

Give Generously

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Amen. Let's take our Bibles and I want you to go Matthew 6 this morning. We've been in something of a disjointed season coming out of the holidays and trying to navigate this virus situation and coming into the conference and thinking about getting ready for it. I, I look forward to after the conference jumping back into our book study of 2 Timothy but I wanted to give you this message before the conference this morning, Matthew 6, and just hold your Bible open there for a moment and let me talk to you about practical things are foundational to the way we function here at Grace Life Church of the Shoals and have for many many years.

First of all, and all this is introduction then we can just set this aside, all right? I want to say, mention to you afresh three basic biblical truths about giving. Three basic, I should say three basic biblical types of giving. I'm not saying they're not, there are only three, there may be many more but these three basic truths about the way we're to give to support God's work are, are common and abundant in Scripture. First of all, we believe in teaching not legalistically, not as a commandment of works, but out of a heart of love we believe in teaching that we ought to bring a tithe for the local operating budget of the church. Now a tithe is a guide. It's not an absolute. Matter of fact, under grace I think you would consider it a starting point. As one person said, learning to tithe and teaching folks to tithe is like the training wheels of giving. It just gets you going. Uh, I have faithfully by God's grace always given more than a tithe to the local operating budge of my church. I could not, I would not charge you to do something I haven't lived. I did that when I made \$50 a week when I first came on staff, and I do that today.

So there, the Bible teaches tithing and more for the local operating budge of the church. Secondly, and this is what we're talking about today a lot, and that's a faith commitment offering for world missions, that is, there's this thing in the New Testament, again it's not an absolute, it's not a command, but there's an illustration in, in, in 2 Corinthians of how Paul wanted the local church at Corinth to get ready to give a missions offering to help, help the saints over in Jerusalem who were suffering. So Paul sends some of the brethren, Titus and some of the brethren, to Corinth ahead to get them ready to give their gift and that's a faith commitment offering. When you take your faith commitment envelope and you indicate on the top line what you're gonna give, on the second line the frequency you're gonna give it, we'll total all those up and we'll make our missions budget. But you're not giving it yet, this is getting you ready to give and that's what 2 Corinthians 9

teaches. Paul said the brethren are gonna...matter fact, Paul said, "I'm gonna send the brethren ahead to guard against covetousness. I know you want to give a good gift but I, I need, I need to send some brothers on ahead to, to get you ready to give it, then later I'll come and some other brothers will come with me, that's when we'll start receiving the gifts for this missions offering to go to the church in Jerusalem."

So from that biblical truth we developed the faith commitment offerings. Not original with me or us. It's been around a while. We've put our own twist on it but that's another biblical truth about giving and God has mightily wonderfully blessed our missions support since we went to this approach. So we give 12 months out of the year but all we'll be doing the week of the conference is indicating what we'll give, that is, getting ready to start giving. Now Brother Steve, gonna put you on the spot. When does the new year start? July 1. Now I always just start the next month with my new amount but would you say it would be right to say sometime between the conference and July 1st your new amount needs to be kicking in, is that right? Hopefully by April, all right. I know he'd bump it up a little bit if I asked him about it.

Well, anyway it gives us an idea how to set up our world missions budget and as I've said, God has wonderfully wonderfully blessed that. I remember years ago when we first went to this approach, it was not the Southern Baptist way of doing missions support because Southern Baptists always had a Christmas love offering. Let's see, was that, that was home missions, I think, and then an Easter offering for international missions. And that's fine, that's perfectly fine, but when we went to this approach, we went from about \$40,000 a year to hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, getting criticism from the denominational leaders and they started saying, "Can you teach us how you did that?" Literally, I preached at big churches all over America about how to teach and lead your church to be involved in missions because they lack the extra money. Well, we don't give them any money today so it doesn't matter, I guess, but nevertheless that's just a little tidbit of history.

The third biblical truth we've used from various times is something for special and unique needs and that's what I call a lifestyle sacrifice. It's where we look at a project, we look at a need and we say, "We need a huge amount of financial resources to get this done so let's all join in together and let's make a three year commitment. Over the next three years we're all gonna give above and beyond an amount from our household, from our lifestyles to, to meet this need, this next project, and we're, we're gonna take something out of our lifestyles." One of the most common illustrations is, "I'm not gonna buy a new car for three years. I'm gonna keep the old car and that house, or that car payment I would have paid for a car, I'll give that to that special project." We call that a lifestyle sacrifice for special needs.

