

The Blueprint: What We Believe and Why Giving

Introduction: Last week, I told you the story of the Church, the family of God. As I did, I shared with you that I totally understand why some are skeptical about our family in Christ. The idolatry of religion within the church, that is obsessed with childish, irrational pursuits and practices totally removed from any semblance of engagement with what actually matters in life, has caused so many to understandably devalue the role and the purpose of the church in this world. The cynicism about the church becomes even more empathically worse when you add to it the stories of preachers being paid luxurious elite-level salaries, not from a book they wrote that people around the world wanted to buy or from wise business dealings and investments they made as “tent makers,” but rather from the donations given in good faith to support the work of the Gospel through the local church.

Given the massive religious hypocrisy and flat-out silliness by so many of the leaders of the church around the world, it’s not shocking at all that studies show the people of the world who call themselves Christians, who earn over 42 trillion dollars collectively, give less than 2% of those dollars to anything related to the cause of Christ.¹ When I say anything, I mean anything whatsoever related to anything that has to do with what Jesus told us to care about the most. Christians only give 2% of their income to the work of their local Church, Christian nonprofits helping people in their own communities who are in need, missionaries taking the Gospel to other parts of the world ... literally only 2% to anything at all that has anything whatsoever to do with JESUS!

On the other hand, despite all the money spent to fund religious nonsense and greedy “Christian” leaders, the Church is still God’s family, and it still has a very clear purpose. Even with all the negative testimonies of Christian leaders and organizations, if we as Christians proclaim we believe a person who doesn’t have Christ will spend eternity in Hell; if we believe everyone who repents, believes, and follows Christ is guaranteed to have a glorious future in Heaven; if we believe nothing in this life brings more power, meaning and depth to our experience than actually having and growing in a personal relationship with Jesus; then we also have to ask ourselves how we could ever allow the negative aspects of a church filled with sinners just like us to be our excuse for not financially prioritizing what we claim to be the most important thing in the entire universe—Christ’s Church!

Think about it. Most American Christians spend more money per month on their iPhone and mobile plan than they do on anything that has to do with helping themselves and others in their own local church grow and experience the life of Christ, much less give people a chance to witness the love of Christ and hear about the Gospel so that they have an opportunity to be rescued from eternal damnation—they may not financially prioritize that work, but at least they can look at Instagram and YouTube on their iPhone as much as they

¹ <https://youtu.be/WrHC7hXNoV8?si=HRrhgnFtXSiWTGtr>

want! Christians in America spend more on gym memberships than they do their local church; more on vacations and designer clothing; and more on Starbucks drinks that ironically cause them to have to also buy diabetic medications because of the large quantities of sugar in them. It's easy for me to draw these conclusions because the majority of American Christians give little to nothing to support the cause of Christ in their local church or anything else that has to do with Christ.

Christians trade perfectly good vehicles in to purchase ones that guarantee themselves a car payment for another 36 months, and here lately, as long as 80 months, rather than budget money to support the local church that ministers to their family and brings the opportunity to have eternal life to their community! American Christians sell their homes filled with stuff they rarely ever use to purchase bigger houses that they can more easily fill with more stuff they rarely ever use instead of investing their money into that which fills themselves and the ones they love with what they can really use—CHRIST! It's as if the Western church thinks Jesus was kidding when He said,

24 "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (Matthew 6:24)

It's as if Paul never wrote these words to Timothy,

9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. (1 Timothy 6:10)

It should be no shock whatsoever, then, with the amount of materialistic idolatry present in the life of Western Christians, that no matter how much money they make, they seem to find themselves further and further in debt, scrounging to pay their bills and never having enough money in their savings account to even cover the predictable expenses of owning all the things they purchased. The financial mess so many American Christians find themselves in comes from the same exact problem that also greatly limits the work of the Gospel through the local church.

American Christians don't believe in the New Testament doctrine of giving because they don't believe that what the Gospel has given to all who repent and believe in Jesus is better than what the world has to offer. They certainly don't believe that the work of the local church they are a part of is the most critical work on the planet—the literal work of bringing eternal life to those in their community and around the world who only know eternal death!

