

I. Introduction

- A. Today I want to start with a huge thank you to you, the dedicated, committed God-loving people of Neighborhood Church. About ten weeks ago, we brought a financial need to your attention. Like many other churches in our community around the country, we were projecting a six figure deficit looming ahead of us at the end of our fiscal year.
- B. So we immediately took a couple of steps. Many months ago, we tightened our belts and asked all our pastors and budget managers to do without, and to isolate only super-critical expenses. We put stringent controls in place for approval of all expenditure. We want you to know that we feel an obligation to you, but even more, an obligation to God, to be super thrifty stewards of every dollar God entrusts to us.
 1. As we close our books this week on our fiscal year, I am so proud of Brenda Aman, our lead director of operations—who manages our budget. She’s done an amazing job.
 2. I’m also proud of Todd Skinner, our lead pastor of ministries—who leads our pastors and staff. He’s also done an amazing job.
- C. Along with all our pastors and budget directors, we have come in well under budget for this fiscal year.
- D. At the same time, you, as a church have stepped up and so many have begun giving who never gave before, and so many others who have given extra. Because of your generous spirit, we can officially report to you that we are closing our general fund books in the black this year. And in this economy, and with the struggles our church has gone through, I consider that a miracle of God.
- E. Thank you, Neighborhood Church.
- F. Thank you, dear Heavenly Father.

II. Selah

- A. There’s a word that you might run across in your Bible if you ever read the book of Psalms. It’s the word “SELAH.” Here’s an example:
 1. *“For I will not trust in my bow, nor shall my sword save me. But You have saved us from our enemies, and have put to shame those who hated us. In God we boast all day long, and praise Your name forever. Selah” (Psalms 44:6-8, NKJV).*
- B. Selah means “pause and consider.” It means, “Don’t rush past this. Stop, think, and say thank you to God.”
- C. When you think about it, we started with the ball deep in the end zone, and now we’ve had a long drive, mostly running plays, and we ground it out. And now, we’ve pressed into the end zone.
- D. Or, we were one strike away from losing the World Series—TWICE—and we came back and won it.
- E. As the pastor of this church, I consider this a “Selah moment.” And I don’t want to rush by it. We had no confidence in our bow or sword. But God saved us—and I want us to pause right now, and give Him thanks. Will you pray with me?
 1. Heavenly Father, we come before You today, aware of Your faithfulness, aware of Your generosity, and eager to say thank you. Thank you, Lord, for providing for our church. Thank you for setting us in the palm of Your hand and never letting go. We worship You as Jehovah Jireh, the Lord who provides. When all the headlines were against us, when the unemployment rates were against us, when the housing market and job market offered little but doom and gloom, You shined the light of Your all-sufficient grace into the darkness, and took care of Neighborhood Church. Thank you, Father, that we close our books in the black. That is Your miracle, and we give You the praise.
 2. And now I pray that You would do that same miracle in every life, in every family, in every household, and in every business represented in this church. Lord, so many are fearful financially, when we need to be at peace.
 3. So, God, provide for moms and dads and single parents. Provide for single people and divorced people, young and old. Provide financial freedom. Provide jobs. Provide wise investments. Provide contentment. As You have been so generous for us collectively, now Lord, do it again for us individually.
 4. We continue to ask for the privilege of being part of Your work in this city and in this world. We ask that through our continued giving, many thousands right here in Redding, would meet Jesus and embrace Him as Savior.
 5. Thank you for loving us this much.
 6. In Jesus’ name. Amen.
 7. Selah.

III. He Told Me

- A. Today, I’m wrapping up a four-part series on giving called Grace-Giving. Together we’ve been answering the question, “Why give?” I know that money is a sore spot for some when it comes to the church.
- B. But there’s something really important here. Because Jesus makes it completely clear that if you can’t be loyal to God with your money, you can’t claim loyalty to God at all: *“you cannot serve God and mammon/materialism” (Luke 16:13).*
- C. So, without apology, we’ve been talking about giving, and financial freedom, and generosity with the Lord, and how He faithfully provides.
- D. So far, I’ve outlined three reasons why we should give to God:
 1. He made me, so He owns me and all that is mine—and since He owns me, He’ll take care of me because He always takes care of His own.
 2. He saved me, so I owe Him everything. Giving is one way I say thank you for God’s amazing grace.
 3. He sent me, so my whole life is a mission to seek and to save the lost—and giving to my church is one way I invest myself into a mission that will last for eternity.
- E. Today, we’re going to add one more reason why we should give:

F. 4. He told me, so even though I might not understand why, or might not like the whole idea of tithes and offerings, God told me, so I salute, say, “Yes sir”, and do it.

1. *“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” Says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:8-10, NKJV).*

G. God tells you to bring your whole tithe into the storehouse in many places, including the New Testament (Matt 23:23; Luke 11:42).

H. I saved this one for last, because to me, it’s the most annoying reason. When I was a kid, and I asked my mom why I had to do something, the worst answer she could possibly give me is “Because I said so.” I hated that answer. So I saved this one for last.

