

Accelerate
Multiply Your Investment
November 6, 2011

Good morning North Heartland.

As you know if you've been around in the past month or so, we are just about to launch a two-year capital campaign called *Accelerate*.

And, to accomplish our goals (which are described in this handy little booklet - which you should have received in the mail by now, or at the door on the way out. If you haven't, we have more available that you can pick up) accomplishing our goals is going to require all of us to give a little bit more than a little bit - actually a lot more than a little bit. It's going to require us to be exceedingly generous over the next two years, from

December 2011 thru December 2013 ... which is why ... as Ladell said, over the past couple of weeks we've been talking about some of the ways that our generosity towards God's Kingdom can actually have a positive impact on *us*, personally. A lot of times when churches do campaigns and things like this, you can focus so much on the goals of what you're trying to do in the ministry, or how much money you need and how much people need to give, that you forget that God uses the process of giving, and even determining what you're going to give, to work on our hearts as well. To make us more like Christ.

I'll say more about that in a little bit but, first, we thought it might be time to provide an inspirational example of what we're talking about ... (*dramatically*) a story of how participating in a capital campaign profoundly changed the life of one man.

That man ... the Right Rev. George
Bailey

The place ... the idyllic community of
Bedford Falls

The cause ... new handbells for the
church choir

Let's watch as the story – and the handbell
campaign – comes to their exciting
conclusion!

Video – “Bells Fundraising”

Kind of puts you in a festive capital
campaign spirit doesn't it? Ok, maybe not.

Actually, the reason we decided to do that
little “mockery” (for lack of a better term)
was to lighten things up a bit. I think that's
necessary because whenever a church
starts a capital campaign, most people who

are part of that congregation get at least a little bit nervous. Even if they've been through it before (as many of the folks in this room have) and not only survived it but thrived through it and even thrived *because* of it, there's always a nagging fear in most people that the pastor at some point is going power up and twist everyone's arm; try to make them feel guilty about what they *ought* to give. "Jesus paid it all ... so, brothers and sisters, we ought to pay it all, too." At that point some people will even take a pass on church services because they don't want that kind of manipulation, they say, "I'll be back when this whole thing is over."

I have to tell you that whenever I hear that people feel like that – and I've heard a few people in this congregation express similar fears about the *Accelerate* campaign – whenever I hear that people feel that way, *I am so sad*. I'm sad, in part, because it

means that a few of us have actually been subjected to guilt-driven and manipulative preaching or teaching somewhere along the line and we're rightfully a gun-shy of what might happen.

But the greater cause of my sadness is that, for most of us ... well, let's put it this way: *the issue for most of us really isn't what some pastor, or teacher, did or said.* Truth is most pastors these days are very aware of the need to avoid any kind of a guilt or manipulative approach on *any* subject but especially when it comes to money. In fact, most pastors these days are so aware of and so sensitive about this little issue with money that they are as afraid to *give* a sermon about money as their church members are to *hear* one! Lucky – or unlucky – for you, I'm not one of those pastors, so you get to hear sermons about money!

See, the negative reaction most people have when it comes to messages about money and mission, or messages about stewardship and sacrifice, or generosity and giving; the negative reaction most people have when it comes to capital campaigns and pledge drives isn't because of what some pastor did or said. It's because we – and I'm speaking to Christians here, followers of Jesus – it's because we have allowed the great deceiver, the enemy of our souls, Satan, to steal from us the incredible, amazing joy of generosity.

And, for a lot of us, not only has our joy been stolen, it's been replaced by an attitude that sees giving as a burden, a chore, something that demands begrudging compliance – “I'd better do this giving thing or God will get mad” or “No one else is going to give like I do, so I guess *I* have to pony up ... *again*.” For some of us, our joy has been replaced by

a pathetic performance-based mentality that says "If I could just give what he gives; woe is me, I can't do that. God must not love me as much as he loves someone else."

And that makes me very sad because, for those who are followers of Jesus ...

Giving ought to be one of the most joyous things we do.

Would you say that with me out loud?
"Giving ought to be one of the most joyous things we do."

