

Harris Creek Baptist Church
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Series: The Good Life
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The Generous Life

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: “They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.” Now he who supplies seed to the Sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Oh hey guys! How are we doing? Good morning! Yeah, there you go. Man, the 9:00, man they were struggling. Mourning that loss, a little heavy. But you guys, you know Jesus came back from the dead so it’s all good. It’s good to be with you.

We’re back in the Good Life and I’ll just start by saying, last week was my birthday and birthdays are a nostalgic time for me; kind of a time for reflection. And I was remembering some of my favorite gifts. Gifts are my love language, I like to give, I like to receive. And so, my son’s birthday is in September, and mine is November, so his is a couple months before mine. I remember back when he was 4 or 5 years old, all he wanted was this truck for his birthday. When he got it he was so excited. You know, a lot of toys wear off, but not this one. He really did, he played with this truck every day. And so, when my birthday came around, you know I was sleeping and I’m like—birthday I’m going to sleep in a little bit, and I wake up and he’s breathing in my face—it’s terrifying, like children of the corn kind of thing—like what are you doing? He’s like, “Dad you’ve got to get up! It’s your birthday!” And I’m like, “Oh, yeah, okay. Alright...” He’s like, “You’ve got to open your presents!” I’m like, “Okay, yeah bud, we’ll do it, we’ll do it.” So, he gets kind of frustrated that I’m not moving fast enough, he goes over to Monica’s side of the bed and is like, “Mom! You’ve got to get up! It’s dad’s birthday, we’ve got to open presents!” So, I kind of slowly make it up, into the kitchen, and our kitchen and our tradition is we have everything on the table, there’s a little birthday sign and whatnot. And he just brings me this gift, and I’m like, “Hey bud, we need to wait for your sisters to get up.” So, he runs and gets them, “Wake up! It’s dad’s birthday!” He’s super excited.

And finally, everybody gathers in the kitchen. It's time to open presents. And he brings me this box, he's grinning from ear to ear. So, I tear into the box and open it up. And it's two pairs of pants from Old Navy that don't fit, and he's as frustrated as I am, cause he's like, "That's not what I—" "He brought me the wrong box evidently. So, he goes, and he gets another box about the same size, so he brings it over, he's just grinning from ear to ear. I tear into it, and I look inside, and what I see really takes my breath away. I'm like, "Ah, buddy what are you doing?" And it's his truck. And I'm like, "Buddy why are you giving me your truck?" And he goes, "Because you're special to me." Right? And so, yeah, you feel that sense of "Aww." That moment where it's like, "Oh man, that's so kind, that's so sweet. That's so generous of him." My hunch is in Christianity, that we're supposed to experience that a lot. That that really is a normal part of our existence of us following Jesus, is this "Aww," like wow, man that was really kind. That was a tremendous act of generosity. That was really faithful, that was really loving. Wow! That that would just be a normal part of our existence.

At the center of our faith, what we believe—the Gospel—is God emptying himself. Like, giving everything, he has. So as Christians, little Christs, little Jesus's, walking around, representative of Jesus, what marks us—what is a distinctive of Christianity—is how we give everything. That word "grace" is not giving someone what they deserve. It's giving them more than what they could ever deserve. It's *charis*, and it's where we get the word *charity*. And so, at the center of our faith is the Gospel. John 3:16, "**For God so loved the world, he gave...**" At the center of our belief is the generosity of our God. And so, what marks a distinctive of his followers, is a generosity that grabs the world's attention.

And I'm sure that this is not new news to you, but it does seem that some point along the way in Church history, this has kind of fallen off where we've made it this mundane, thoughtless, oh yes—stroke a check, drop it in the box, move on to the next thing, set it up auto giving. But there's something different that I see in the Scripture.