I. Because if God made me, and if God saved me, and if God sent me, then God told me is all I need to hear.

IV. But I’d like us to think together.

A. Here’s a crucial truth, and one that I often doubted when my mom told me what to do. When God tells you to do something, He always has your best interests at heart. Most of us don’t believe that often enough. He doesn’t just fling out commands because He likes being obeyed; He carefully and judiciously issues commands because He loves us and wants what’s best for us.

B. So with that premise, let’s think through some possible motivations for God to tell us to bring our tithes and offerings to Him.

V. To Break Materialism

A. *“Here is the man who did not make God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness” (Psalms 52:7, NKJV).*

B. *“Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven” (Proverbs 23:5, NKJV).*

C. *“And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, ‘Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God’” (Mark 10:24, NKJV).*

D. One of my all time favorite characters is Gollum from The Lord of the Rings. A man transformed into a monster by the horrible power of greed. Gollum is both greedy and pathetic. Horrible, because Gollum hops around half naked biting into a living raw fish (in the movie version) and is cunning and treacherous. And he is pathetic because he used to be just like us. He IS us, in many ways.

E. The fastest way to an unhappy heart is to pin your happiness on money. Riches “make themselves wings and fly away.” Some of us are living that truth.

F. Now listen; I am for money. I am for us being financially free. I believe that God wants to bless us with both money and with things money can’t buy. I do not believe that poverty is God’s normal calling on His children.

G. But neither is materialism. God knows that if He can pry our bony, Gollum-like fingers off our money often enough, He can pry our HEART from money too.

H. Giving is a heart issue. If you can’t give cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7), you have a problem.

1. For some of you, there’s a reason you’re not happy: money has ruined you.

2. For some of you, there’s a reason you’re not rich: money would ruin you, spiritually. God knows that if you suddenly found a buried treasure of gold coins worth millions of dollars, He would never hear from you again.

You are “trusting in the abundance of your riches.” You have a heart problem.

I. So, because He loves you, He keeps you broke. It’s hand to mouth until He can trust you with more. I believe that you tell God how much He can trust you every time you hold that offering plate in your hand.

J. When you can cheerfully participate in the part of our worship called “the offering” that’s when God knows your Inner Gollum has taken a nap.

K. So God tells you to give because giving loosens the grip of materialism on your heart and life.

VI. To Create Margin

A. A second reason is because giving forces margin into your life.

1. *“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8, 11, NKJV).*

B. Margin means spare room in your life that YOU don’t use. God insists on margin. Emotional margin. Time margin. Money margin.

C. God did not design you to rev the engines at maximum RPMs all the time.

1. One newspaper just ran an article called “Too Busy to Notice You’re Too Busy.”

2. The National Sleep Foundation reports that a majority of Americans are sleep deprived. I want to add: “especially if you have children.”

3. At \$2.5 billion per minute, our national debt will balloon by \$100 billion during this message.

4. The credit card debt for the average American household stands \$15,766.00 (per household).

a) Zero margin.

b) Actually—negative margin.

- D. God's plan is this: that you adjust your standard of living so that you are living beneath your means. Not at your means, and especially not above your means.
- E. I have a word from the Lord for you today: your God-ordained standard of living equals your current salary minus at least 10 percent for giving and minus a wise percent (perhaps another 10 percent) for saving for the future.
- F. In other words, if God gives you \$30,000 each year, you need to live on \$24,000 and give at least \$3,000 and save at least \$3,000 for the future. That means you rent an apartment you can afford, you buy food and clothes and a car you can afford and you buy a house you can afford, and still have margin.
- G. God gives you 24 hours a day and He doesn't want you rushing and hurrying and racing around like a crazy person. He wants you to rest. He wants you to have regular Sabbaths in your life when you put on the breaks and breath.
 - 1. Nobody was busier than Jesus, but over and over again, He broke away from the demands of other people—and rested. And ate. And slept. And prayed.
- H. Do you know what margin does for you?
- I. It makes you emotionally rich. You're not stressed out about money, and you're not rushing around like a crazy person. God loves you so much that He tells you to give; so you don't fry your circuits and burn out. To create margin and to shatter materialism.
- J. And two more reason why God tells us to give:

VII. To Experience Grace

- A. When I was sixteen, two friends threw a surprise birthday party for me. I was totally clueless it was coming. That's why it's called a surprise party. My friends set it up so my mom would bring me to my friend's house.
- B. I didn't want to go. Going to that friend's house seemed random. I had other stuff to do. I wasn't interested. I didn't want to go. I argued with my mom, and she made me go. Why?
- C. Because I told you.
- D. I really didn't want to go. My mom practically had to shove me through the door. I know this is hard to believe, but I was being a brat.
- E. Imagine my surprise when I walked into that house, down the stairs, opened the door, and twenty-five of my friends jumped out of hiding and yelled, "Happy Birthday!"
- F. God told you to give. And I get it. We've all pushed back against that. We've all resented that and maybe even gotten a little angry. But we did it because He told us to do it—and what did we find?
- G. We found an experience of grace that we never saw coming.
 - 1. *"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8, NKJV).*
- H. Yes. God commands you to give.
- I. But there's a deeper truth spinning its gears in the universe. It goes like this:
 - 1. God's commandments are God's enablements.
 - a) Whatever He commands you to do; He will enable you to do. He will give you the means. He will give you the power. He will give you the motivation. He will give you the opportunity. He will give you the money. He will give you the grace.
 - b) He doesn't just say "go forth and give." He rolls up His sleeves and works in your life to enable you to give.
 - c) You have never given one penny to God that He didn't first give you, so you could give it back to Him.
 - d) Because you can't out-give God.
 - (1) *"Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine" (Proverbs 3:9, 10, NKJV).*
 - e) When you are stingy with God, God FEELS stingy towards you.
 - f) When you are generous to God, God feels generous towards you. He is faithful. He upholds you. He takes care of you. He provides for you. He enables you.
 - 2. He told you to give so you could experience His grace.

