

# Stewards of a Generous Heart

*The Grace of Stewardship*

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**Bible Text:** Exodus 35:20-29; 40:16-38

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## **Faith Church**

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I'd like to begin our time this morning by informing you of a few things that you may not have known, for example, did you know that Mister Rogers was a Navy Seal sniper in Vietnam responsible for numerous deaths? That's what they say, and the reason that he wore those sweaters was to cover up the tattoos. Did you know that? Also, did you know that if you put a tooth in a cup of Coke overnight that it will completely dissolve? That's right. That's what they say and some of you actually drank a Coke on the way over to church and you did not brush your teeth which is why they are dissolving right before our eyes. Did you know that Walt Disney is cryogenically frozen and will be thawed only when future technology can bring him back to life? That's what they say.

Now, some of you are already giving me the, "No," look. In fact, I can see people from Faith West giving me the, "No," look. That's not very nice. Others are checking this out on the Internet right now, like my-year-old grandson Liam likes to say, "Just Google it, Indiana Pop. Just Google it." That's what some of you are doing and in these cases, you would be doing that for good reason because what I have just illustrated are three of the more popular urban legends in our culture. Mister Rogers was not a Navy Seal. A tooth will not dissolve completely overnight in a glass of Coke. And Walt Disney, Walt Disney ain't frozen. He was cremated 49 years ago. But it's amazing, isn't it, how persistent stories like this can become.

Well, here's another urban legend that you probably heard if you've lived in this town for any period of time and that is that Faith Church sends its members monthly statements telling you how much you have to give. Have you ever heard that? I heard that not long after our family came here 28 years ago. I've heard that throughout the time I have lived in Lafayette. I heard it again recently. I have no idea how or when that started. I have no idea why that is so persistent, but at some point, folks, that's offensive. Do you realize that? That is offensive to our God because to suggest that the only way he has to motivate his people is through law or through raw duty. "Here's your monthly statement so you better pay your light bill or your electricity is going to be turned off and you'd better pay your God bill or you're going to get kicked out of heaven." Is that really the best that he would have?

It's also offensive to God's people. It's offensive to this church family historically because it suggests that the only reason we do what we do is because somebody else makes us do it. That notion fails to take into account the marvelous stewardship of a generous heart. With that in mind, open your Bible, if you would, to Exodus 35. That's on page 68 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you. Exodus is the second book of the Bible so Exodus 35 or page 68 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

I hope whenever you are turning to a place in the Bible whether it's your personal Bible study or some small group that you might be in or certainly whenever we're studying something here in church, that you automatically start thinking, "Now, where does that passage, Exodus 35, in this case, fit into the overall context of the Bible?" And I realize that for some who will hear this message today, you'll say, "Context, I don't have any context. I'm just learning the books." That's fine. That's why I give the page number. I want to be sure that everybody can follow along even if this is the first time you have opened the Bible. So that's fine if you don't have much context, but over time, you do start to get more of a skeleton, an outline, an understanding of the major themes and storylines. That's why over the years I have recommended this particular book, "30 Days to Understanding the Bible." It's a great book. It's a great read especially if you're just getting started at that.

Well, we're in Exodus 35 so what do we know about the book of Exodus? If you would like a fuller treatment of that question than time allows this morning, Pastor Aucoin has prepared a really helpful tool. You can find it at that address on the screen in our website. But Exodus should always be understood in tandem with the book of Genesis. In fact, frequently in Bible college or seminary, you'll take a class entitled GenEx. In other words, you're going to study those books as a unit on purpose so let's do that quickly before we read from Exodus 35.

The story begins with God creating a people for himself and to be a visible representation of the invisible God. So we're made in his image and we are commanded to fill the earth and rule over his creation and represent him well. By the way, if you were with us at our church family night a couple of weeks ago, and I hope you were, we just had some marvelous testimonies of men and women who are being baptized and others who are coming into the membership of our church and one of them was Steve R. who is a relatively new believer and he wove that concept of the importance of being a visible representation of the invisible God in just a delightful way in his testimony. So it's an important concept for sure.