Now I don't have time but these are thoroughly taught in Scripture and there could be others but we found that God has blessed that through the years. Is it not wonderful that we don't have to have special offerings to hire the architect, to renovate the old auditorium, to build the new auditorium, it's all been done. Praise the Lord. Which not be good for us, by the way. You get to resting on your laurels, you get an ease in Zion and

that's not good for you sometimes, but you know me, we'll find something to spend our money on. Matter of fact, God's blessed us with a wonderful balance in our local operating budget and so hopefully we can continue to patch and mend and fix some stuff around here that literally a lot of things hadn't been touched in 30-40 years.

Um, now let's go to real quick four basic biblical truths about Christian financial blessing. If you want to be financially blessed, now this does include the amount of money or wealth God allows you to have, but it's not necessarily and absolutely that. Often the financial blessing – now listen to me – means that the, the finances God entrusts to you are blessed instead of cursed. You're better off to have little or nothing that's blessed than to have a whole lot that's got the curse of God on it. I've never seen a wealthy individual grow old who was greedy and selfish and didn't honor God with their wealth and so the wealth that they had is not a blessing to them, it becomes a curse and a bitterness in their lives.

How do, how do we, how are we to be financially blessed as Christians? Well, foundationally and I, I, I need to say a whole lot about this but just not time, the heart condition is the primary foundational issue. Okay, are you hearing me? The heart condition, a heart that's striving to joy in Christ, a heart that is striving to treasure Christ, a heart that can say, "Lord, I enjoy good stuff and nice things if You'll see fit to bless me, but You are my true joy and You are my true treasure." If that's not there, everything else I'm telling you is null and void. We're, we're not about superstition. You don't just plug in a formula and, zap, you get something, okay? It's the heart condition, but with the heart condition being right, these four basic biblical principles must be there.

1. Hard work. Number 1: hard work. Is it not a testament to the fallen, non-wisdom and depravity of men's hearts and minds that we have a massive movement in our world today of handing out stuff to everybody that they can define as needy or a victim or oppressed or whatever it might be, and they end up with this, with this warped sense of compassion actually hurting the people they're trying to help. You know why? God ordained people work for their wealth. You put a person, you, you drag a person down beneath the level of human dignity when you just give to them without any responsibility. And these liberals and leftists that are teaching this stuff, all they're doing is ruining a whole generation of people. God ordained work. Hard work. Now it is true when you, when you've got 30-40-50 years in that you shouldn't have to hold your nose to the grindstone in those first 20 or 30 years. Now and that's part of God's blessedness, but generally speaking hard work is a foundational truth for financial blessing.

2. Spend responsibly. Now again I've got sermons on each one of these and I'm trying not to belabor each point. Spend responsibly just means that you have a disciplined approach, a budgeted type approach to your expenditures in your life. And of course, one of the things there would be to be very careful about indebtedness and the things you will have any debt toward.

3. Hard work. Spend responsible. Thirdly, invest wisely. The Bible teaches there is a, a, an importance in putting back and in saving even investing your money. There's parables

in the New Testament where our Lord used how wise it is to invest and get a return. That's a good thing. That's a gift from God and you can't expect to go through your life with no, uh, wisdom about putting back or investing and be blessed financially.

Now we come to the fourth one and that's where I'm going to camp this morning: give generously. Give generously. You cannot be blessed of God and have blessed wealth if you're not one who has a heart that says, "I want to generously honor and support the Lord's work." And as you make your faith commitment, again on the top line you'll indicate the amount you want to, uh, commit to missions this next year through Grace Life Church, and on the second line you'll indicate how often that amount will be turned in, when you do that, my joy is not in the final number, it's really not. It used to be a lot but it's not because I know God's gonna take care of his resources if our hearts are right but that you give generously with the right heart motive and attitude. Not out of guilt. Not out of some deal with the Lord that I'll do this, Lord, if you'll do that. No, it's, Lord, we want to see you advanced and you glorified. And the best we understand our Bibles, the way to do that is through our local churches.