Now, I love it when some say, "I didn't come to Christ because of the work of a local church, but rather I came to Christ because I heard Billy Graham preach on TV one night." As a friend of one of Billy Graham's grandsons, I can assure you that with a very high level of

authority, nobody would respond to that suggestion with a more decisive rebuke than Billy Graham himself. He would be the very first person to call you out and tell you the reason you heard him preach on TV was because people in local churches put a lot of money and work together to offer a crusade in their city, a crusade so big that when he stood up to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ they put it on television and you stopped to watch it! Furthermore, Billy Graham's life was shaped by the impact of the local church he grew up in and the Bible college that he attended, which was started by, you guessed it, local churches!

I can almost guarantee that every time you say, "What about all the great Gospel things that happen in the world that aren't led or funded by a local church, but rather by individuals who just do it and pay for it," I will be able to say, "Great point! You are talking about the work of Christians who became Christians, grew up in their faith, and caught a vision for what they are doing because of the impact of the work of at least one local church in their life!" Every time you point to some awesome thing God is doing in the world, I'm going to point to how He used the money donated to a local church or a network of local churches to make it happen, so much so that if you take the local church and the money donated to fund its work out of the mix of the work of the Gospel in local communities, then every useful thing happening in the world today for the cause of Christ and His life would completely collapse!

And listen, I'm not saying this because God depends on the local church to accomplish His work; I'm saying this because God made it clear it's His will to accomplish His work on this earth through the local church! God didn't offer up a plan "B." The local Church is God's only plan; therefore, it will accomplish all He planned for it to accomplish. The only question that remains is whether or not you and I will enjoy the blessing of being a part of that work or not.

However, before we go any further in that thought, let me establish a plumbline for what I believe the Bible teaches about how to fund His work through His church. Just as we tried to do in the effort last week to make sure our understanding of the local church was aligned with God's Word, today, I want us to make sure we are aligning our understanding of money and what God wants us to do with it to God's Word. The following is my personal theological statement concerning the Doctrine of Giving in the Bible:

God created tithing (giving 10% of our income to God and His work) as a universal minimum standard for spending the money He gave us the opportunity to earn. When properly understood and believed, the Gospel leads every Christian to cheerfully prioritize finding ways to exceed tithing to their local church and things that complement the work of the local church because the Gospel builds within them a passion for people to know, follow, and thrive in a relationship with Christ as well as confidence in the very clear promise of Christ to bless all who faithfully serve Him with their finances. Therefore, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the ultimate motivation to prayerfully formulate and execute a plan to live life as a Kingdom giver rather than a consumer.

Proposition: My personal summary of the Biblical doctrine of giving has three key statements.

The first key statement is that,

- (1) God created tithing (giving 10% of our income to God and His work) as a universal minimum standard for spending the money He gave us the opportunity to earn.**
 - A.** Now, to those who suggest the idea of tithing was created by the Mosaic Law and thus fulfilled in Christ, let me start by making it clear the Mosaic Law didn't create a universal law of tithing, but rather, like everything else, it ADDED to it! The law names three different tithes every Jew had to give. Two were done annually. One supported the priests and religious workers (Numbers 18:21-24), and the other was given to support the expenses and upkeep of the Tabernacle (later the Temple), as well as the various feasts and sacrifices that took place there (Deuteronomy 14:22-27). Finally, at the end of every third year, another tithe was to be taken for "... the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do." (Deuteronomy 14:29). There were also times when the Law commanded a free-will offering of their choosing (i.e., Deuteronomy 16:10), but this was separate and in addition to the essentially 23.33% they were required to give annually.
 - B.** However, LONG before God gave Moses the Law, we see a default understanding that a tenth (a tithe) of what a person earned through their labor or even in battle was to be given to the Lord. In the Book of Genesis, two very clear examples of this understanding set the precedent for what would come later in the Law, not as God's universal standard but as an expectation to go beyond that standard.
 - 1. 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) 19 And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. (Genesis 14:18-20)**
 - 2.** It's interesting to note that Abraham did this before he even got saved! The Bible tells us Abraham didn't truly believe in God and receive His righteousness until Genesis 15:6 (see also Romans 4)! So when Abraham gave this tithe, he did so as somebody who didn't even truly believe in God yet, but he still knew enough to know this is what you are supposed to do with whatever you earn!