Well, think about that and then think about this: human beings unfortunately repeatedly abdicate our role. We do our will instead of our Creator's and we seek to magnify ourselves instead of our God and the consequences biblically are always disastrous. Why? The way of the transgressor is hard so if you choose to live in a way that is inconsistent with your God-given design, it will always bring misery. It will always bring heartache and chaos to yourself and to those around you. So the first 11 chapters of the book of Genesis, they scream those messages in living Technicolor for sure.

Well, amazingly it's in that setting that God chose a man named Abram. In Genesis 12, it introduces the crucial theological concepts of 1. God making covenants, promises to sin cursed people, and the importance of human beings that in turn choosing to believe what God promised, to exercise their faith in them. That's why Paul said in Romans 4, "Abraham believed God and that's what was counted to him for righteousness." So Abraham did that. He believed God's promise of land and seed and blessing and God shows throughout the rest of the book of Genesis, 2. to keep those promises through the lives of the four patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. His dealings with them showed his ability to sovereignly orchestrate the details of their lives in a way that that they might not have even seen yet but chose to exercise their faith anyway. So for example, you have at the end of the book of Genesis Joseph saying to his sinful brothers, "You meant it for evil but," what? "But my faithful God, the one who made promises to me, my faithful God is working. He meant it for good."

Now, we're at the end of the book of Genesis and the children of Israel find themselves in Egypt, the place of God's miraculous provision from a worldwide famine. But when we open the book of Exodus, the book we're studying from this morning, 400 years have elapsed and a breathtaking fulfillment of the promises of God. Here's what we read, "But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly and multiplied and became exceedingly mighty so that the land was filled with them." Not bad, Abraham. Right, that's the point of that. God fulfilled his promises to childless Abraham. But now there's a king who doesn't remember Joseph. Remember, 400 years have elapsed and so they afflict God's people with torturous enslavement and even begin murdering their male children. We read in Exodus 2 at the beginning of the book we're about to study, "And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage and they cried out and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God." So God heard their groaning. Aren't you glad for a God who hears our groanings? There's a lot to groan about this week.

So God heard their groaning and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. You can think about the rest of the book up to chapter 35 in this way: there's God's deliverance. In chapters 1 to 18, the parting of the Red Sea, which is a beautiful picture, by the way, of our redemption. Then Exodus tells us about the giving of God's law in chapters 19 to 24, the presentation of the 10 Commandments and many other laws to guide those who have been delivered. Then a major emphasis on God's tabernacle, God's meeting place, an amazingly detailed description of the tabernacle where God's presence would especially dwell. Think about that. And where God's law then would be kept, where? Under the mercy seat and where forgiveness could be found because of the sacrificial system that was being instituted and where direction could be received.

Now, what should fascinate us in part about the tabernacle is how many chapters in this book are devoted to precise instructions about how it is to be built and also this: how the entire narrative begins with instructions about giving. I asked you to turn in your Bible to Exodus 35, I'm going to be there in a minute, but let me show you where this begins. It's Exodus 25, "Tell the sons of Israel." That sounds kind of like a command, doesn't it? Yeah, "Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me," in other words to build this

tabernacle. Now listen to this though, "From every man whose heart moves him," interesting, "you shall raise My contribution." You see, no statement will be coming in the mail.