So, we're continuing the series The Good Life, and today I want to talk about how the good life is the generous life. That's the message. The good life is the generous life. So, we said the good life is a stewardship series. Stewarding is what you do with something that you possess that's not yours. It's how you handle it, how you treat it, what you do with it. Week one we talked about stewarding our body. We said that God has entrusted to us this vessel, and that we're to honor Him with it. Week two we talked about stewarding our minds with what we let in our minds. If our mind is a room, what are the thoughts that we let come into that room, and do they honor God? And then in week three we talked about using our gifts and talents—stewarding our gifts and talents—that is the skills that the Holy Spirit illuminates in us for the purpose to be used in the Church. If he made us fast, he made us fast for Him. If he made us good at math, he made us good at math for Him. If he made us with the gift of hospitality, we're going to use that to serve the Church. Then in week four, we talked about stewarding our work, our occupation. Whether that's outside the home, inside the home, how do we do that as though we're working for Christ, since we know we will receive a reward from Him. And then week five we said stewarding our relationships. Those that we know, we talked about our life groups, how to we leverage our relationships for the kingdom. And then last week we started kind of two weeks talking about stewarding our money. Stewarding the resources that God has entrusted to us, which we said are His resources, and it's our job to get his resources to where they go. Like a pipe, not a container,

not that we would store up those resources for ourselves, but like a conduit that we would move those resources wherever they need to go. A conduit not a container, a pipe not a pail is an illustration that's been helpful to me in the past.

And so, we're talking about money. I know that we don't talk about this, and many of you grew up in a tradition where part of every single service they talked about money, because there would be ushers who'd come down the aisle, they would pass a plate, and somebody would talk about the offering. And we don't do that here, we certainly don't talk about it in proportion to what Jesus talks about it. We know He talked about money more than just about any other topic. But we do discuss it a couple of times a year, and it is an important part of what it means to follow Jesus. And one of the reasons we don't talk about it is because of my baggage, and that's on me. I'm working through that, I know that when I see the guys on TV, you know, "Sow an offering and get this holy water and oil or whatever" That that rubs me the wrong way—that turns me off to the Gospel. I know it's usually the time you *finally* get your friend to come with you to Church, that they talk about money. So welcome guests, we're glad you're here.

And a couple of years ago I showed you some graphs on the screen, and I just said, "Hey 50% of our members participate in worship through giving." And someone rightfully took a big issue with that. And they wanted to go to lunch, and so we went to lunch, and everybody has different gifts. Their gifts are in the area of generosity, and they said, "Hey we've got to get that number up—to be the church that God desires us to be, we have to get that number up. We need 100% participation. And while I agree with them, I said this, and I want to share this with you. I said, "I bet if we surveyed the congregation of members, that we would find about 50% of our members read their Bible on a daily basis. About 50% of our members have a thriving prayer life. About 50% of our members are regularly sharing their faith with lost people." Right? Which means that about 50% of our members are disciples of Jesus Christ. And I said, I don't have any interest in manipulating them, saying some really powerful or passionate things with great illustrations so that people would feel compelled to give when God doesn't have their hearts. And candidly if you asked me, "Hey would you rather us read the Bible every day or give generously to Harris Creek?" I would choose to read the Bible every day, all day. Because as you're reading, the Holy Spirit makes known to you the things of God through the word of God, you're going to become a follower of God. And I don't have any interest in Harris Creek having your money without God having your heart.

I want God to have your heart. And many of us grew up in a tradition, in church, of tithing. And I want to say this controversial but absolutely true statement up front: Tithing is unbiblical. I know...It's like wow. There is no precedent in the New Testament for a tithe, which that word just means a 10th, a 10th that you would give, a 10th of what you make. And so that word comes from the Levitical law, the command that God gave the Israelites to give a 10th of their harvest. And we've taken that, the Church has adopted that, it has become common place tradition in the church. But just as you and I shave the sides of our heads, we eat shellfish, we do not follow the law because Jesus has fulfilled the law, we are not commanded, asked, or expected to tithe. That is to give a 10th of our income. It is completely redefined in the New Testament, and in fact, if you were to—you're arguing with me in your head, listen—if you were to go look and see what the Israelites did, you would see percentages between 23%-30%. They gave 23% and 30% of their income to the Church. That's the actual number. Now, I don't have any time to spend on

that, but good for you if that's an area of interest for you, there are countless resources online. Randy Alcorn has written extensively on this, he's an authority on the topic. You can go even to gotquestions.org, or very basic apologetic websites and just search the idea of tithe, and you're going to see and confirm exactly what I'm sharing with you now. A number somewhere between 23% and 30%.

And so, we really have operated in the church, some of you for a very long time, with a misunderstanding on this topic. What I hope to do is to show you from the Scripture today what God calls us to. We're talking about the good life, and so today, to live the good life, I'm going to be in 2 Corinthians chapter 9 if you want to turn there. 2 Corinthians chapter 9. And we're saying, hey the good life comes when you give generously—these words are straight from the text—give cheerfully and give faithfully. The good life is when you give generously, give cheerfully, and give faithfully.