Now the foundational truth here, Matthew 6:31-33. I have just 33 on the screen but let's get the context. Matthew 6:31,

31 "Do not worry then [our Lord says], about, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'" 32 For the Gentiles [those that don't know God] eagerly seek all these things [in other words, why would your life be driven just like those who are pagans and don't know God?]; for your heavenly Father [middle of verse 32] your heavenly Father knows that you need all this stuff [that's my translation]. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all that stuff you need will be added to you."

Now that's the way a disciple lives. That's the way a God-fearer, one who's striving to honor the Lord lives. He strives to put God's cause first and trusts God to bring the clothing, the food, the provisions, the material elements of life.

Let me give you some points here. They're, I could pull out many others but from a systematic overview of Scripture here's the points I want to bring out this morning.

I. The profit in giving. The profit in giving. Now that's not prophet like a preacher but profit like money. I, I, I'm, I would say amused but really I'm, I'm saddened by the number of Reformed and Conservative scholars who come to the verses in the Bible that clearly teach God, generally speaking, wants to bless you financially and they're so afraid of the prosperity gospel movement, which is wrong, which is out of balance, they're so afraid of that movement they overlook these truths and explain them away. But let's look at it together.

Now again, the heart motive is the key foundationally issue but if the heart is right and you are generous in your giving primarily to God's work and God causes, here are some

verses and I'll just run through them. Proverbs 8:21, "To endow those who love me with wealth, That I may fill their treasuries." Doesn't mean that God's always gonna make godly people wealthy but generally speaking God has a pattern of blessing those who love him and strive to put him first. Now it includes more than material wealth but we cannot say it does not include material wealth. Sometimes God does just bless in ways that it, and it's not financial after we've given, but very often it is and does include financial blessing back to the one who gave.

Proverbs 11:25, "The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered." Proverbs 22:4, "The reward," or consequence, "of humility and the fear of the LORD Are riches, honor and life." Can't get around this. You just can't explain it away. It includes financial recompense back to the giver from the hand of God.

Malachi 3:10, "'Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,' says the LORD, 'if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overthrows, overflows rather.'" So here they're bringing material gifts to God's work at the temple and God says, "If you'll do that with the right heart motive, I will see that it comes back and blesses you."

Now a lot of you out there, you've been out, you've been at it 20-30-40 years like me and God's just blessed you. I mean, it's, you're not the wealthiest guy in town maybe but just, just things have been good. I mean, how did you think that happened? Think. Have you not tried to tithe and bring offerings and make faith commitments through the years? So does it surprise you that God brings back a financial blessing? It shouldn't. God just does those kind of things.

Well, let's go to the New Testament. 2 Corinthians 9:8, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything," that's talking about material goods, "you may have an abundance for every good deed." So again we give, God gives it back, we give some more, and we keep this reciprocal flow going in our lives.

Philippians 4:19 after the Philippian church had sent to Paul an abundant offering for his ministry, Paul writes, "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." That means in proportion to the infinite wealth God has, he will supply it back to you. Can't take this out of the Bible. It's so clear.

Mark 10:29-30, "Jesus said, 'Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house,' to honor the Lord sometimes it may cost you for a while, "or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake," that means Matthew 6:33 is true in your life, you've put Christ's kingdom first and its cost you might materially, "but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age." So that's not just talking about spiritual blessing though it includes that because he's real specific here, "houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life." Clearly taught in Scripture. This is a strong verse. You see, when God blesses me materially, he gloriously brings with it,

and often before it, certain trials that humble me lest the material gain draw me from a pure devotion to him. So you gotta understand he'll bring something with that material blessing that humbles you and causes you to say, "I enjoy this stuff but He's my stuff. He's my real joy." God's wise. He loves you too much to let stuff ruin you. He loves you too much to let material blessings become your god because though money is a wonderful tool, money is a cruel master.