Now, let's see if they did it. That's the question before the house: did they do it? Unlike Adam and Eve and their descendents who rebelled, unlike those in the days of Noah who went their own way or those who tried to build the Tower of Babel to glorify themselves, let's see if these miraculously redeemed people chose to obey their God and if so, how, and to what extent? I'm in Exodus 35, beginning in verse 20. "Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel departed from Moses' presence." They received that command, now what? Verse 21, "Everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came and brought the LORD'S contribution for the work of the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments. Then all whose hearts moved them." Do you think there might be a theme building here? "All whose hearts moved them, both men and women," note that, "came and brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and bracelets, all articles of gold; so did every man who presented an offering of gold to the LORD. Every man, who had in his possession blue and purple and scarlet material and fine linen and goats' hair and rams' skins dyed red and porpoise skins," for crying out loud, "brought them. Everyone who could make a contribution of silver and bronze brought the LORD'S contribution; and every man who had in his possession acacia wood for any work of the service brought it." Now this, "All the skilled women spun with their hands," that's different, "and brought what they had spun, in blue and purple and scarlet material and in fine linen." We're not going to give our worst to the Lord. "All the women whose heart stirred with a skill spun the goats' hair. The rulers brought the onyx stones and the stones for setting for the ephod and for the breastpiece; and the spice and the oil for the light and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. The Israelites, all the men and women, whose heart moved them to bring material for all the work, which the LORD had commanded," interesting juxtaposition again of those two concepts, "through Moses to be done, brought a freewill offering to the LORD."

Now, for sake of time, look over at chapter 40 to see how all of this ends. I'm skipping a lot just for sake of time but look at chapter 40:16. "Thus Moses did; according to all that the LORD had commanded him, so he did. Now in the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was erected." Now it's done. "Moses erected the tabernacle and laid its sockets, and set up its boards, and inserted its bars and erected its pillars. He spread the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering of the tent on top of it, just as the LORD had commanded Moses." Now look for this, look at the end of verse 21, "just as the LORD had commanded Moses." Verse 23, "just as the LORD had commanded Moses." Verse 25, "just as the LORD had commanded Moses." Do you think there's a theme there?

For the sake of time, look at verse 34, "Then the cloud," the Shekinah glory, the visible presence of God, "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." This was a special people. "Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the

tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel."

We're talking this morning about how our redeeming God can grant us stewardship of a generous heart. That's what we're after. And with the time we have remaining, let's look for three characteristics of the way godly people give. What a great passage. I mean, don't you want to be like them? Please tell me you want to be like them. Well, how do we get there? First of all, redeemed people clearly give from the heart. You saw that emphasized throughout this passage. Even at the beginning back in chapter 25, "Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me from every man whose heart moves him." And I tried to point it out as we were reading through it, did you notice the juxtaposition between the notion of commands and a willing heart? We're going to have to talk about that in a little bit. Then 10 chapters later where we started reading, "Everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him." By the way, don't think, "Okay, what's the difference? When do I know if my heart is stirring and my spirit is moving?" This is Hebrew parallelism, just trying to help us see. This isn't something that was imposed from without. "I have to because somebody is making me. I'll praise Jesus with you too." No, no, no, we're talking about something from within. "Their hearts stirred them and their spirits moved them." You saw it again in verse 22, "Then all whose hearts moved them, men and women, brooches, earrings, etc." Verse 26 again, "All the women whose hearts stirred with a skill spun the goat's hair." Or verse 29, "The Israelites, all the men and women whose hearts moved them to bring materials." It's pretty apparent, isn't it, what the Lord is trying to emphasize here? You see, something's happening that's a whole lot better than God sending them a statement in the mail and demanding payment regardless of how they feel in their hearts.

Now, please notice this also, this was being done by both men and women. That probably would not have fazed us but in this particular patriarchal culture in which this text was given, I think it would have stood out to the original readers. God was working in the hearts of the men. God was working in the hearts of the ladies. Everybody wanted on this. It was also done quickly. I like what this particular commentator observed about all of this. He said, "Corresponding to the last verses of the preceding paragraph," I didn't read those for sake of time but "they begin with the expression, 'and they departed.' After Moses gave the command, they departed. We have two verses commencing with the words, 'and they came.' A fine stylistic parallel which at the same time contains an allusion to the swift response of the children of Israel, men and women, to the request for the contributions to the sanctuary. As soon as Moses ended his address, they left to fetch their gifts and immediately returned with their offerings." Exactly. You see, the text is really clear that men and women gave quickly from their hearts.