To set this up in 2 Corinthians 9, I'll back up to 2 Corinthians 8, where Paul is talking about the Macedonian church. The churches in Macedonia, and he's saying they have gone through some really difficult times, but these people are known for their generosity played out. And this is what he says in verse 2 and 3 of chapter 8, **“In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.” 2 Corinthians 8:2-3** He's writing this to the church in Corinth, and then he says, “And by the way, I boasted about you church in Corinth, to the church—to the Macedonians, so that they would understand and know about your generosity too, and they would celebrate.” And he's sending someone to the church in Corinth to pick up an offering. And so, he says, “Hey I know that you already have it ready, I don't need to compel you anymore.” But then he does. And so when you read this in context it's almost like Paul is that televangelist. It almost reads manipulative, until you begin to peel back the layers and see that he is simply celebrating faithfulness. And this is what he says, **2 Corinthians 9:6, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”** Simple verse, the baked in illustration is one of harvesting. He's alluding to this idea, you give sparingly, you receive sparingly. You give generously, you receive generously. My first point, to live the good life is to give generously.

1. Give Generously.

Number one, give generously. And so that's the word he uses, that's the word I'm using in the point. Could say sacrificially, there's other verses that point to that idea. But here he uses generously. And he defines generously by giving you the contrast, sparingly. The words that he doesn't use is, give comfortably. He doesn't say give conveniently. He says don't give sparingly, give generously. And it raises the question in the text, do we give to receive? Do we give to receive? I'm going to let you think about that for a second. If you've grown up in church, you probably start violently shaking your head, “No, we do not give to receive.” Listen, I don't want to play games with you, I'm going to tell you, “Yes you do.” You do give to receive because I see that in the text. Why would he tell us that? Why would he use those words, “Give sparingly, receive sparingly. Give generously, receive generously.” And he's going to go on about this even more and really expound on this idea, and so everybody gets really uncomfortable, saying, “Oh no, wait, did he go off the deep end? Prosperity Gospel?” Sit tight. Let me just say this if we

were in a conversation, you're like, "No, no, no. You don't give to receive. This is bad, this is bad." I would just say this, "Would you follow God faithfully if you still went to Hell?" And after you thought about that for a while, you may come to the conclusion of, "Well I don't know. I don't think so. I want to follow God so that I would get more God in heaven..." I'd say great! So, there's a part of the program that God says, "Hey, you are walking in obedience, you receive blessing." And a lot of times we wrestle with, well what is that blessing, well is it in heaven, is it on earth? The Scripture says it's both. Luke 18, He says, "I tell you that no one who has sacrificed in my name will fail to receive 100x as much in this age and in the age to come." That's what it says in the Scripture.

Now here's the problem. The guy on TV, he's going to say, "Hey, if you just sow this amount to this church, and you give to this cause so that we can purchase this jet—or whatever it is. Then you're going to receive an abundance in full. You're going to be able to drive something nicer and live in something bigger...Upgrade!" That's not why God gives. You're going to see in a minute that you give, He gives it back, so that you can give more. This is true to the text. This is consistent with what the Scripture teaches. And so generous giving is giving in a way that you feel.

Here's an illustration, a story that Jesus told. Not as a parable, but actually as an eyewitness account. It shows up in Luke 21, and then I'll read here in Mark 12, they're just about the same. Both four verses that make up this story, and I'll read it to you out of Mark. **Mark 12:41, "Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts." So, you have wealthy people there, and the wealthy people are giving a lot of money. Because they have a lot of money so they're giving a lot of money! "But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Hey come here, come here. We've got to talk about what we just saw, okay? Hey guys, come here. Circle up..." And he says, "Truly I tell you; this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.""**