Now I asked you to say that with me because the wording is very significant. "Giving ought to be one of the most joyous things we do." Unfortunately, what most people – again, Christians, believers in Jesus – have in their heads is a slightly abbreviated version of that.

This is what most of us think: “Giving ought to be one of the things we do.”

We leave out the joyous part, and we connect the “ought” with *giving* when, in reality, the “ought” ought to be connected with *joy*.

“Giving ought to be one of the *most joyous things* we do.”

In other words, if anything ought to happen, it ought to be joy about giving – not just giving.

Do you see the difference? I hope so because this is not my idea. This comes from something the Apostle Paul once wrote to a group of Christ-followers at Corinth.

I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in

Macedonia.

"Hey," Paul is saying, "I've got to tell you something amazing about these believers I've been working with."

They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. 2 Corinthians 8:2 (NLT)

Notice the connection there: abundant joy and rich generosity.

Paul continues:

They gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift

*for the believers in Jerusalem.
2 Corinthians 8:3-4 (NLT)*

What was happening here was that Paul was in the process of going around to all these different churches, collecting a special offering to help out the church in Jerusalem which was suffering and these believers from Macedonia – who were suffering just as badly – begged Paul not just once, not just twice, but “again and again” to let them have the privilege of giving! What an attitude!

“Paul, we really want to take up a collection to help our brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. We’ve heard it’s really bad there.”

“No, you guys are in enough trouble yourselves. I didn’t know how bad it was until I got here. There are other believers in other towns who will help the people in

Jerusalem.”

“But Paul, we really want to do this!”

“No. No. Seriously, I can’t ask you to give at a time like this, when you’re in a situation like this.”

“Paul, you’re not listening. We know you’re not asking. *We’re asking.* In fact, we’re *begging* to have this privilege. Don’t cheat us out of the joy of giving!”

And, as the story goes, Paul didn’t.

In fact, a few paragraphs later, after describing this scene to the Corinthian Christians, he encouraged them to join with the Macedonians in giving to this special offering out of the same motivation.

He wrote:

*Don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure [i.e., don't give because you ought; don't connect ought and give] for God loves a person who gives cheerfully. 2
Corinthians 9:7 (NLT)*

I'm sure some of you know that the Greek word translated as "cheerfully" is "hilarion" ... from which we get the word "hilarious." Paul here is saying that

- God just loves it when people are tickled pink to give.
- God just loves it when people give with utter joy, with laughter and delight.
- God just loves it when people say, "Lucky me, I don't *have* to do this. I get to do this! Lucky me, I get to participate in what God's doing in this world. I get to extend my influence (like we talked

about last week). I get to maximize my character (like we talked about in the first week of this series). I get to use my money to make one of the greatest long-term investments ever (which we'll talk about in a few minutes). Lucky me!"

Friends, the truth is that God is not after our money as much as He's after a heart that gives cheerfully. Just as it is with so many other issues, it's not as much about what we do as much as it is about what we are *becoming* while we do. God doesn't want you and me to *give* as much as He wants you and me to become *the kind of people for whom giving is a joy*; the kind of people whose lives reflect Jesus' teaching that ...

"It is more blessed to give than receive." Acts 20:35
(NIV)

And a big part of what I hope will happen in

this campaign is that you will come to believe that scripture and you will experience that in a way you never have before. See, not only does God want us to give so that His work gets done, He wants us to give so that we get done; so that our hearts will expand and experience the joy that He has for us. And, *that* result, friends, is just as important to me as raising the money we need and accomplishing the goals that we've set out.

Becoming a Joyful Giver

Of course, the question is ... how does that happen? How do we become the kind of person for whom giving is one of the most joyous things we do?

I don't want to oversimplify this but I think it comes back to that same saying of Jesus that we always come back to. The Gospel of

Mark tells us that ...

Jesus went into Galilee (at the beginning of his ministry), proclaiming the good news of God.

And here's the good news he was proclaiming:

*"The time has come," he said.
"The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"
Mark 1:15 (NIV)*

Repent, as we know, means to change your way of thinking. Admit that what you're thinking about life, what you're thinking about God, what you're thinking about money, what you're thinking about how the world works, has been tainted by the world system, by the Deceiver, and admit you're wrong. And say, "God, what do you say?" And then you start believing what God says.

