight that summer.

But that was Wendell. Then his wife Betty, she was one of the head nurses at Kaiser Permanente in southern California. So they both made a pretty good income. They were in their 60s at that time. They didn’t have any kids. I remember just sitting around the dinner table with them every night and they spoke into my life and poured into me.

I remember this subject of stewardship and generosity came up with them. They were both really, really involved in the church. They were supporting missionaries. They constantly had people in their home. I remember them sharing with me one night that, as a young married couple, they had decided to take that step of faith and begin to tithe even though they didn’t make very much money. Then they said, “You know what? Every year we just decided that we were going to continue on this journey with the Lord and we would say, ‘God, we’ll add a percentage to that every single year until it just becomes too much.’” And they said, “We’ve been doing that now for several decades.”

And I said, “Without prying, where are you guys at now?” And they didn’t want to tell me at first. I had to pry it out of them. I got Wendell drunk on ice cream then he was willing to speak really freely about this. I remember that he finally shared with me one day. He said, “We’re at about 47 percent.” They were giving away 47 percent of their income.

Here is the issue. God is not asking you to get up to that level. All He is saying is “What is the next step for you and how do you cultivate this muscle in your life?” Here is the thing. It’s there. The resources are there. I was reading last week that last weekend—did you know Americans spent six billion dollars last weekend on two events, the Mayweather versus Pacquiao fight and the *Avengers* opening—six billion dollars on those two events. Do you want to know what Americans gave to charity in 2013? Half of that. It’s not that it’s not there. It’s just a matter of where our heart takes us and how we prioritize things.

Do you know that, on the average right now, Christians (this is Christians) give 2.6 percent of their annual income per capita? Do you want to know what it was during the Great Depression? It was 3.3 percent. So Christians gave a little bit more of their income during the Great Depression than we do today.

Many times we think, “I’ll give more when I make more.” Statistically speaking that is not true. If you make \$30,000 per year you’re likely to give about five percent of your income. If you make over \$250,000 per year, it’s less than one percent because we just find more to spend our treasure on when we make more. No, this is a decision that we make now and we develop it like a muscle.

Look at what it says in verse 8. This is really important for you to understand, I double-underlined this in my Bible. “I say this not as a command,” he is not commanding it because if he commanded it, we’d miss the point, “but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.”

So the sixth principle is: Generosity is a matter of the heart. Here is what we mean by this. Money is often seen as a measure of your power. It’s how much of the world you control and it’s also relative. So this afternoon when you take mom out for Mother’s Day lunch (and hopefully you’re taking mom out for Mother’s Day lunch. Some of you forgot) the more money you make, the more options you have. The more options you have, the more power you have.

Now here is the question I have for you. Is that good or bad? Well it largely depends on what you do with it. It's kind of like this question: Is fire good or bad? Well it kind of depends on what I do with it. And money, a lot like sex (I was going to work that in somewhere) answers something deep down within each one of us—within our human nature. Here is what I mean by that. Money was designed by God to be our dignity. There is human dignity in a good day's work followed by an honest paycheck so that you can then provide for your needs and the needs of your family. Without a part of the world to care for, then there is not dignity.

However, sin has twisted every good gift of God, including this one, to the point where money is no longer is our dignity, it becomes our definition. When money is our definition, that's when it corrupts our heart. It has to be our dignity. So wherever it is our dignity, we're glad to be generous with others. When it becomes our definition, then we cling to it. When it becomes our definition, we worry about it incessantly and we envy what others have.

Have you ever done this? Have you ever become suspicious of what others spend their money on? And you are like, "How can they afford that car?" And you start to think about it, "How can they afford to wear that? How can they afford to live in that neighborhood?" Well, you don't really know the intricate details of their lives. You see the reason why that bothers you so much is because money has become your definition. It's the way we compare ourselves, and we always compare up.