Luke 6:38, "Give and it will be given to you, good measure--pressed down, shaken together, and running over they will pour into your lap." It'll come through other people, other places. "For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return." I, I, in the last few months, I've had several of our faithful businessmen and it wasn't orchestrated, just maybe in the hallway, I think one time we went out to lunch and they said, "Pastor, you just wouldn't believe this happened and this happened and this person bought this out of my hand, and I got three times more for it than I ever thought it would be worth and God just blessed," he said, "I wasn't looking for it. I didn't go out and have a strategic plan, it just happened and I've been materially blessed." I just happen to know these men for decades and I know how generous they are to honor God's work. Listen to me folks, that doesn't just happen. You say, "Yeah, but I know pagan and wicked men that stuff just falls in their lap and they've got great wealth." Yes, but here's the problem: it's cursed wealth. It's cursed wealth and they can't really enjoy it because it owns them, they don't own it, and there's a difference. Remember I've told you many many times it's not sin to have wealth, it's sin to love wealth. I know more people who are poor who have the sin of the love of money than I know wealthy people who have the sin of loving money because there are more poor people than there are wealthy people. It's a heart issue. You can have nothing and love it, and love stuff, and you can have a lot of stuff and love stuff but it's the heart attitude.

I, Pam and I were talking about, I, I've mentioned some of these things in the past but how God has proven this truth in my own life and I just want to mention some of these, uh, for the glory of God and to humbly admit that what I have come from the hand of God. It's nothing I deserve and nothing I, I can claim credit for but we had a revival meeting here many many years ago and some of you will remember that the, the singing group was traveling in this old dilapidated motor home and I forgot how many children were in the singing group but it was a bunch, but I mean it was, they were in a desperate place, and I led us to do something I've never done before that and never done since then, I got in the pulpit and said, "Pam and I have a little money," and we just had a little, I mean, this was pretty early in our marriage and when Pam and I got married, well, she had some money because she was a superstar person, you know all about that, she had money but I didn't have anything. No, she'd gotten some gifts and that was nice but before we married, you couldn't have more of nothing than I had. You just couldn't. I had all of nothing you could possibly have. "And we put a little money back for some, some patio furniture and we're gonna give the money we've got put back to help them buy a motor home," and I said, "nobody should feel an obligation but if anybody else wants to pitch in," and I think it went on for two or three hours people just kept pledging money and we gave them about \$35,000 to buy a new motor home. But here's the part you don't

know: couple of weeks later, family in the church bought me and Pam patio furniture. Stuff just keeps coming back when you try to put first the kingdom of God.

Y'all remember the old auditorium over there? It's the chapel. We're on our third renovation of that building and we, this is the best one. But we were going to renovate that building, this has been many many years ago, and Pam and I had, again, put some money back for an anniversary. I think that was our 10th anniversary, I'm not sure. And, um, uh, I, I'm not as, as disciplined and wise as Brother Steve, I've never had a real good emergency account, I've had little but not much, but anyway we thought we need to renovate that building. If I'm the pastor, I need to be an example. I'm not going to charge my people to give if I'm not gonna do it. So we cleaned out our bank account again and gave the money we'd put back for an anniversary trip to renovate the building and God blessed and you guys came through and we renovated that building. But over the next couple of years, I got a check from an insurance company I had no idea was coming, and we got free trips to both New York to see some plays and to Hawaii. We had a better trip than we could've ever afforded. God knows how to bring it back.

Now let me throw this in at this point: there have been times when we've tried to give generously to be quite honestly from an American definition, we were kinda strapped because of our commitment to give and it didn't flow right back and you know what God was telling me? "Did you give it to get it back or did you give it because you love Me?" Are you with me, church? Generally he does but occasionally he may test you. "No, it's gonna be lean for awhile and you're gonna have to live to this commitment you've made because you love Me." And I said, "Amen, that's right. Yes, Lord."

When we, um, started thinking about building a new auditorium, do you remember the Hire the Architect campaign? We had a Hire the Architect. I forgot how much the architect cost but it cost a lot to what we had and I thought, "Well, I'm the pastor of the church. If I'm gonna charge my people to give generously, I've got to do that. I can't be a hypocrite in this thing." Well, once again, we didn't have any money in the bank but I had bought a new 4 wheel drive vehicle and it was the first 4 wheel drive vehicle I ever owned and I loved it because I could just get out in the woods and sling dirt and mud. It was just fun. And I said, "Pam, you know, the only real way we've gotta give in money is we've got good equity in that car. Let's sell that car and I'll get a little something to drive and down the road maybe I can get another one." And so we sold the car, gave those thousands of dollars to the Hire the Architect campaign and it wasn't, I don't know, two or three months later a family in the church gave Pam and I a brand new car.