That's what it means to repent and believe. It's good news that you can do that because the Kingdom is right here.

Now, here's how that works when it comes to giving vs. receiving. When it comes to giving and receiving, what do most people believe? Most people (including me) tend to believe that it's better to *receive* than to give. I mean, it's just simple arithmetic:

- When you *receive*, you *gain* – you add to your pile.
- When you *give*, you *lose* – you take away from your pile.

That's what it looks like.

But Jesus says we're all wrong about that, that the truth is just the opposite: that it's better to *give* than to receive; that if you want to add to your pile, you actually have to take

away from your pile.

Now, quite honestly, that's sounds crazy. It sounds crazy and it does not make sense. However, and it's very important that you and I understand this: Jesus is not asking us to believe something stupid. He's not saying, "I know it makes no logical sense, but if you just close your eyes to reality and believe hard enough, maybe it will come true."

That is not what he is saying at all. Jesus says what He says about giving and receiving because *He sees something about the pile that you and I don't see.*

For example ... one time Jesus told his followers ...

He said:

"If you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least

*of my followers, you will
surely be rewarded.”
Matthew 10:42 (NLT)*

Translation: if you give in even the smallest way, your generosity will come back to you.

For example ... Jesus also told his followers
...

*“When you give (take from
your pile) to the needy, do not
let your left hand know what
your right hand is doing, so
that your giving may be in
secret. Then your Father, who
sees what is done in secret,
will reward you.” Matthew
6:3-4 (NIV)*

Translation: if you give, even if no one knows about it, your generosity will come back to you. God Himself will see to it.

For example ... Jesus also told his followers
...

*"When you give a banquet,
invite the poor, the crippled,
the lame, the blind, and you
will be blessed. Although
they cannot repay you, you
will be repaid at the
resurrection of the righteous."
Luke 14:13-14 (NIV)*

Translation: if you give to those who can't or don't give back, your generosity will come back to you. God will see that you are repaid.

For example ... Paul wrote:

*Command [those who are
rich in this world] to do good,
to be rich in good deeds, and
to be generous and willing to
share.*

Why? Not because they ought. This is what Paul says, because:

In this way (they're going to do a thing with the pile) they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.
1 Timothy 6:18 19
(NIV)

Translation: if you give here and now, your generosity will come back to you later, and then some, in the life to come.

For example ... one time Peter said to Jesus, "We've left everything to follow you. We've given everything we have to be your followers."

And Jesus said ...

"Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life." Matthew 19:29 (NIV)

Translation: if you give it up for my sake, your generosity will come back to you in huge ways, literal ways, both now and later.

Do you see a pattern here? I do. It's "Generosity produces reward."

Now, let me ask you a question. What do we call it when a person takes some of their money and gives it to someone else in the hope that the money will come back and then some? We call it an *investment*. So, what Jesus and his Apostles are teaching us is that giving is an investment.

And that's why it's better to give than to receive. That's why, when Jesus makes that crazy-sounding statement, He isn't saying "close your eyes to reality and just try to believe something that's not true." He's saying "open your eyes to the reality that, when you give, you're not *losing anything*. You're moving stuff from your pile to a better pile; a pile with your name on it in the Bank of Heaven, so to speak."

"Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal." Matthew 6:20 (NLT)

If He could put it in more contemporary terms, I think Jesus would say, "Store your treasures in The Bank of Heaven; a bank that isn't overleveraged or too big to fail. What you put in there *and then some* will come back to you. Guaranteed at a rate of

return that is higher than any other place in the universe.”

And, friends, if we're ever going to become the kind of people who are joyous givers ...

- We have to repent of the thought that we're losing something when we give or that we're only gaining some kind of emotional feel-good moment. That's not anywhere close to what Jesus is talking about.
- We have to repent of the thought that it's better to *receive* than to give.
- And then we have to start believing the good news – that the Kingdom of God is so near and so real right now that it's really the other way around; that it's actually better to give than to receive and, hallelujah, thank God, we've been let in on the secret! Lucky us.