3. Later, one of Abram's grandsons echoed the same understanding. In Genesis 28, Jacob, who had yet to demonstrate true faith in God at this point in his life, at least understood what he was supposed to do with all that God was going to give him.
4. **10 Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11 And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. 12 And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! 13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. 14 Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." 16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." 17 And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." 18 So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. 19 He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first. 20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, 21 so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, 22 and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you." (Genesis 28:10-22)**
5. At this point, Jacob has nothing! He fled his father's house because he undermined his brother and deceived his own father! Therefore, the implication of verse twenty-two isn't just that Jacob was committed to giving ten percent of whatever he was going to get on this journey of escape, but rather, based on the vision he just had, he understood all that he would ever get would be from the Lord and thus he was committed to giving a tenth of everything he ever got to the Lord.
6. Jacob, like Abram, didn't just randomly come up with this number. People who didn't even believe in Yahweh understood that the universe was set up to work this way.

7. "Tithing was very common throughout the ancient Near East, especially in Mesopotamia where Neo-Babylonian texts from the sixth century b.c. discuss the collection of tithes as a means of supporting a sanctuary." (Harper's Bible Dictionary) ²
8. Jacob's receiving a promise of supply from God led this deceitful, faithless man to fully understand where his gains in this world would come from. As such, 10% needed to be offered back to God both as an act of worship and as an act of faith in His continued provision.
- C. Simply put, tithing was the universal default understanding of how finances were made to work, so much so that when God gave Moses the Law, He didn't have to explain tithing, but rather, He raised the bar of how much should be tithed and when.
- D. In addition, some suggest the New Testament didn't require believers to give anything. The passages used to make this argument are typically passages like 2 Corinthians chapters eight and nine that speak of giving with generosity, according to a person's means. The most common verses in this passage that people point to in an attempt to refute the expectation of tithing in the early church are:
- E. **6 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 2:6-7)**
- F. Now, despite the fact the principle in verses six and seven point us to a promise that should lead us to want to enthusiastically look to give more than 10% of our income to the work of Christ (more on that in a minute), the very clear context of this passage has nothing at all to do with how the believers in Corinth were supposed to support the work of the ministry in their local church. Chapters 8 and 9 are ENTIRELY about a special offering Paul raised and frequently mentioned in his writings for the church in Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem was not only suffering persecution, but they were now doing so in a famine that had stricken the entire region with extreme poverty. But the point is, the instructions he gives for this offering literally have nothing whatsoever to do with how a local church was to raise the money to support the work of their local church but rather how they should make a plan to give an additional offering to help the church in Jerusalem. To apply these specific instructions to anything else is to take them completely out of context.

² Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In [*Harper's Bible dictionary*](#) (1st ed., pp. 1078–1079). Harper & Row.

- G.** So, how did the early church fund the needs of the local church? Well, we don't fully know. The followers of Christ were to surrender everything to Him. The disciples abandoned their businesses altogether to go follow Christ. One wealthy man was actually told to literally sell all he had (Luke 18:22). When the church initially kicked off in Jerusalem, people were selling everything in their possession and bringing the proceeds to the Apostles to use for whatever was needed to care for the people in the church and thus continue the effort of advancing the Gospel in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42-27; 4:32-37).
- H.** Furthermore, we know local churches were expected to financially support the pastors who were devoted to fully serving the church and even provide "double honor" to those who did it well, especially to those who labored in preaching. They didn't just raise money to provide for the orphans and widows in the church but also to advance the Gospel in and through their church and spiritually shepherd and mature the church.
- 1. 11 If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 12 If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? 14 In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. 15 But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. (1 Corinthians 9:11-15)**
 - 2. 6 One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches. (Galatians 6:6)**
 - 3. 17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17-18)**
- I.** But was tithing practiced to accomplish the work of the local church? Yes, it is true that no specific verse commands people in the New Testament church to tithe to their local church, but we also know that tithing was understood as worshiping God with what one earned for literally thousands of years up until that point. Nothing in the Scripture points us away from the church practicing it other than when they clearly went well beyond it! Furthermore, early church writings reinforce the idea that the practice continued and was expected by the early church.