If you've been in church long, you've heard the story of the widow and the two mites. But I think what can happen is we can be really numb to that. "Well, what are we supposed to do? What am I supposed to do? Give all I have? All I have to live on?" And the answer is maybe. You're certainly not supposed to be like—"No way!" That's in the Scripture for a reason, the Holy Spirit preserved it, and we have to wrestle with those kinds of things. What God is driving us away from is thoughtless giving. There is no thoughtless giving in the Kingdom. It is always thoughtful; it is always prayerful. It is always an act of commune with God, and "What is faithfulness, Lord? What would you have me do, Lord? How can I act faithfully towards you?" And what the Scripture is saying is that it is much more difficult for the wealthy to give generously. If I said, "Hey guys, unbelievable, we received this week at Harris Creek a million-dollar gift." That's not true by the way, yet! If I said, a million-dollar gift, and then I said, "Is that generous? Is that a generous gift?" you would say, "It depends. It depends. Are they a billionaire? If they're a billionaire, it's not that generous." You know what I mean? It's just not. If I said, "Hey guys, you're not going to believe it. This week at Harris Creek we received a five-dollar gift. Somebody put five dollars in the boxes in the back." If I said, "Is that generous?" You

would say, “It depends, how much did they have, if that five dollars was all they had to their name it would be extremely generous.” Or if I would say, “Ten dollars.” “They gave half of what they had. That is very generous.”

So now the Scripture is redefining generosity for us. Do wealthy people give generously? Some do. Some do. Some don't. And so, to put it simply when you give, give more than you're comfortable giving. This is an idea true to the Scripture, that is often not practiced today. We love to give comfortably, not generously. Verse 7, **“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”** And now he brings in this idea of the attitude of the giver, an attitude that he wants is cheerful. Which is a word that we don't use often, especially not around making a sacrifice. And so, to live the good life, number two, give cheerfully.

2. Give Cheerfully

We are to give cheerfully. And so, the first two sentences of this, the first two verses of this passage, present a dichotomy to you. He says, “Do not give sparingly. Give generously. Do not give under compulsion or reluctantly but give cheerfully.” So, he allows us to understand what cheerful giving looks like, because it's not under compulsion, and it's not filled with reluctance. My son is the best example of this that I have. He wakes up early, “Dad, I can't wait to give you this!” He's so excited, he's grinning ear to ear! You would describe that picture, he's cheerful! It's almost like cheerleaders! “Yeah. Let's go! Fist pump! Come on!” You gather the family, you gather the family, and you say, “Hey guys, you're not going to believe how the Lord allowed us to partner with the Church this week.” And you bring them all in that. That's not a common practice today. Which I think is contrary to what the Scripture says—what's the common practice is we set automatic giving. My wife and I do automatic giving, but we try to bring the kids in on that. And sometimes we go above and beyond what we've programmed at the beginning of the year to give. So that our hearts stay involved we want to talk about that. And it's an area that I'm challenged by the Scripture too, even as I share that with you. I want to do better; I want to make sure that our family is cheerfully involved in how we are able to participate in generosity towards the Church.

And so, compulsion is being forced to, reluctance is an unwilling or hesitant way. Compulsion, reluctance, these are kind of brakes -if you will, and then cheerful is the gas, it's the accelerator. Let's go! Let's go! Let's go! I'll give you an illustration of both compulsion and reluctance. My mom grew up in a small country Lutheran Church in Meyersville Texas, and so I would attend with her often on Sunday. And Meyersville Texas, the population is 448. I looked it up so I could share that with you. 448 people there. This small country church is where my mom and dad were married, her family behind the church is buried, there's a cemetery back there. That's where now my grandparents are, and growing up my great grandparents, my great great grandparents, and uncles and aunts and all the things, they're all back there behind the church. And so, it's just basically the only thing is the school across the street and then farmland. Nothing else, for miles and miles and miles. There are little, short pews in this church. Two aisles, one pew in the middle, one row pew in the middle, another row on each side of that one. And they would do an offering. And the way they would pass the plate, it was actually on a pole, where they take the poll and put the basket in front of you, and then go to the next—have you ever seen this in a

church before? They just go person to person with the basket on the pole. And so, my uncle, he's sitting there in front of us, big ten-gallon cowboy hat—the pew actually has a little clip for your cowboy hat, it's that kind of country church—so he clips his cowboy hat, he's there, and it comes time to do the offering. Well, he had gotten a little skirmish with one of the ushers before the service, they had exchanged words outside the church, and so it's time to do the offering and that usher was walking down his aisle, my uncle was right there on the side, on the end. Right in front of me. And so that usher put that basket in front of him and left it there. Now typically, if someone doesn't give, they've already given—whatever—you just go to the next person. But to my uncle he just left it there. And he just gave it a little shake, and my uncle was kind of like, “No I'm good.” And he goes, “No, you're not.” And so, he reaches in his pocket, and he pulls out some kind of bill and he puts it in there, and then he just stays there and kind of shakes it some more. And now the whole church is looking at him, and his head just kind of fills up with red—if he was a cartoon steam would be coming out of his ears. And he's just angry and the guy just leaves it there.