“Exceedingly Generous”

Now, I’m telling you this today because in two weeks, on Sunday November 20th, I’m going to ask you, if North Heartland is your church and if you are a follower of Christ, to make an exceedingly generous financial commitment that will last for two years. And between now and then, I’m asking you (and your spouse) to spend some time looking hard, looking closely at your financial situation and figuring out what for some of you will be the single greatest monetary charitable contribution of your lives and for others – especially those who are struggling right now – what might be the greatest *sacrifice* that you will ever make in your life, even if it’s not the largest gift you’ll ever make in your life.

And, as your pastor, I’ve got to tell you, asking that of you both excites me and

terrifies me. It excites me because if we all said “yes” to that challenge, we would slam dunk our *Accelerate* goals. The true giving capacity of our congregation (we figured this out a couple of years ago) is actually closer to \$6M over two years than the \$4M goal we’ve set. And it excites me that if we said “yes,” that might happen. It also excites me that if we said “yes” to these things, each of us would grow in our faith in a way we never have before.

But it also terrifies me to ask this of you because, unless you understand and believe that you are making an investment that God will repay in some form or another, this whole *Accelerate* campaign is going to be a joyless burden and a chore for you; it’s going to be something that demands begrudging compliance – “I’d better do this capital campaign thing or God will be mad” or “No one else is going to give to this thing. I don’t

know what McGinniss is thinking, so I guess I have to step up and do it ... *again*." Or it will be yet another instance of a performance-based spirituality that says "If I could just give as much as they do, then maybe God would be happy with me. But, I can't. Woe is me."

That would be horrible, and that would make me so sad because I don't want that for you. It ought to be the most joyous thing we do. And, I don't want that for me either.

So, I want to talk for a little bit about how to determine what an "exceedingly generous" commitment looks like for you and for me. I want to make sure we have clarity on this because, again, if we don't understand this, we're either going to miss out on this huge investment opportunity that God has put before us, or we're going to lose our joy. Both are terrible ends in this deal.

So, to explain it, I just want to walk you through the process that Jetta and I went through as we were thinking about our commitment, because, even though I work here, we're members of this church, too. And, as I always tell our staff "you're a church member before you're a staff member. We do the things we ask of everyone else."

Now, before I tell you what we're planning to do and how we arrived at it, I think it would be good to spend just a few minutes reviewing what Accelerate is all about, because I know not everyone has been here every week. And some of you didn't get to see the video that we showed two weeks ago, which explained the whole vision. And, we have a shortened version of that and people have said, "I'd love to see that again," so we're going to show a shorter

version of that in a minute. And then we're going to show another video right after that which is two guys that we sent out to plant churches several years ago, and they're talking about their experience with us, and maybe a little bit of challenge in that, too. Okay, let's watch and I'll stop talking.

Video – “North Heartland Short Final” (3:21)
Video – “Plant Churches” (2:00)

By the way, Darrin's church is 10 years old with over 3,000 people attending every weekend in various locations in St. Louis. Bob's church in St. Joe is not quite as large, but they have a very successful ministry and reach a lot of people from the city there. And, they just celebrated their 5th anniversary several weeks ago. So, we're the proud parents of both those churches and other churches, and they have churches that they're parents of. Anyway, through *Accelerate*, we want to do that again. We

want to get back into the church planting business.

Oh, and one more thing. I mentioned in the first video that we have two options for expansion – renovation or relocation – but not anymore. We did *not* receive an offer for our building so, welcome home, everybody. This is where we are and this is where we're going to be. We're very excited about that. Hallelujah – it's a phenomenal option. We're going to move this wall and expand this auditorium and renovate our commons and our entryway and maybe even a couple other cool things we haven't talked about yet.

What I want to do in the time we have left is I want to talk about how to determine what an exceedingly generous financial commitment looks like. And as I said, I want to walk you

through what Jetta and I did. But I also want to read you a little bit more of what Paul wrote to the Corinthians because it speaks to this issue so well – and it also reflects my heart for you guys as your pastor.

This is what Paul said:

Since you excel in so many ways—in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, and your love from us—I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving. 2 Corinthians 8:7 (NLT)

And I feel the same way. This is an excellent church, but let's also excel in this gracious act of giving.