1. One such early church writing is from the third century, and it stated, **“Set aside ... offerings and tithes and first fruits to Christ, the true High Priest, and to His ministers,...”**³
 2. In the fourth century, John Chrysostom, the Archbishop of Constantinople, wrote, **“Whereas someone was saying to me in astonishment at another, ‘Why, ... givest tithes.’ What a load of disgrace does this expression imply, since what was not a matter of wonder with the Jews has come to be so in the case of the Christians? If there was danger then in omitting tithes, think how great it must be now.”**⁴
- J.** The point I’m making is that the church in Acts immediately prioritized the work of the ministry in their local church and, as such, prioritized supporting it before they even considered what they would spend on anything else. Later in the early church, it was such an expectation that a person would at least tithe to their local church that when people refused to do it, they got rebuked! The early church fathers took Jesus literally when He said you can’t serve Him and money, so they refused to let the people they shepherd live as if they could.
- K.** How else was the work of the church going to be accomplished if not through the local church, and thus, how else would they provide a living for the pastors who spent their days shepherding it, provide for the widows and orphans, and provide for whatever else was needed to be done in and through that local church for its health and ministry effectiveness in their community? It was clearly expected to be everyone's financial priority in the church, and you couldn't say it was a priority if you weren't at least tithing!
- L.** But the New Testament explains why we should never view our giving as just a tithe to our local church—at least, not if we have any sense! I mentioned this earlier in our discussion of this statement, but now I want to elaborate more thoroughly.

The second key statement in my personal summary of the Biblical doctrine of giving is that,

- (2) When properly understood and believed, the Gospel leads every Christian to cheerfully prioritize finding ways to exceed tithing to their local church and things that complement the work of the local church because the Gospel builds within them a passion for people to know, follow, and thrive in a relationship with Christ as well as confidence in the very clear promise of Christ to bless all who faithfully serve Him with their finances.**

³ <https://www.holycrossoca.org/newslet/1602.html>

⁴ <https://www.holycrossoca.org/newslet/1602.html>

- A. Jesus promised that if you truly surrendered your life to Him and therefore start following Him, you would become a fisher of men (Mark 1:17). Being fully invested in what it takes for people to come to know God and abound in a relationship with Him isn't a side hustle, it's not an interest or a hobby, but literally who you become if you give your life to Christ! We understand our purpose as followers of Christ is to proclaim just how awesome Christ and His life are to the world (1 Peter 2:9), not as a task to check but literally who we are by our very nature as rescued and redeemed fully favored sons and daughters of God! Your dollars follow who you see yourself to be—period. If the grace of Christ truly transforms you, then the last thing you're going to feel good about is how little you can give to the work of Christ! You will be driven to give more and more because it's what you're all about!
- B. But do you remember what I read you from 2 Corinthians 6:7 a minute ago? Paul wrote about a promise that's universal to how we give to the work of Christ – **“whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” (2 Corinthians 6:7)**
- C. If you've ever read the Bible, then you probably already know that sounds a lot like something Jesus said in the Gospels,
- D. **19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 23 but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! 24 "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. 25 "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ... 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matthew 6:19-34)**
- E. In short, Jesus said everything you invest into the things of this world will rot and fade away. You literally can't take any of that investment with you. But everything you invest into the work of His Kingdom will pay you dividends

forever! When you die, the labor and sacrifice it took to make that money isn't voided by moth and rust!

- F.** Furthermore, Jesus made it clear that your giving and your heart always match up, so you need to deal with the darkness in you that keeps you from freely and abundantly investing your money into His work! He made a promise that you can't serve Him and money at the same time. You can serve Him with your money, but you can't serve money and serve Him, so you need to get your passion to be in what the Gospel has given us in the Kingdom of God so that your money will follow suit!
- G.** Last, as you do this, He promises that if you fully surrender to God, trusting Him with everything, including your money, and seeking to live and walk in His righteousness, you will have no reason to worry. God will supply your needs.
- H.** This isn't a promise to get rich in the things of this world. The prosperity Gospel is a bold-faced lie meant to get the guy preaching it rich. However, God provides significant wealth to some people because they have proven to be faithful with it and thus do what He wants with it. However, proving you know what to do with money doesn't mean God will give you a bunch of it to manage! As we talked about last week, everybody has different roles in the body, and for some, it's to have the responsibility of having a lot more money to serve Him with, which He chooses as their path to bring Him glory. However, at the other extreme, He equally gets glory from those He calls to live in abject poverty and do so with joyfulness and faithfulness. Paul experienced both (Philippians 4)! So, despite what some people think about those who make a lot of money, God has a history of using some of the believers He's gifted with a unique level of wisdom, talent, and work capacity to make a bunch of money all over the Old and New Testament. There's nothing sinful about being able to make a lot of money but rather living to have it and what it can buy in this world instead of living to generously and abundantly invest in His Kingdom. It's not only sinful, but if you understand the treasurer principle in Matthew 6, it's stupid!
- I.** However, the point is, no matter how much God provides you with, you can be sure God will provide your needs to live on this earth as long as He has called you to live on it, exactly how He wants you to live on it, so stop worrying and trust Him, and that means trust Him enough to abundantly invest whatever you have into His Kingdom and not the things of this world! As you live that way, fully surrendered to Him, he will bless you now and for all eternity with things you can't measure with the stuff in this world. You can't measure love, joy, and peace with money! As a matter of fact, you can have all the money in the world and have none of them! But if you are living your life genuinely submitted to Christ, meaning your money is fully submitted to Him and His work, then you can be sure the fruit of living in Him will abundantly fill your life.