And so, there is a picture of both reluctance and compulsion. Okay? And a lot of you, as you think about your experience growing up with passing the plate, you've felt some semblance of this before. Where it gets to you and it feels like the entire church is looking at you, and so you wrap a ten around some ones, and drop it in there like a baller, like, “Yes I did.” Or you pretend to—kind of put your hand in there pull it out—they don't know, right? Or you just quickly hot potato, like, “Oh, it's yours. I've already given millions this week.” So, there's something that that kind of brings us back to.

At Harris Creek, when I got here, we participated in passing the plate. That was a part of our weekly service. Admittedly I have baggage with that. I'm telling you, I've got issues with that, because of this verse, honestly. And so, I said, “Hey, let's see what happens if we don't pass the plate for a month.” And so, we stopped for a month. We stopped passing the plate, we put boxes in the back so that you can give at your convenience when no one's looking, no one's going to know what you gave. I never look at it, that's not something I've ever asked Kelly for. And so, let's just see what happens. So, we didn't pass the plate for a month. After that month, on average, we took in less, \$4,000 less every week. So, an average of \$16,000 less for the month. Okay? This confirmed my suspicion, that people were giving out of compulsion, and so we stopped passing the plate. Now that's counter intuitive because a lot of places would say, “Hey, if you take in \$4,000 less, make sure you bring back passing the plate.” But that's pragmatism, that goes in contrast to what this says. Because what this teaches me is one day I'm going to stand before God, and he's going to be like, “Hey, how did you do with the flock, in shepherding their hearts?” And I don't want you to give reluctantly or out of compulsion. I don't want Harris Creek to have your money, I want God to have your heart. And so, we have to train up our people to do what this says.

I'm a simple guy. Look, I'm not the smartest person in here, I've got a two-year degree in art from a technical college most people have never heard of. And I just want to do what the Bible says, I want to read it, “Hey, let's do that.” God wants us to give cheerfully. Let's give cheerfully. Not reluctantly, not out of compulsion, generously. Let's just do that! What if we starve? Great! We'll get up to God and tell Him He was wrong. We'll say, “Hey you said we

wouldn't, but we did!" And he'll probably make it up to us in heaven I imagine. It'll be like, "Okay, well, you slipped through the cracks, here's your house forever and ever."

I would keep the kids involved on this. It's so core to what we believe, because at the center of our faith, as I said, God gave everything, but how did He do it? Hebrews 12:2 gives us the answer, "**for the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning the shame...**" There's His attitude, and there's the attitude that He's calling us to.

Verse 8, "**And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.**" There's more of that language that we cannot deny is in there, it's right there. We've got to be honest with what the text says. So, God is in charge of who has what, and He got it, He has us, He's going to meet our needs consistent to what Jesus says in Matthew 6 and Luke 18. "**As it is written:**" And then He reads to us from Psalm 112:9, "**They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.**" And then he says in verse 10, "**Now he who supplies seed to the Sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.**" And so here is the verse that every televangelist loves, but like all lies—every manipulation the enemy uses—there's truth in there. And so, it does say, "Hey, God blesses those who faithfully give," but He's about to show you why. In this next area, He's going to tell you why.

Let me just show you the baked in illustration here. The farmer, in an agrarian culture—if you've got a kernel of wheat, now you have a decision to make. Because you can grind that up and make flour and make bread from it and eat and feed yourself. Or you can do something crazy. If you didn't know anything about farming, nothing about agriculture, this would be absolutely insane. "Hey Farmer Bob, what are you going to do with that?" "I'm going to put it in the ground." "What? But we need that to eat." "No, no, no, I'm going to put it in the ground." And when you do that in faith, it produces a stalk, which produces dozens and dozens and dozens of kernels. Woah.

And so, God provides the harvest, He provides the bread, verse 12, "**This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.**" And so, He pairs the gospel—God giving everything, His son—and he pairs it with our generosity, so that his renown is increased in the land because people love talking about generosity. "Weston gave his favorite truck, did you hear? That was crazy!" "That family—did you know they went without, and they opened their home, and they gave, they sold..." People love talking about generosity. You take that and attach it to the Gospel, and now people are talking about Jesus and generosity increases the fame of God. And so, to live the good life give faithfully.