God does that. What does this text say? "They will pour into your lap." It comes through human means but you didn't see it coming and you didn't know how it would come.

Then the last one I'll mention is when we built this auditorium. You remember Project 2000? That ring a bell to any of you? We're gonna raise all this money. We wanted a, we had this huge capital campaign and I don't know, Brother Bill Newman knows all these figures, \$1.4-1.7 million dollars we actually got together up front in cash to build the building and I thought once again, "Hey, if I'm the pastor of this church, I'm charging

these people let's build this auditorium for God's work, if I don't do it, I'm a hypocrite." So we didn't have really anything in the bank to look at but we made a pledge in faith we're gonna give \$30,000 to the building campaign. Now that might as well have been \$300,000 to be honest, and it was tough for awhile but you know where that money came from? We had started saving money to build the new house we now live in and we put a bunch of money back to build that new house and so we just cleaned all that out and gave it to the building program of the church.

Now here's what I want to say: I'm not saying anybody else is supposed to do that. You're not less spiritual if you didn't or do not do those kind of things because I haven't done those kind of things in a long time. All I'm saying to you when God impresses you and you do it, it's amazing how he takes care of you.

So we gave our money for a down payment to build a new house and part of that motivation was because my, uh, accountant at the time, his name's Ricky Kennedy, a good brother, a good man, he had been telling me for several years, "Brother Jeff, the church keeps upping your salary, the church keeps being blessed," he said, "you need to sink all the money you can in a house. It's a great, uh, tax shelter especially for ordained ministers." You may not know this, ministers get an extra deduction nobody else gets and it's a huge, huge blessing. He said, "Put all you can in a house." So that's what we were trying to do but we gave that to the building program and in two years – now here's the point – after we gave our last dollar on that \$30,000 above and beyond commitment, two years after that there were six different channels of financial blessing that came to us that enabled us to build the house we live in today, channels you could have never figured out.

I'll just give you one real quick. Church member called me and said, "Pastor, I know you love woods and I know you've thought about maybe investing in real estate one day as, as a part of your retirement." He said, "I've got this family that lives in Georgia. They've inherited some land up here in Culvert County and they've given me the price. I think it's a great price, do you want to buy that land?" Well, I had no idea what land was, I had no concept. So I called another church member who does that. He looked at the land and said, "Boy, you'd better buy it." So I didn't have any money so I went to the bank and borrowed the money and bought the land. A month later I sold the timber and two months later I sold the land and we had a huge pile of cash with the other five channels to put a very big large down payment on the house we've been living in for 21 years.

Here's what I'm saying to you: give and it will be given to you, good measure, pressed down, running over. They will pour into your lap and you'll never be able to figure out. But now listen to me: the heart attitude is foundational and I think God also wants to know do you work hard? Do you spend responsibly? Do you invest wisely? And do you give generously? And I'm gonna tell you what it does, it humbles you and you come to a point in your life, I'm 41, almost 41 years into this thing now and you're, you're, you're generous and gracious to your staff and that's biblical and right and good, but you realize you cannot explain my life based on my salary and what I give and what I have. It's not

explainable. It doesn't work on paper. It just doesn't work. It ought to be said of all of us, I can live like I live because I give like I give.

Now are you listening to your pastor this morning? My story's not supposed to be your story. You may not be supposed to be doing anything I've done. I want you, I'll free you. All I'm saying is you get with God and you honor him from your heart knowing that God for some reason gave us an abundance of specific promises that as a general rule he floods it back to us when we give and honor him first. Maybe some of you this year ought to do something supercalifragilisticexpialidocious on this offering, just, just something unusual. Just say, "Lord, I love You." I don't know, maybe not. I would charge all of you as I'm going to do and I don't, I think every year we've always done this, I'm gonna do at least a little more than last year in my faith commitment. It may be \$5, it may be \$50, it may need to be \$500,000. I don't know but I'd charge you can you do a little more than last year?

Well, how's our time doing? I'm gonna hurry.