This leads me to the third key statement in my personal summary of the Biblical doctrine of giving.

(3) Therefore, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the ultimate motivation to prayerfully formulate and execute a plan to live life as a Kingdom giver rather than a consumer.

A. 41 And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. 42 And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. 43 And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. 44 For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." (Mark 12:41-43)

Note: That woman planned to trust God no matter what! She planned to give what little she had left to give, not for a morsel to eat, but to worship the Lord and clearly say investing in His kingdom was more important than anything else in this life, including whatever bites of bread or piece of fruit she could have purchased with those two copper coins!

B. That woman's plan is the plan we should all have. Listen to God's Word,

C. 5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

D. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 16:25)

E. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. (Matthew 19:29)

F. 23 And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. (Luke 9:23)

G. 20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? (James 2:20)

H. Let's have the faith to believe all we have in Him is better than all this world has to offer, and let's start planning for faith, meaning, let's start planning to prioritize financially investing into the work of this local church so it can become an absolute powerhouse movement of the Gospel in this region that spins off missionaries and local church movements all over the world long after we are

dead and gone. Let's plan to live the life of Kingdom givers who don't check a box that they tithe but are constantly looking for how they can increase their giving above a tithe to not only prioritize the work of the Gospel through their local church but also in complementary organizations and missions in your community and around the world! Let's be those who are so convinced eternal life is real, and Christ rewards those who prioritize financially investing in His ministry that we look for how we can trust Him more by living off of less and less of a percentage of what we make and investing more and more of a percentage into the work of His Kingdom. Let's show the world our God is not a dollar or things it can buy us in this world, but a Risen living Savior coming back for His bride—the Church!

Challenge: Are you seeking God for permission to spend more of what you make on the things of this world or for the wisdom, discipline, and faith to spend more on what matters most to Him—His life-giving work through the local Church?

Venture's giving continues to rise, and I praise the Lord for it! But here's the problem. Our giving per person is going down, which means, as a church, we have less and less dollars per person to fund ministry to our church and community? How is that possible if giving is going up?

This year, as of last Sunday, Venture's weekly attendance has grown 8% over the same period last year. However, in the same timeframe, giving has only gone up by 3.9%. This phenomenon has happened for far too many years over the last decade. It's a perfect storm. The need for staff, resources, and ministries continues to go up, which is an answer to prayer and a reason for an absolute celebration. However, the available dollars to do ministry with are getting spread thinner and thinner across the needs of more and more people. Thus, things like our obvious need for more useable space at our Dallas campus can't even be considered.

As a result, it's becoming harder and harder to pay our staff a fair wage for their labor and give them the kind of budgets and resources needed to be effective and fruitful at what we hired them to do! For instance, Jason Gilbert, our student pastor at our Dallas campus, is absolutely awesome. I believe we have the best student pastor in this region! But as gifted as he is, he can't do what he does without the church paying him a salary large enough to provide for his family in a way that enables him to work here full time as well as provide him with a budget and space large enough to effectively do the things that engage the students of this region with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and disciple them to know and follow Him.

So, imagine what would happen if everybody in Venture started asking God for the wisdom, discipline, and faith to spend more of the money they earned in the ministry of their local church rather than asking God for permission to make and spend more on things of this world? Imagine if everybody in Venture committed to giving at least at the basic level that God created the world's finances to work by and, as such, gave at least 10% of their income

to the cause of Christ in their local church. I can assure you that we do not know what could happen because we aren't even close to that kind of reality as a church.