Now, what does that tell us? Here is some incredibly great news. It's possible to order our affections. Do you realize that? You can change what you want. That's some great news. You can change what's going on in your heart. The Gospel of Jesus Christ doesn't simply help you change what you do with your hands, it can help you change the direction of

your heart. John Piper wrote, "Christian conversion on the other hand is a supernatural radical thing. The heart is changed." Do you believe that? "The heart is changed and the evidence of it is not just new decisions but new affections." Do you believe that? You saw that in this text: new affections, new feelings.

You probably know John Piper is a student of Jonathan Edwards who wrote the classic volume on this topic, "The Religious Affections," and Jonathan Edwards said this, "But yet it is evident that religion consists so much in the affections as that without holy affection," he's talking about our desires. He's talking about the way we cultivate our hearts, "there is no true religion. No light in the understanding is good which does not produce holy affection in the heart. No habit or principal in the heart is good which has no such exercise and no external fruit is good which does not proceed from such exercises."

Now, we're not talking about living by our feelings or only obeying when we feel like it. That is not the point. But listen, the greatest obedience always proceeds from well ordered affections. Do you understand that? The greatest obedience always proceeds from a well ordered heart, from well ordered affections. Lest I be heard to suggest that you conjure this up on your own, John Calvin in his commentary on this exact same text puts emphasis where it belongs on the power of the Holy Spirit of God. Here's what he said, "For Moses, even while praising their spontaneous feelings in this text, does not mean to exclude the grace of the Spirit whereby alone our hearts are inclined to holy affections." Note that. "But the stirring up is contrasted with unwillingness by which ungodly men are withheld and restrained. Those therefore whom the Spirit rules," does he rule you, by the way? Are you loving this text right now? I hope so because I am. "Therefore whom the Spirit rules, he does not drag unwillingly by a violent and extrinsic impulse, as it is called, but he so works within them upon their will." I love this. "He so works within them upon their will that believers stir up themselves and they voluntarily follow his leadings." Amen. Amen. Amen. I hope I could hear that even from Faith West, you were amening so much.

Now, you probably already did this but I would encourage you if you haven't yet, pull out this stewardship commitment card from your bulletin, if you would, and just kind of lay that baby on your lap. Now, don't be afraid of it. It's not going to bite you. Some of you, "I don't even want to touch that." Relax. Stewardship calls upon us to consider every aspect of our lives, right, including and maybe especially the heart that God has entrusted to us. Do you believe that? God gave you a heart and I mean by that not your blood pumper, I'm talking about your inner person and someday you'll give an account for how you chose to order your desires, how you chose to order your affections.

One of the exercises, are you ready for some homework? "Your pastor must love the fire out of you if he would even give you homework." That's right. Here's one of the exercises I would encourage you to go through with your spouse if you're married or by yourself if you're not, or with a friend, is to look through your checkbook register over the past year. Look over your bank statements or your credit card statements if that's the way you typically organize your spending. Take an honest look at where your money goes and

then simply ask this: what do your spending habits say about the condition of your affections? Great question, huh? That was a good question. What do your spending habits say about the condition of your affections? And the fact of the matter is some people who call themselves Christians in this country will spend more money on dog food and overpriced lattes than they will on the things of God, and I'm not particularly worried about the color of the cup in which your latte comes, I'm concerned about why you're spending four bucks on that swill to begin with. Just chatting.

And you might say, "Hey, are you judging me?" I love when people wrinkle up their face at me while I'm up here trying to do my job. "Are you judging me?" Well, I don't have to. Your math will if you'll let it. If you'll let it. And for some, if you do what I just said, that will be a delightful and encouraging exercise to see how the Holy Spirit of God over time with you and your honey has helped you change the nature of your desires. Change the nature of your affections. For others, it will be a convicting process but that's how change takes place. Don't be afraid of the Bible. Don't be afraid of those who are trying to help you take an honest look at what's going on and if change is necessary, run, don't walk to the mercy seat. Run, don't walk to the cross. Run, don't walk to a God who stands ready to forgive and help you change.