The second thing Paul says is:

I am not commanding you to

do this. But I am testing how genuine your love is by comparing it with the eagerness of the other churches. 2 Corinthians 8:8 (NLT)

I feel the same way. I'm not twisting anybody's arm here. I'm not commanding you to do anything. But this is a test. Make no mistake about it, friends. This is a character test for all of us, like we talked about in the first week of this series.

Paul goes on, he says:

Give in proportion to what you have. Whatever you give is acceptable if you give it eagerly. And give according to what you have, not what you don't have. 2 Corinthians 8:11-12 (NLT)

In other words, don't be beating yourself up,

“Oh, I wish I could give more, but ...” No. Give according to what you have. This is a great no-guilt strategy, isn’t it? Some of you need to memorize that little passage right there and get your head straight on this giving thing.

I don't mean your giving should make life easy for others and hard for yourselves. I only mean that there should be some equality. Right now you have plenty and can help those who are in need. Later, they will have plenty and can share with you when you need it. 2 Corinthians 8:13-14 (NLT)

That’s a very good principle which definitely was helpful in our planning and I think you’ll see why.

Then, finally, back to the verse we started

with.

Don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure for God loves a person who gives cheerfully (in a hilarious way). 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NLT)

Now, in this passage, I think there are four questions – four principles – that I kept coming back to as I worked on our pledge. And I say “I” because I handle the finances in our family and I took the initial shot at coming up with a pledge amount, then I showed it to Jetta and got her feedback and suggestions. And based on how we both felt about these four questions, that determined our final number.

Here are the questions (and you might want to write these down).

1. Does this commitment represent a hard

(but not *destructively* hard) test?

Remember we just read about testing in what Paul wrote. Does this number require sacrifice? Does it push us to excel in a way we never have before, yet without becoming destructive to us financially or emotionally or spiritually? It's kind of like weight training, and I've talked to you about this a little bit lately. You know the phrase, "No pain no gain," it's true, but too much pain and you're out of the game altogether. So, there's a fine line between hard and destructive hard, and that's where you want to be on this for the exceedingly generous pledge.

2. Is it in correct proportion to our income and stored resources (money we've already laid aside)?

That's just a general principle of scripture which Paul directly restates here. God always asks us to give a percentage of what

we make and what we have.

3. Does it fit our life circumstance?

Does this match where we are right now? And Paul said, right now, some of you Corinthians are doing well, and some are not. And that's true of us. Some of us, right now in our lives, are in a better financial position than ever. We are - I'll just tell you right now, you'll hear more about that in a minute. But, some of us maybe are not doing so well right now. Some of us have a lot of earning power still ahead of us and we're going to make big bucks over the next few years. Some of us are getting older and we're thinking "Man, there's a day when I'm not going to have this kind of income and I need to keep that in mind." Does this fit your life circumstance?

Then, finally, the last question which we've

been asking all along.

4. Do we feel joy over our decision?

When we look at the final number and we consider the other questions I've just laid out, can we sign our pledge card saying "Lucky us! We get to give this much! Thank-you God!"

If not, then your number is probably wrong. It might be wrong on the high side – maybe it's destructive hard; maybe you're giving too much OR it might be wrong on the low side. You picked a number but you don't feel joy because it's not in proportion to your income or your stored resources, or it's not a sacrifice whatsoever.

Now, with all of that as a backdrop, here's

what we did to determine what, for us, is an exceedingly generous pledge. And, I'll tell you upfront, I feel a little vulnerable laying this out for you, but I'm going to be gut-level honest with you about where we are and what we're going to do. And I don't do this to make anyone think highly of us or to make anyone feel like, "oh, I wish I could do that." I just want to give you an example, okay? (And, again, you might want to write down this 3-step process we did.)

Step 1. Put everything you have on the table.

"God, all that I have - my earning power, my possessions, my savings - *all of this* comes from You, and it is Yours. This is not mine. I'm just the steward that you have entrusted to use this." You've got to start there; everything goes on the table.