II. The priority of giving. The priority of giving. Giving is a real priority in our Christian discipleship and one of the primary reasons, A, is because it reveals the heart. When you, when you look at your bank account, when you look at your checkbook, when you look at how you respond when material stuff comes up, it's a good check-up for what's lord of your life or who's Lord of your life, or who's on the throne of your life. It's just a good check-up. I turned in my tithes and offerings this morning, dropped it in one of those boxes and I'll just be honest, I try to give generously and I, I, my accountant is sitting back there, you can ask him. Say, "Does pastor give generously?" I think he'd say yes, confident that he would. But sometimes if I get to looking at those numbers too much, I think, "God, I could back that off a bunch and do some other stuff." But I need to do, I, I need to give that.

Do you remember that doctor I told you about him a while back, there's a doctor who found that there's a nerve that wraps all around your heart and that nerve has a linkage, it comes off that nerve and it comes down through your hip and it connects to your billfold. You want to find a man's heart? Find out what that billfold's about. And God knows that. It's just a check-up, it's a weekly check-up of, "Lord, are, are You Lord? God, am I looking to You? That's why I can bring these tithes and offerings because You're my source."

Well, tied closely to that in Matthew 6:21 is a good verse there, "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." You find one, you find the other. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Well, secondly, it [inaudible] the heart. It, there's actually a spiritual discipline in giving that sanctifies you. It grows you as a Christian. It matures you in the faith. God knew this and notice especially from the Old Testament these texts real real quick. Notice the first here on these verses, the first and the best of the first. Notice those words. Proverbs 3:9, "Honor the LORD from your wealth, And from the first of all your produce." Why the

first? Because you need the exercise of putting God first with your giving to help your heart keep putting God first. You see, what you do helps what you are when you're a Christian.

2. Nehemiah 10:35 and 36, "and in order that they might bring the first fruits of the ground and the first fruits of all the fruit of every tree to the house of the LORD annually, and bring to the house of our God the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, and the firstborn of our herds," and on and on we go. "What's the point here, God, we're gonna bring You the same." God said, "I don't want just the amount, I want to know that it's the first because you need that discipline, you need that reminder. It helps renovate your heart to put Me first." On and on we could go. This isn't coincidental, folks. God has a purpose.

Exodus 34:26, "You shall bring the very first of the first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God." Now this is a agricultural people. They ate or starved bathed on, based on this year's crops but when the crop came in, God said, "You can't put the first thing you harvest into your storehouse for your family to eat. That's not, that, your heart's not right there. You bring the first to My temple, then I'll make sure that yours never runs out." You need it, it renovates the heart. It disciplines you to put him first.

Numbers 18:12, "All the best," not just the first but the best of the first, "All the best of the fresh oil and all the best of the fresh wine and of the grain, the first fruits of those which they give to the LORD, I have given them to you." Now here in this context he's saying they're for the priests, they're for the ministers. You bring the best of the first to God's work, he says.

Ezekiel 44:30, "And the first of all the first fruits of every kind and every contribution of every kind, from all your contributions," is that exhaustive enough, "shall be for the priests; you shall also give to the priest the first of your dough," now that's bread, "to cause a blessing to rest on your house." Look, to cause a blessing to rest on your house. I don't know if you believe God or not but I like thinking if I honor the Lord, if my heart's right with tithes and offerings, in ways far greater and better than money he brings a blessing on my household.

And 1 Corinthians 16:2, "On the first day," not the second, there's a principle here, "on the first day of every week, let each one of you put aside and save as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come." What's God saying? God's saying, "You need that exercise to remind you you're trusting Me and looking to Me."

Well, thirdly, it meets the needs of the Lord's work, it meets the needs of the local church. We know that and actually in Scripture when you look at the New Testament, there are only two basic things that the, the offerings of the early church were concerned with: the pastors and the poor. The church was in, encountering rather great hardships and persecutions and difficulties and there were lots of folks who just needed food to eat so they gave their money to support their pastors but also to take care of one another with special and difficult needs.

III. The pleasures of giving. The pleasure of giving. You've heard the phrase give till it hurts, that's ridiculous. Christians don't give till it hurts. That's ridiculous. That's what pagans would do. Christians give out of joy. Have you ever heard me say give what you can give with joy? You know why I say that? Because I mean that. If it's \$1 or \$1 million, do what you can do with joy. There is a pleasure in giving. If you give till it hurts, if that's the case, don't give at all. God does not want your begrudging gift. He doesn't want it. He doesn't need it.