Now, while we're on this topic. You got me here, I don't remember how I got here, but while we're here, let me tell you why some people will not do what I just encouraged you to do: because if you did this as a couple, it would be to a fight. I've been in this pastor business a long time and I do know this: there are some husbands right now who are shaking in their boots and they're hoping I'm going to get off this topic just as fast as I possibly could. And if that's the case, if you say, "Listen, there is no way my honey and I could have an objective conversation about our spending because it lead to a fight," can I just love you enough to tell you that you've got a much larger problem than money? And I want to challenge you to sit down with someone and if you don't have a someone, if you email me, I will hook you up with a someone, to sit down with someone who can work with you as a couple and help you begin making concrete plans to get to a better place in your ability to communicate, in your ability to talk honestly about what's going on in your hearts and in a way that will help you become better stewards of every area of life, because listen, this is not in the Bible to hurt you. God did not write this to jam you up. God put this in his word to give you hope, that you can get to a place of living in a way that is consistent with the rightly ordered desires of the people in this passage.

Now, what else can we learn from the details and the argument of this text? Redeemed people give of whatever God has entrusted to them. You saw it in the passage, of their possessions, "all whose hearts moved them, both men and women came and brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and bracelets, etc." And I won't take the time to read down through all the verses again but they brought fine linens, they brought skins, silver, bronze, wood, jewels, spice, oil, whatever God had entrusted to them that could be of use in this building of the tabernacle.

You might say, "Hey, where did they get all that stuff? Where did they get all of this?" Well, some writers believe that was part of plundering the Egyptians who had oppressed

them for so long. You remember, the Egyptians threw them practically out of the country and gave them whatever they asked for. That was back in Exodus 12. "The Egyptians urged the people, to send them out of the land in haste, for they said, 'We're going to all be dead.' So the people took their dough before it was leavened," the feast of the unleavened bread, "with their kneading bowls bound up in the clothes on their shoulders. Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians." Oh, by the way, you mind giving us some silver? "Articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians."

Well, who wouldn't have liked to have kept the plunder, right? Especially if you received it as a result of being oppressed for all those years. Payback time, baby. "This belongs to me." I mean, everybody likes a new outfit, right? Everybody likes a little gold, a little silver. Who wouldn't have wanted to keep all the plunder? Well, what did their heart tell them to do next? No statement in the mail. What did their heart tell them to do with what had been entrusted to them? To give it to the God they loved, their affections, because of the value they placed on what was being constructed.

Now, they also gave of their abilities. Did you notice that transition in the text? "All the skilled women spun with their hands and brought what they had spun in blue and purple and scarlet material and in fine linen." You don't bring your junk to God. It's a travesty when men from a church somewhere get together and put a roof on the church house and the shingles are going every which direction as long as you're ready for fried chicken at lunch, but when you're doing something on your own house, those shingles better be straight. Shame on the people of God for ever giving him their leftovers. So please tell me you would never do that. No, we're talking about fine, we're talking about the best.

"All the women whose hearts stirred with a skill that they spun the goats' hair." Now, are you picturing that in your mind? Are you picturing the kiddies standing around asking, "Hey, momma, momma, are you making yourself a new dress?" For that mom to be able to say, "Oh no, I'm making something for the tabernacle right now. It's about the tabernacle, and God's about to do something marvelous for us and I want him to have our very best."

Now, there's another important point we need to bring to the table. I've been alluding to this throughout in this text but this is based on what had been commanded. You see, I realize someone might walk away from this presentation thinking, "Well, I guess Pastor Viars is saying that if I don't feel like giving, I shouldn't do it. Let's go order that new car, Myrtle." Well, my apologies to all the Myrtles who are here. I try to pick a name that I don't think anybody here will have but I generally mess it up and I'll get an email by noon about it.

No, you ought to ask yourself, "After as long as you say you've been a Christian, why wouldn't you feel like it?" That's really the question, and we make that point on exegetical grounds. There is a fascinating interplay here between God's commands and

our affections. Now, I need you to think hard now for the next couple of minutes. Just follow. What is the relationship between the commands of God and my desires? Don't view them as opposites. Remember how all this started in chapter 25, "Tell," that's a command, "Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me from every man whose heart moves him, you shall raise My contribution." You have a command and a willing generous heart side-by-side and obviously we're in the book where the 10 Commandments were given. We're not going to say that the law doesn't matter or has nothing to do with a generous heart. Then remember the summary of the story at the end of the book. I just pointed out that repetitive phrase, "Just as the LORD had commanded. Just as the LORD had commanded. Just as the LORD had commanded."