Now, very specifically, here's what this

meant for us ... and I'm just going to rattle this off so you get an idea, because some of these things might be on your table, or might not be, maybe other things. For example,

- We're paying down our principal, quickly. We're paying about \$200 more per month on our house - that's on the table.
- We have a house; we have \$70K of equity in our house. We could take that equity out if God tells us to and use it for this. Some may say, "No, you don't do that!" Hey, it's on the table. *God gave us the house*. It's His equity, not mine. It's on the table.
- We own some stock; it's worth about \$50K. That's on the table, too.
- We have an investment that we made years ago and it's finally paying off and it's paying off pretty well. It's about \$1,500/mo, and we've been shocked.

It's on the table.

- We've been able to manage our money, God has blessed us, we don't have any debt, and our kids are all married (Thanks, God), and, so, we're able to put \$1,100/mo into our long-term savings.
- I'm paying \$300 per month to go to a physical trainer
- \$600 per month Jetta & I just got raises
- \$400 per month in raises over the *second year* of the campaign (assume \$200 for each of us)
- \$400 per month additional retirement contribution I make
- LOTS per month golf/horse expenses
- LOTS per year Christmas, vacation, and other luxuries

All of this is on the table of us! Does this make sense? Are you with me? It all goes on the table. It doesn't belong to us. It belongs

to God. That's the first step. Now, here's the question: What's on your table? You've got to determine what's on your table.

Step 2. Decide what you need to keep, of what's on the table, and what you can give.

And this is kind of a process, and I'll show you how to work through this, "What of this, God, can I keep, and what of this should I give?" By the way, what you can give includes what you are currently giving. Remember this is a one-fund campaign – we don't have a general fund and a building fund. Everything goes into the same pot because it's all important. So, whatever you're giving right now is part of what you're going to pledge.

Plus, some of us, when we do this exercise (when we look at what is on the table) we're going to realize that we can't give any more than we're currently giving. Now, I don't

think there are a whole lot of people in this situation because, honestly, I think almost everyone in this congregation could sacrifice – could do something hard, not destructive hard, but hard. But, for those who are in this situation (and there are a few in this church), the one fund idea means that your giving - just continuing to give what you already give - *that matters* and you're in the game. And lucky you, you still get to be in the game.

Now, for us, we're not in that situation. So, we're definitely in a place where we can give more. We're going to start with our current giving, and for us, we are tithers. Let me explain what tithing means. Tithing is a word that literally means "ten percent." Here's how a tithe works. If you make \$100K a year, you just take off a zero, and that's your tithe. You say, "God, you get \$10K this year, and I'm going to give that to You through our church or other ministries."

So, we're tithers, and for us, because of our income and how it works:

- our current giving is about \$1,450 per month (a little bit more than a tenth). And when you multiply that over two years, it's about \$35K. So, when we do our pledge card, one of the numbers that will go on the pledge card will be \$35K that we're going to contribute over the next two years towards *Accelerate*, because that's what we're already doing.
- Now, for us, we can do some additional things ... we're looking at
 - This investment we weren't counting on, it's paying us \$1,500/mo - that's going in. That's part of what is on the table. We're saying, "We don't need that. God, You use that." That's \$36K over two

years.

- The raises we just got - we were doing fine before that - that goes in. That's \$600/mo, or \$14.4K over two years.
 - After I reach my goal in June with my trainer, I'm going to be a free man. I'm going to say, "Jonathan, go torture someone else." And that will save me \$300/mo, and that's going to work out to about \$5.4K over two years.
- When I add all that up:
 - Beyond what we're currently giving, it's about \$56K over the next two years
 - That means the Grand Total, what Jetta and I are going to pledge, is \$90K over the next two years.
 - I'm talking about it like I'm calm, cool and collected, but we were

sweating bullets as we were working through this because this is a big number. We've never given anything like this and will probably never give anything like this again.

But this is where we are in our situation, and this is where those questions come into play. You have to go back and say, "these are the numbers; this is what it looks like. What if we take this off the table and give this to God...."