Going on in verse 9, this is where we get to the heart of the gospel. This is the true motivation for everything. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich," he owns all the waffle fries. That's that interpretation. He was rich in every way, "yet for your sake He became poor," He went to a cross. He gave it all up. He set down His crown and took on our rags, "so that you by His poverty might become rich. And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, 'Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.'"

So here is the last principle: Generosity reorders my eternal perspective. 1 Corinthians 4:7 makes it very clear. "Everything that we have, including the next breath that you take into your lungs, is a gift." And only about 1 billionth of your existence will be spent on this earth.

Now just grasp that for a moment. So much of my worry, so much of my concern, so much of my time is wrapped up in a place that I'm actually not going to spend very much time in. And most of what I end up spending money on is going to burn up, expire, fall apart, or end up in storage or in somebody else's driveway at a garage sale. But the work of the Lord will never pass away. It was the generosity of God's people during the First Century (see the Book of Acts) that caused the church to explode in growth.

The church—it was the early Christians who were the most concerned about the poor in the streets, and about the orphans, and about those who couldn't defend themselves. That's what set Christians apart from pagans in the first century world. God says to us, "Listen, I'm inviting you into my ongoing work here on this earth and I'm asking you to just trust me with a little bit of your earthly treasure to re-order your eternal treasure." You see, financial stewardship is a discipleship issue.

As we close I just want to read an excerpt of an email that I got last week from a lady in our church. I have her permission to read just a little bit of this because how she framed this was really well said. She was in a meeting recently where we asked our leaders to share their giving stories. Listen to her words.

“When we were asked to share our giving stories, my most immediate thought was, ‘I don’t have a giving story.’ In thinking this over in the days that followed I came to the conclusion that I have a faith story and a redemption story, stories of trials and triumphs, and that these are not separate stories, but they are all woven together into what is a life spent in pursuit of Jesus and my giving story is a part of that life of faith and cannot be separated out from the context of all that it means to follow Jesus.

“Giving is a part of our faith walk. It’s not separate from our relationship with our Lord, but it rises naturally in the context of that relationship and because of that very relationship. God doesn’t need our giving, but He knows we need to give. It’s for our benefit. We need to exercise obedience to God’s commands about giving and, in so doing, learn compassion for others and learn to trust in Him as our provider and not in ourselves.

“God wants us to walk by faith and not by sight but when we rely on ourselves for our daily bread, not much faith is required. We’re less likely to acknowledge that all we have is really His, on loan by His grace, and we’re just the stewards. God wants to draw me closer to Him and to accomplish His purposes in my life through the discipline of giving. In giving to God’s church here on earth, I’m drawn into God’s redemptive work here and now and I become a part of His eternal plans. What I give to God is used for eternal purposes. What I spend my money on here is temporal, fleeting, and passes away as quickly as last year’s fashions.

“There is no satisfaction in that. But it’s exciting to become a part of His plan, to bless and to provide for others in Jesus’ name. And in joining with God and His good purposes, my joy is being made complete. I’m investing in the eternal, not the temporal, and as I do I am drawing closer to Him and into His perfect role for my life.”

Well said. Let’s pray.

Father, we come to You now and I ask that, in our time together this morning, that Your Spirit will do a work within our hearts. God, it seems that when I think that I’ve come to an area of accomplishment in this particular area of my walk with You, You take me to the mat all over again and reveal the pride that’s in my heart, and reveal the insecurity that exists, and reveal maybe even the cynicism that is there.

God I trust You with my eternal life. I want to trust You with my fleeting earthly one as well. I want to be part of what You are doing on this earth. So Father I pray that when it comes to this specific area, that You would do a work inside of each heart today and that we would be reminded that every financial decision that we make should be done in the shadow of the cross of Jesus who gave up all so that we could receive it.

As we take communion this morning, God I pray that You meet us in this place and that Your Spirit would be in this room working on each heart and mind. We ask this in Jesus’ Holy Name. Amen.