Well, what's the relationship then between God's commands and our affections? In the beginning, God's commands clashed with our affections big time. Did you come out of the womb saying, "I want to do what God wants me to do"? No, you didn't, I'll talk to your momma. No, they clash with our desires because God wants this and I want that. Can I just get an amen on that? Don't look around, "I've never experienced that before." That's the way it is. But as the New Testament explains, his law then can be a schoolmaster. It leads us. It reveals the selfishness of our desires and it leads us to the mercy seat, in our case, leading us to the cross. That's why Abraham was not justified by his obedience, Abraham was justified by his faith in the one who gave the law.

That's why I would say this morning if you've never trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, please don't think another second about anything you would give to him until first you are willing to admit your need, that your desires have run amuck. This is not your best day now. This is your worst day now. We're talking about sin and its impact on the nature of our hearts and it would be your responsibility and your privilege to run to the cross of Christ in repentance and faith and beg him for forgiveness that only comes through his shed blood and it's only then that we could possibly begin changing at the level of the heart and that's the beauty that after you come to Christ, it's not like, "Okay, then they come out with this whole rule book." No, we're talking about God's law being written on your heart.

That's one of the marvelous provisions of the new covenant. Remember, when we observe the Lord's Table together, we lift up the cup and what do we say? "This cup is the," what? "The new covenant in my blood," referring back to Genesis 31. And one of the marvelous provisions of the new covenant we enjoy in Christ together as believers is that the law of God is written where? Is written on our hearts. So now you do things not because you have to, but because you love God and you want to. You want to. That's why James referred to God's word as one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of, what? Have you ever thought about how those words don't go together very well unless we love God. The law of liberty. Here's what maturity looks like: loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Do you? And then choosing over time to learn to order your desires, your affections to match his and loving to do what he loves for you to do and makes possible through the shed blood of his Son.

Now back to this stewardship brochure. We're encouraging everybody who is attending our church to complete this. It's a good opportunity to do planning. It's a good opportunity to do evaluation. It will not hurt you. That's how, you say, "How did things get this way around this church?" Well, over the years, 51 years now, the majority of men and women associated with this place have chosen to be stewards of their generous hearts. No, we never sent out an end of the month statement because it's not necessary if you have a family of people who are focused on cultivating generous hearts. So many of us, it started by tithing, meaning giving a tenth of our income to the church. The Bible would refer to that as storehouse tithing, Malachi 3. And lest anybody say, "You see, I knew he was a legalist." You've been wrinkling up your face a lot at sweet old Pastor Viars today, but don't think, "Well, tithing is part of the law."

No, tithing predates the law by several hundred years. Do you know the first example in the Bible of a person tithing, Genesis 14. Again, 700 years before what we're reading about this morning. It's a fascinating story of our man Abraham, and the Bible tells us about Abraham having this marvelous victory. It was the battle of the kings and he won all sorts of plunder and now he's bringing it back and bam, out of nowhere he meets this priest. Remember the priest's name? Melchizedek. Who's he? We don't know. He just met him. A priest. And what does the Bible say Abraham immediately did to this priest? Here's the answer: he gave him a tenth of all.

There are people in this church who have been doing that since the day they were old enough to earn a paycheck. You'll have older women in this church who started doing that when they were 13 years old from their babysitting money. Not because they had to but because they wanted to.

Well, the Lord has also, you see it in that brochure, has given us several special ministries and this church had to make a decision over time, "Do we want God to give us a school? Do we want God to give us a Vision of Hope? Do we want God, etc. etc." And historically we said, "Even though as a church budget we're going to have to supplement those, we're willing to do it." So we encourage our church family to grow in their giving and to consider giving additionally for those kind of ministries and we're happy about it. We'd take that deal again in a heartbeat, even if I can't get as many swill cups in the red version. I mean, we'd do whatever we had to do in order to make that happen.