3. Give Faithfully

That's my third point. To live the good life, give faithfully. There's a double meaning here. Faithfully means to give full of faith, believing that God has you. You give in such a way that kind of says to the world, "No, I believe that there's a God and he takes care of me. He's got me. He's going to provide for me." And then to give faithfully meaning routinely; not waiting until the end of the year, "I've got this bonus kind of coming, so we kind of just wait until then, and then who knows what's going to happen then." We don't presume upon tomorrow. You give when the bonus comes, but then you give regularly. Faithfully, monthly. You have that practice. Just like you share your faith, just like you read your bible, just like you pray, just like you fast. You give. Verse 13, **"Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ"** Others will praise God for your obedience.

I just got back from Colorado. There was a pastor's gathering. A gathering of about 50 pastors from around the country. And I struggle with 1) whether to share this with you, 2) how to share this with you. Because I never want to put off arrogance, and there's a part of this that you risk that. So, there's a fine line between celebrating God's faithfulness, and saying something with the motive of pride or being boastful. So, I'm going to stumble through this a little bit.

So, I get there, walk into the room of these pastors—the most notable pastors in the country. And they all start coming, one off, ones and twos, and are like, "Hey Harris Creek, huh? Hey, tell me about... So I heard... outside of Waco is it true that...?" And these are the conversations that I'm having. And it looks like, "Hey is it true that they had 6.2 million dollars in debt? And you guys paid it off in three years?" "Yeah." "Man, how did you do that?" "I didn't do that?" "No, no, were there like thermometers on the stage, or really amazing videos, what was the sermon?" "No, no, man I just communicated the need and asked people to pray." "Yeah, no no, but it's just us pastors now, like, what did you do?" "Hey brother, I got a two-year degree in art from a technical college you've never heard of. We prayed." "Okay, but you had like, somebody said, 'Hey, just say this and we'll pay it off, we'll stroke the check.' It was probably one, two, three checks." "No man, it was faithful gifts of people." "Wow. Okay, well then is it true that as soon as you did you gave \$250,000 to build a transition foster home in the city? Is that..." "Yeah." "Man, that's wild. And then did I hear that you guys are buying land across the street?" "Yeah." "So how did you—" "I didn't. I didn't. It was the generosity of the people. God's faithfulness working through the people." And now we're able to talk about the faithfulness of God because He's worked through the faithfulness of you. That's what this text is saying, and that's why I'm sharing it with you.

It's a live example of what Paul is saying to the church in Corinth. And so, it is the renown of the faithful giving of the people here. About half of you. About half of you. And I say that—no shame, no guilt, no compulsion. I'm not trying to get an emotional response from you. I want to say this very clearly to you, you are simply missing out. You're missing out on the good life.

Let me share my story with you. Okay? I'll show you why I have a lot of grace, a lot of patience, and a lot of empathy for this specific topic. I became a Christian at a church—I was raised in the church my whole life, it wasn't until I was a young adult that I really understood the grace of the Gospel, surrendered my life to Jesus Christ. I loved that church—I went every Sunday; it was like the best part of my week. I would sing, I would learn, I would take notes in my Bible, I just

couldn't get enough. It was like all of a sudden, the Holy Spirit had awakened, I was like, "Man, this thing is really interesting, wow, it gives us instruction on how to live, we can just do what it says." It was fascinating to me. But I didn't give, it never even dawned on me like, who pays for this place and who pays for the AC, like what is the product that they sell? All I knew was business, I knew profitability, I knew profit centers, I knew margins, PNL, general ledgers. I didn't understand that this is people who come here are members here. They contribute to this place, and that's who pays the worship leader. I didn't get that. But then I heard a message just like this, out of 2 Corinthians 9, and ironically, I thought, "You know what, I'm going to do it. I'm going to do it. I'm going to give." And I pulled out a crisp \$100 bill and I put it in an envelope, and I wrote my name on it so that I would get the tax benefit. And I walked it, and I dropped it in that box, I mean with my chest out. And I walked back to my car, and was like, "Man how lucky is this church to have me. I mean, I am unbelievably generous." No wonder God recruited me for his kingdom.

