



PRIORITIZATION
Shane Philip
November 22, 2020

The Crossing Church
Las Vegas, Nevada

OPENING

This week we are concluding our study called **After\$hock**. Maybe the best metaphor for 2020 is an earthquake followed by a series of aftershocks. Anyone who has experienced an earthquake may know that the aftershocks often cause more emotional trauma and as much damage as the actual earthquake. That's what 2020 has felt like to us and the aftershocks don't seem to end! Everything seems to be out of balance and has come crashing down: Our work lives, our family lives, our social lives, our vacation plans, and our financial situations – which is where we notice it the most. In the past two weeks, we have learned about **Preparation** and **Transformation** – this week we are talking about **Prioritization** – so prioritization of our finances need to be a priority.

QUESTION: Where are you in getting over the shock that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused in your life?

SCRIPTURE¹

Matthew 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Acts 11:19-21 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord..

Acts 11:25-30 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So, for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

OBSERVATION

The people of Jesus' time experienced aftershocks, also. They came in the form of persecution and a pandemic, but ended with God's provision. Our scriptures this week tell the story of Stephen who was the first Christian martyr to die for the faith. He was a follower of Jesus and had been selected by the Apostles to distribute food to the widows in the church. He was also a determined evangelist which brought him to the attention of the Jewish religious leaders who had him stoned to death, but not before he shared the Gospel of

¹ All scripture translation is NIV unless otherwise indicated.

Christ with onlookers. One of those onlookers was Saul, later to become Paul, the author of 13 of our New Testament epistles. Stephen's death started an open season on arresting and killing Christians who fled the region and scattered everywhere, spreading the Word but only among Jews. In Antioch, 300 miles north of Jerusalem was where the Gospel began to reach Greeks and other gentile peoples – but not without great hardship. This was not what the religious leaders anticipated, but it was what God planned.

QUESTION: When have you endured great hardship and found out later that God had led you there for His purposes?

So, a man named Barnabas (Son of Encouragement) went to Tarsus to find Saul, a new Christian, and brought him to Antioch. There they taught and disciplined new believers. Together they were responsible for helping the church become multi-ethnic and multi-cultural and no longer just for Jews. So, as Peter had told Church leaders after his encounter with the Gentile Cornelius, the Gospel is for everyone!

QUESTION: When have you been told that you are a great encouragement to others? How did your encouragement affect your relationship with them?

When the early church, under persecution and duress, suffered a massive famine throughout the Roman world, they didn't hunker down to protect themselves, instead they asked three questions: **1) Who will be at risk? 2) How can we help? 3) Whom should we send?**² They saw the times as an opportunity to be generous.

QUESTION: When did you realize that Covid-19 was an opportunity to be generous? How did you respond?

APPLICATION

Prioritization is the decision to prioritize our finances around God's purposes. When we tithe at least 10% then give to others with open hearts and hands as first fruits of our income, we are prioritizing. These principles are so powerful: **1) Give as each one is able.** The widow with her mite gave more than all of the rich in Jerusalem because she gave all she had. We aren't asked to do that, but to stretch ourselves and renew our minds to give without hesitation when we see a need. With God it's always about sacrifice. His Kingdom is never about a dollar amount -- it is about percentage. It's never about what we don't have – it's about what we do. As we each give a percentage of what we have, that allows us to help those who are not able – those who are in need. **2) Decide to give.** Nothing of significance in our lives starts without a decision. We decided to follow Jesus, didn't we? None of us regret that! Our discipleship was a decision, and so financially, we will never get out of debt until we make a decision to not live that way anymore. We must decide to get our finances in order so we can be generous.

QUESTION: Tell us about a time when you had to make a decision to change something in your life? What was the result of that decision?

QUESTION: How is your 10%-10%-80% budget coming? Have you considered Ramsey+ to help you? How have you built in the principle of prioritization?

So, what is our next step? Tithe and give consistently -- it's the season, isn't it? Christmas is an opportunity to think of others: Children of incarcerated parents; those who can't provide for their families without us; abused women; children who won't have gifts of toys to open; people who live in areas devastated by hurricanes; people who need churches to lead them to Christ. The list is endless. This Christmas season The Crossing is entering into **Project Hope 21** as we begin 21 days of prayer, worship and serving. We want to give \$21,000 to each of our partners³ who 1) combat human trafficking, 2) provide disaster relief, 3) provide benevolence for people in our church who are suffering, 4) build new churches in India, and 5) shelter abused women and children. We are also presenting the opportunity to bring unwrapped toys and envelopes with gift cards to a church service for those in our community who are in need. Just like the early church disciples, who suffered through hardships, gave sacrificially and changed the world around them, we can do the same to glorify Jesus.

² God and the Pandemic. N. T. Wright.

³ Agape International, Hope for Prisoners, Refuge for Women, Project 150, Convoy of Hope plus benevolence at The Crossing

QUESTION: What does your family need this Christmas? Where will you go for assistance?

QUESTION What are you teaching your children about generosity this Christmas?

QUESTION: What decisions have you made to take the next step into financial generosity with us this Christmas?

The 23rd Psalm tells us: We lack nothing as followers of Jesus because He provides for us. Then why would we not be so grateful to Him that we would open our hearts and give generously to others?

PRAYER

Lord God, give us hearts of generosity and show us what our next steps are. We are so in awe of the early followers of Jesus and we want to have the same passion, determination and loving hearts as they did in order to share with others as we are able. We seek after righteousness and we trust You. in Jesus' name. Amen.

QUESTIONS

QUESTION: Where are you in getting over the shock that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused in your life?

QUESTION: When have you endured great hardship and found out later that God had led you there for His purposes?

QUESTION: When have you been told that you are a great encouragement to others? How did your encouragement affect your relationship with them?

QUESTION: When did you realize that Covid-19 was an opportunity to be generous? How did you respond?

QUESTION: Tell us about a time when you had to make a decision to change something in your life? What was the result of that decision?

QUESTION: How is your 10%-10%-80% budget coming? Have you considered Ramsey+ to help you? How have you built in the principle of prioritization?

QUESTION: What does your family need this Christmas? Where will you go for assistance?

QUESTION What are you teaching your children about generosity this Christmas?

QUESTION: What decisions have you made to take the next step into financial generosity with us this Christmas?