Then occasionally we have a special project. Right now it's the Hartford Hub. We're trying to have a more effective ministry down in the north end where there is great spiritual need and we want to bring the Gospel there in a new and creative way. We're hoping to raise \$500,000 as part of our year in giving. We understand some are going to want to spread that out into next year as well, but there's no arm twisting. "He's got my arm!" No, there is no arm twisting. There are no emotional appeals. There doesn't have to be if our affections are attuned to the redemptive heart of our God.

And I rarely, I realize you might say, "This is my first Sunday. Now I know what this place is like." Look, I rarely talk about money around here. Frankly, I generally give one giving sermon a year. If this is your first Sunday here, apparently God thought you

needed it so that's just the way it is. But I'll tell you what, I'm not apologizing for this. I slept so well last night. I could have slept through the first service if I wanted to. I slept really well like a baby. Why? Because I don't think the word of God is ever going to hurt anybody. I don't think the word of God will ever hurt anyone and I would, while we're on the topic, to encourage everybody present to give this area of your stewardship past, present and future careful consideration and take heart. The verses scream the message, "There is hope." God can help you even handle this area of your life well.

Lastly, redeemed people give because of what can be accomplished together. What were they giving to? What did the tabernacle mean to them? A commentator said this, "The description of the donors is long and detailed as though Scripture were depicting," think about this, "depicting for us the long and crowded queue of people in their multitudes bringing their contributions. The fact that the word 'brought' occurs seven times in this paragraph is not without significance. What an interesting picture of people waiting in line to give." Why? Well, it's because the tabernacle was where God's presence would especially dwell and where the law would be kept and where forgiveness could be found and where direction could be received.

Look, as New Testament believers don't we have all of that in Christ and more? Because he made a perfect sacrifice once and for all? Our former pastor, Bill Goode, used to like to say because he taught on stewardship faithfully as well and he said, "Listen, I ought to be more excited about the blood of Christ than an Old Testament Jew would ever be excited about the blood of a bull or goat." That's exactly right. We want Christ's message to be shined as brightly as possible here and around the world, not because we have to, but by his grace he changed us at the level of the heart.

And we have incredible ministry opportunities around here and we want them funded. For example, do you realize one of our staff members, the pastor who oversees Vision of Hope, Mark Shaw, he was just returning from a trip to Egypt this week. Aren't you glad that the Gospel was just proclaimed in Egypt? Guess where he was laid over on Monday? Paris. Paris. You never know. You never know the opportunities for ministry and I'm simply saying this: we want that funded, don't we? If we could take the Gospel to Egypt, tell me how? Stretch me thin as Amy G. said in her testimony. I want to be stretched thin for that.

Another couple of our men, David S. and Mike King, just returned this week from the Congo. What a great ministry opportunity. Don't we want to be involved in that? And we would give to that kind of thing not because we have to. My, oh my, oh my, because we want to. And when we do, I had somebody ask me yesterday and I have this question all the time, "How in the world does your church get the money it has to do what you folks do?" Well, it's not about us. It is not about us. It gives me an opportunity then to do exactly what occurred in this text focusing on the glory of God.

"Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of God filled the tabernacle." Now I realize, look, I understand, I'll go to my grave with people saying, "You know, your church sends out monthly statements." I understand people are going to believe that

forever but anybody who believes that is probably also wondering about the nature of Mr. Rogers tattoos. But many other have and will rightly conclude, "No, you don't get there with monthly statements, you get there by redeemed, joyful, willing, generous hearts." Why? Because the glory of God is among us.

Would you stand with me for prayer?

*Father in heaven, thank you for this passage. Lord, thank you for this day in which the people of God got it right. And Lord, I pray that we would allow your sanctifying grace to help us be like them and for the many here who are, thank you for their faithfulness. For those who need to get to a better place, Lord, I just pray that we would do business with you so that we can stand in line to glorify you better. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.*