And what my life looked like at this time, I'm in corporate America, we live in a penthouse condo, I drive a Jaguar, got multiple watches, wear a suit every day, and I gave \$100. Continued to grow, got plugged into a small group, a part of that life group was we went through Crown Financial. Going through Crown Financial was where we shared what we made, what we gave, what we saved, what we spent. I mean it really was like getting naked in front of strangers. In fact, I remember somebody said that "I would rather show up naked than have to do this." And so, all the things, all the things that you would wonder, "Well what if somebody made... What if there's a big disparity...?" There was! There was! We showed what we gave, and honestly it was embarrassing. It was embarrassing, and embarrassments a sin, it's rooted in pride, but it was embarrassing. We made more than anyone else there, and we gave less than anyone else there. And they were so patient with us. And they said, "Hey man, everybody is growing in different areas of their life. And this is just an area where you guys can grow. It seems like the world has its grip on your heart here."

And so, we walked away from that, and with prayer and accountability, we began to give 10% because I grew up, just like you, in the Church where I heard 10%. That was the number 10%. Tithe, 10%. So, we began to give 10% post tax, and as we continued to grow, we started giving 10% before tax, and as we continued to grow, we looked for opportunities to give above and beyond that. And here's the weird part. Here's where it gets weird as though it's not already weird. We couldn't give it away fast enough. When we started giving, I mean, money would show up out of the most random places. And it just continued, it was like, book deal here, "Hey write a book. We'll pay you this..." What about this? What about this? And it became this burden. I remember my brother-in-law called me and said, "Hey we could flip this house, make a quick \$40,000" And I remember thinking, "I don't want \$40,000. That's such a burden right now. I'm going to have to figure out what to do with that." And I know that's weird. But it was like it all connected up here. I was like, okay, I've got to figure out—this is all God's money. If He owns it all, I've got to figure out how to steward it in a way that I would be faithful and with more of it comes more responsibility, and we have enough. Right?

And now fast forward the tape I went into ministry, making a fraction of what I was making in corporate America, and we continued to give, and God continued to provide, and I've never ever

felt it. And that's the truth. And I know that's weird, it's just the truth. I think it would be a sin if I didn't share that with you. That is my best effort to tell you about our journey on this topic.

And so, at the center of our belief is a God who gave everything. And as we follow Him, we have to wrestle with what that looks like for us. Our giving is an opportunity to show what we believe about Him. Others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the Gospel of Christ. And for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

And so, in summary, the good life comes from giving generously; the good life comes from giving cheerfully; and the good life comes from giving faithfully.

Weston giving me that truck really started a parenting dilemma that was really—stay with me guys—really hard for us. I had read BabyWise, I had read parenting books, but man, I was so challenged by something that was happening in our family. And that was that he just started giving away everything. And he was five years old, and so he had lived through five birthdays and five Christmases, and had saved a little bit of money, and he would sit his sisters down and he would say here's a 20 for you, and here's a 20 for you. And here's a 50 for you, and here's a 50 for you. Here's a 5 for you... And he would just give it all away. And I was like, man, how do I teach him to be responsible here?

And I remember we were at a restaurant, and he had asked Monica, "Hey do you have any change?" And there was a gum-ball machine there, and I was like, "He's going to get some gum." So, she hands him her coin purse. And he takes it, and he walks through the restaurant, handing it out at everyone's table, he starts giving them change. And he has so much joy, just grinning from ear to ear. He loves it! And I sit him down and I'm frustrated, I'm like, "Weston, you can't just give away all our money!" And I'm in ministry, I know this, I'm like, "I don't think? I don't know. Stop? What are you doing? Don't you understand? There's that ant in the Proverb...? We... Bigger barns... I don't know?" And there was just the angst in trying to parent him through that. And I really wrestled with why does he feel the freedom to do this? And then it dawned on me. It's because he has a dad that provides for his every need. If he's hungry he eats, breakfast lunch and dinner. He's never gone without. And so, he's sitting there, and his five-year-old brain is like, "I don't need this stuff. My dad has got me." And right there from a five-year-old I learned what Biblical generosity looks like. And it's the lesson that continues to instruct us.