And, to be totally honest with you, when we first did this, I came up with a higher number than what we're putting down right now. But when I discussed it with Jetta, she said, "don't forget that we're getting old and we're going to retire soon. (She wants to retire.) You realize that when you say we're going to give this extra money, you're sacrificing

money that would be available to us for retirement, so let's not be destructive hard about this."

So, that's the number we came up with. We think the number is doable hard but not destructive hard. And I want to challenge you to do the similar thing.

Step 3. Decide how you will give it (i.e., lump-sums, monthly contributions, etc)

I've mentioned several times – and it's in the booklet as well – that Sunday December 4th is "Big Give" Sunday. On that day, we're asking everyone who makes a commitment to Accelerate to bring as much as possible of our pledge and give it in the offering that day. Or, you could do it online through the City. However it works best for you.

Now, for us, we decided that we're going to figure out how to put in 20-30K of our 90K in

on that one day. I'm not sure how just yet.

- We might donate some stock. (By the way, never sell stock and give cash! Donate the stock to the church and we'll sell it and save you the capital gains taxes and you get the tax write-off still).
- We're also refinancing the house and might take out some additional cash and pay it back to ourselves over the next two years.

We're not sure just yet.

But here's the deal. Some of you could match or exceed the amount that I'm talking about! You could write a check today or donate stock today or you could get creative. And so I want to challenge those of you who are able to do just that. And for others, you're going, "man, I'm glad God's blessed

you and you're in that situation and you can do that. Yay, God! Yay, you! But, I can't do that." So, I want to challenge you to think about how you could give the single largest gift you've ever given to North Heartland on that day.

Ok, that's what we're doing as a couple, and that's how we got there. And it could even change over the next two weeks as God continues to speak to us. But, in any case, this will be the largest pledge we've ever made to anything. And, as I said, I'm feeling very vulnerable to lay all this out, but I think you need to hear it to understand how this works and how you think about these things because I don't think most of us do it this way. And I don't share this to show off or make you think more highly of me and Jetta than you ought because, right now, for us,

our life situation is such that we can do something like this. Three years from now we might not be able to. In fact, in the previous campaign back in 2006, we didn't come anywhere close to this number because we still had three girls at home, weddings – you know what I'm saying, a big mountain of money ahead.

Conclusion

Ok, let's bring this epic to a conclusion.

Two weeks from today is pledge Sunday.

Between now and then, if NHCC is your church, I want to ask you to take some time and work through this process and bring your pledge card on that Sunday. And, by the way, that particular service, those pictures that Ladell was talking about at the beginning of this service, they are going to

make an appearance in that service. And that service is going to be awesome. In fact, years from now people will be saying “do you remember that Pledge Sunday at NHCC when we ...?” Just giving you a heads up on that. You don’t want to miss it.

And then two weeks after that is Big Give Sunday –the first offering towards Accelerate.

I am praying that we will have the largest one day offering we have ever seen at North Heartland on that day – well into the six figures – which will allow us to get a huge jump on the design of our renovation in early January.

I want to close with one more thing Paul wrote to the Corinthians about this matter of giving.

You know the generous

grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9 (NLT)

Now, Paul is not saying “you need to do what Jesus did; you need to sacrifice as Jesus did; you need to follow in his example.” What he is saying is not that. What he is saying is a principle we talk about all the time around here – you can only give what you have already received. And we have received much from Jesus, Paul is saying, and because of that, we are able to be generous. It’s not a guilt thing, it’s an “I can” thing.

So, I’m going to pray for us now that this will be our goal, that this experience of *Accelerate* will teach us joy. Giving ought to be one of the most joyous things we do. Let’s pray to that end.

God, thank you for this morning. I pray that You would bring a spirit of joy on our congregation. I pray that You would bring prosperity to people. I pray that people would be challenged by the opportunity that You have put in front of us this morning. God, I pray that if there is anyone sitting here this morning who is thinking, "well, gosh, I can't do anything," God, please rescue us from that kind of thought and give us a joy that we can participate in some way.

God, some of us are sitting here this morning, thinking, "I can do what he did, easy." God, I pray You would give us the motivation to do that.

God, I just want to put this whole thing in Your hands and pray that You will be glorified and Your work would be done

and that we would get done, as well. I ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Endnotes