VIII. To Declare Worth

- A. *"And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head" (Mark 14:3, NKJV).*
- B. Perfume was important and valuable. Know why? Because nobody took showers.
- C. So here, she breaks open this expensive oil. And what does she do with it? She pours it on His head. She anoints His head with oil. To me, it sounds gross and messy. But, in those days, it was a loving, respectful, pleasurable gesture toward Jesus.
- D. Think about that moment.
- E. People are hungry. People are poor. People are out of work. People are dying. She has this extremely valuable commodity.
- F. And what does she do with it?
- G. SHE WASTES IT ON JESUS. There is no lasting value here. There are no buildings, no monuments, no lives changed, no families helped. Just something of great value wasted on Jesus.
- H. And the point is simply HE'S WORTH IT.

1. She does not invest it.
2. She does not add it to a portfolio that will multiply its value.
3. She does not give a gift that keeps on giving.
4. She wastes it. And the disciples said she wasted it.
 - a) *“But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, ‘Why was this fragrant oil wasted?’” (Mark 14:4, NKJV)?*

- I. Don’t answer out loud, but what do you think about that? Or more importantly, and more to the core of what I’m saying, what do you FEEL about that? What is your gut reaction to money wasted? What is your gut reaction to money that could have helped the poor, but doesn’t?
- J. This question is all important, because it shows the value you place on Jesus.
- K. In fact, the disciples were ticked off. The original Greek here suggests that they snorted with anger. Visceral, tangible anger. And they made no effort to hide it.
- L. Why? Because they had a more spiritual thing to do with the value of that oil:
 1. *“For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.’ And they criticized her sharply” (Mark 14:5, NKJV).*
- M. Give it to the poor. They criticized her sharply. They wagged the giant foam finger of shame at her. The disciples. The faithful disciples. The disciples who loved Jesus.
- N. But who loved something else more.
 1. *“But Jesus said, ‘Let her alone... She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. 9 Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.’” (Mark 14:6-9, NKJV).*
 2. She’s the only person who gets that He’s going to die for her sins. She gets it. And she brings Him her best to say thank you.
 3. In the Old Testament, God’s people built a temple. The only word that could even start to do it justice is the word extravagant. The temple was covered in gold, to the tune of billions of dollars. Was that a waste?
 4. In the Old Testament, for centuries, animals were slaughtered, and burned. Not the sickly animals, but the best of the best. Was that a waste?
 5. Week after week, we give our offerings to the Lord. And so often, we pray, Dear Lord, use this offering to further the gospel. Use this offering to reach people for Jesus. Use this offering to mend broken lives, and to help the helpless. Lord, use this offering.
 6. That’s what we pray.
- O. But you know what.
- P. If we took that offering, and put it on the altar, and lit it on fire, and burned it to ashes, it would still be our way of telling God His worth. Our way of telling God how much we love Him.
- Q. When Jesus Christ became our sacrifice and died on the Cross, He was giving the ultimate gift. He gave it first of all to His Father in heaven. There is nothing more important to me than you, dear Heavenly Father. You told Me to save them, and here I am.

IX. Conclusion

- A. God told you to do this thing called giving. Where are you?
- B. One last thing, and especially dads can get this. I have a son and a daughter and I love them both equally, and passionately, and differently. My daughter is ten.
- C. There is a day coming years from now, and I already dread it. That is the day I’m going to have to give her away in marriage. The fastest way to make me cry is to play a country-western song about a daddy giving away his little girl.
- D. I want to freeze her at this age.
- E. I don’t want to give her away. I love her too much. I want her in my life too much (just as I want my son in equally powerful though different ways).
- F. The only word I can give to describe this feeling is jealousy. I don’t want to share her. I’m already mad at the guy who’s going to take her away. He’s robbing me.
- G. Jealousy.
- H. Do you know what your heavenly father feels toward you?
- I. Jealousy. *“For you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (Exodus 34:14, NKJV).*
- J. He doesn’t want to give you away. He loves you too much. He wants you in His life more than you can imagine.
- K. He’s already mad at whatever takes your heart away from Him. That’s what the prophet meant about robbing God, I think.
- L. Don’t let anything—and don’t let money—carry you off from the One who loves you with an everlasting, indescribable, infinitely jealous Calvary love.
- M. May Jesus look at the offerings we pour out to Him, and say, “Wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what these people have done will also be told as a memorial to them.”