So, listen, all of those people moving around a second ago, they're ushers. We're going to do something we haven't done in a long time. We're going to pass the plate. So, I know that they're going to come, and they're going to line up in the back. Ushers you can do that right now. And they're going to move through the aisle. And they're going to pass a plate to you, in this last song. But I don't want you to put anything in the plate. You don't have to grab your wallet. I don't want you to put anything in the plate. In the plate are envelopes, those envelopes have money in them. I want you to take one. Okay? Harris Creek's money. Those are the faithful tithes of the people. And I just want you to get that money wherever it needs to go. Okay? You have between now and Thanksgiving to pray, "God what would you have me do with it." Just do the first thing you sense Him telling. Don't try to come up with the perfect thing, the perfect plan. Just right now, even right now during this song, just ask, "Lord, what would you have me

do with this money?” Some of you are going to get \$2, some of you are going to get \$5, some of you are going to get \$10, some of you are going to get \$20. Some of you are going to get \$100. Okay? When you get it—listen, if you can’t pay rent, you use that money to pay rent by all means. Alright? That’s why I have complete confidence that that’s why God has you here. That’s your money—use it.

For the rest of us, we’re going to wrestle with where would He have us give it? Do not give it to this place. It’s coming from this place; it doesn’t need to go right back. You need to think about, okay, “Who is in my life, who would be blessed by this? What should I buy, how should I give?” Maybe it’s another church that you know has need. If you’ve never given to the Church in your life, you’re welcome to give it here, just to see what that feels like. But for the rest of us, pray and ask the Lord, “What would you have me do with this?” So again, just one per person, you’re welcome as a family to pull yours together and figure out what you want to do as a family. Don’t grab one for someone that’s not here but take one for yourself. Everybody and anyone that can hear me.

Father, would you help us to know, just as we go to pray now, would you show us what faithfulness looks like? What we do with your resources, we know that they’re your resources. And so, help us to be the pipe that funnels them to where they need to go. Help us to be the conduit that gets it to where it needs to go. Would you do that please? There’s going to be folks here, Father, that talk to you for the first time in a long time. And they’re just going to say, “What would you have me do with this?” And would your Holy Spirit just prompt their hearts. If you would have them add do that, great. If you would have them spend it on a need that they have, great. Would you show them? In the name of Jesus, Amen.

(JP comes back after the song) I told that story about Weston when it first happened. So just like when it was fresh, I was reminded of it last week because I was just thinking about gifts and whatnot. Thinking about this, thinking about stewardship. And so, what happened after I told that story in the church, and don’t do this, okay, don’t do this, but people started showing up on our doorsteps with bags of change. And they were saying “Hey, this is for Weston.” They would say, “Hey, would you give this to Weston?” And it became like this burden, truly it was, and they were like, “No, he knows what to do with it.” There was this one note—there was this duffle bag full of change and the note said, “Weston knows what to do with this.” Somebody else left a Ziplock bag full of change and said, “Hey this is for Weston.” Somebody else left another Ziplock bag full of change and said “Hey, would you give this to Weston.” And they realized he knows how to get this where this goes. And I think about that, and I think that must be how God thinks about us.

He’s like, “Hey, they know how to get my resources where it goes.” And so, in that little thing that we’re doing to help you remember this, I want to ask you two things. Would you do two things to attach to that this Thanksgiving week. One, would you take it seriously. Like, please don’t put that on the dash and forget about it, or just get stuck in the paralysis by analysis, and it’s like “Oh well I don’t really know what to do.” So, it just kind of ends up in a drawer and you stumble across it three years from now and you’re like oh yeah that was interesting. Don’t do that please, you have between now and thanksgiving. Ask the Lord, “Hey, what would you have me do?” If something comes to mind, do that. Buy somebody a Slurpee. If they need a Slurpee,

get them a Slurpee. If you want to add to it and meet a family's need, great. If you want to give it to another church, you have the freedom to do that. Just whatever the Lord prompts you, do that.

And then the second thing, and this will be harder for a lot of you, but I'm asking you, okay? Please would you tell us what you did? And so, you can go to harriscreek.org/money, I've got to do a better job of sharing these stories, there's a QR code if you want to grab that, but it's just harriscreek.org/money. And your life group, group text your life group and say, "Hey, have you guys all checked in? Have you shared what you did?" And I just need a couple sentences, I want to do a better job or sharing about the faithfulness of those in our body. And so just share with us, "Hey this is what I did." And again, resist the urge to try and do the really profound thing. Just the first thing that comes to mind. Just share that if you would. And so again, between now and Thanksgiving, harriscreek.org/money, let us know how God moved in your heart in that.

I love you guys. If we can serve you in any way there will be a team of folks up here ready to pray for you, you can stop by the welcome desk out there. If you're watching from afar, you can always email us hello@harriscreek.org. I love you guys. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.