The Scripture teaches, though, that there is great pleasure. One of them, I, I call immediate pleasure. There's an immediate pleasure that happens when we give our tithes and offerings. Or maybe you just give to bless a brother and sister in Christ who has a special need. 2 Corinthians 9:7, but let "Each one do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." You've heard it before, the word "cheerful" means "hilarious." It does something to me when I bring my tithes and offerings or a special gift and give it to bring a sweet pleasure and a joy to my heart and now that only works for the child of God. It only works for the child of God.

Proverbs 10:3 reminds us, "The LORD will not allow the righteous to hunger, But He will thrust aside the cravings of the wicked." He'll not allow those who put first his kingdom to hunger. He's gonna take care of us.

The bottom line is, folks, he's my source. He is my source. There's joy and there's pleasure in giving because he's my source and so when I give and it speaks to my heart afresh and it reminds my heart, "You're looking to the Lord to take care of you," and then I think about the Lord, I think about, "Oh, my goodness, the One who came for me, the One who died for me, the One who suffered and bled for me, the One who faithfully intercedes for me, the One who pledged the totality of His being to keep me secure and bring me to glorification." I don't know about you but that gives me pleasure to think on him as my source, not that company I work for, not that stock investment I've got. That's all good and wise, we should do those things but he is our source.

But lastly, there's a growing pleasure. As we have seasons of giving generously and joyously, it brings us to a new level of maturity. It develops a spiritual character in us that produces an increasing – listen – and lasting pleasure in God. Again, money is a great tool but it is a dangerous tool and God knows it takes many years of training for you to find pleasure in your money and not be hurt by the dangers associated with money, and giving is the greatest way God has found to keep his children's hearts right so that they will not hurt themselves but rather bless and help themselves.

Now you may be sitting here and you may be begrudging what I'm saying. Here's what I want to say to you: don't worry about it. Keep it. Do what you want. I'm not beating you up, I'm talking to God's children about the blessings he's given us. I'm not beating you up if you don't belong to him and don't want to do this. Amen? It, that's, that's between you and, and your God.

The dangers of money. Proverbs 28:22, "Those who hasten after wealth, want will come upon them." 1 Timothy 3:3 says, "Be free from the love of money." 1 Timothy 6:10, "Those who love money pierce themselves with many a grief or a pain." Luke 12:15, "Even when one has an abundance, our life does not consist of that advantage." It doesn't consist of the stuff we have, though God may let us have a lot of stuff, and there's nothing wrong with enjoying it but it's not our joy. Proverbs 30:8, "Don't let me be rich or poor, give me what I can handle." Basically that's what that's saying. "God, You know where I am. Don't let me have so much it becomes an idol and gets in the way of my devotion to You." Some of you, the best thing you could do as God's blessed you, best thing you could do is do something big for God to get your heart back right.

Well, true financial success is when God provides your needs and most likely if you've been faithful in these biblical principles, he provides more than your need so you have an abundance and that's true of all American Christians basically. True financial success is when God provides our needs and likely in abundance because you honored him through hard work, responsible spending, wise investing, and generous giving, and this abundance is enjoyed but it's never enslaving. It's a blessing but it's never possessing. That is true financial success.

Now when we come to our faith commitment this year, what's most important? Heart attitude. "Lord, I love You and I want to strive to make the kind of faith commitment that hurts, puts first the kingdom of God and His righteousness knowing You're my source, You're my provision." And he promises all these things shall be added unto you. Here, here's what's interesting: some people are missing out on significant financial gain because they've never learned to put first the kingdom and God's just gonna let you scratch until you learn to do that. And on the other hand, if in the providence of God Jeff Noblit and all of us come to almost nothing to be devoted to Christ, praise his name. Do I want to do that? Anybody want to sign up for that today? I don't but if that's God's will, then praise his name. Amen? Then we'll just get a bunch of chickens and hogs and we'll just slaughter them and pluck them and feed each other and do what we gotta do. But you know, you can have joy there too because he's our joy.