What I'm about to say to you is NOT a statement of arrogance or bragging. It's meant to be a reality check for our church. Of the literally hundreds of households involved with Venture, somehow, Keri and I are consistently among the top 20 annual donors to Venture. However, I obviously can't prove it, but I would be willing to confidently wager every dollar to my name that we are most certainly not in the top twenty household incomes in this church.

So this Christmas season, as you get ready for next year, I'm challenging you, as one of your pastors, to stop asking God for how much you can spend on stuff and start asking God how you can invest more into this local church as well as other things that advance the cause of Christ. I challenge you to make a budget that puts 10% of every dollar you make into Venture's One Fund and asks God for clarity on how much more you should set aside to fund nonprofit work, support missionaries, do things for others in your community yourself and whatever else God leads you to do. I'm challenging you to flip your financial paradigm and stop looking at your income as a tool to buy things that moth and rust destroy and instead look at it first as something to use to invest in His Kingdom, then wisely meet your needs and wants in this world with the rest.

Again, not in some way to brag at all, but to obey the Biblical charge to pastors to lead by example; I want to assure you I'm not challenging you to do something Keri and I haven't done for a long time. In preparation for this sermon, I did the math to wrap up our December household budget plan. We aim to give at least a tithe to Venture and 5% to other things. This year, my Rammell crew and I will have given away 17% of our income. When I checked it, I realized we had actually gotten a little carried away in our miscellaneous giving. I had to move some money from a different line in our budget to cover the overage! OOPS!! So, in addition to our donation to Venture's One Fund, we had the joy of helping fund Snowbird Outfitters, Least of These Carolinas, the Boys and Girls Club that meets in Venture's Dallas building, a campus missionary at Virginia Tech, Lottie Moon and a variety of other things. Not included in our 17% is the money we spend on being hospitable to people we invite to our home for ministry purposes, hosting our life group meetings, doing things we do for neighbors, etc.

In the meantime, like most people in America, over the last four years, our household expenses have risen at an absolutely ridiculous rate ... way more than our income. So, sometime during our Christmas break, we will have a Rammell Crew sit-down for a very serious meeting about how we spend money. To continue investing in the Kingdom of God like we are doing, we will have to make some significant adjustments to how we spend money everywhere else. To give the way we've given, we've been chipping away at our savings, not because of how we are giving, but rather because we haven't managed our other spending well. To spend more on "a," you have to decrease "b," especially when "b" costs more than it used to! That means a hard conversation is getting ready to take place in our house about eliminating some of our "wants" and reducing others so that we can successfully achieve the "wants" most important to us. It's a conversation that must also

include a serious commitment to a plan that reduces how we pay for our needs. You can pay for your needs in a needful or a “wantful” way. Like many Americans, “Bidenomics” is absolutely killing our finances, so we have to reduce funding our “needs” to a “needful” way.

Now, we can have our family meeting with a negative attitude that we have to do this to give a certain percentage of money to Venture and other ministries, or we can have it with a Gospel-informed attitude that this is what we need to do to keep prioritizing our finances into what God prioritizes—the work of the Spirit in and through this local Church to grow it into an unstoppable force that changes lives and communities as a Gospel movement across this region and around the world! We can act like we are losing something to give, or we can remember you lose everything you don’t give!

If our most significant “want” is for the people in our local church to grow and prosper in their faith in such a way that Venture becomes the kind of church that turns this region upside down with the Gospel for generations to come, that spins off missionaries and ministries that impact people all over the world; then it makes no sense for me and my family to do anything other than prioritize our spending on Venture as well as other ministries and missionaries that are laboring with us for the same goal! If that’s our “want,” then it needs to be in our budget so that we can decide how to best use what we have left to take care of our needs and fund some of the other wants in our lives if possible. And you heard that right, our Kingdom “want” dictates how we will pay for earthly needs because the Kingdom is the greatest need of all, and it is why we give our lives for the Glory of Christ and His Kingdom ... just like that widow!

Christ and the life He alone gives us is literally the treasure in the field worthy of everything we have; every hour we have to breathe on this planet, every talent we have to use on this planet, and every dollar we ever receive on this planet! He and what He gives us is worthy of it ALL, so let’s live like it!!