

TREASURE

UNSELFIE

2 Corinthians 9:6-12 // Craig Smith

August 28, 2017

CRAIG: Good Morning.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

CRAIG: I'm so glad you came. I wasn't really sure because some of you knew I was coming and you came anyway, so I'm psyched about that. And some of you were freaking out when like, "Wait a minute." So if you don't know what I'm talking about, I'll just go ahead and catch you up. We've been in a series we're calling "Unselfie," which is where we've been unpacking Jesus's teaching that we're to love others as He loved us, and we said that's an unselfish life. It's an unselfie approach to life. It takes the self out of the frame, so we can put the focus on other people. And what we've been doing the last few weeks, we've been kind of unpacking what does that look like in terms of time, talent, and treasure. We've already done time. We did talent last week, which means today is all about treasure.

Somebody asked me this weekend, "Well, treasure, but it's not gonna be just about money, right?" No, it's pretty much just gonna be about money. And I hope you understand I don't really like talking about money. It's definitely a subject I'd prefer to avoid, partly because I think that the church has sometimes done some pretty sketchy things when it comes to money, and I don't wanna be associated with any of those things. I think about a few years ago, there was a very famous televangelist. You may remember this, that he basically said, "You know, we're looking for a giving threshold of this, with this amount of money to come in." And he said, "And God told me that if we don't get that amount of money, He's gonna call me home." And I remember thinking, "Bon voyage, I'll help you get to Jesus by doing nothing. That's awesome." I don't wanna be associated with that kind of a thing.

I had a friend who was at a church and not too long ago, and when it came time for the offering, there was a really big lead-up to the offering, kind of a guilt thing. And then the pastor said, "I want us to do a wave offering, which is as the plates were being passed, I want you to pick up whatever it is that you can put in that plate, and I want you to wave around for everyone to see." And my friend said, "I watch a couple guys in front of my wave around hundred-dollar bills, and then drop a 20 in the plate." I'm like, "Oh, gosh, I don't wanna be part of that. I don't wanna be associated with that thing. I do not wanna be a church that's known or even suspected as being all about money." I wanna be a church that's known for being all about mission, for joining Jesus when He's doing in the world. But I have come to believe over the years that you cannot be a church that's all about mission without speaking regularly about money. It's just a simple reality. Churches that fail to speak on a regular basis about money do two things that impact mission.

The first one is that when we fail to teach them money, what happens is we often find that our people get sidelined from mission. Mission isn't just a responsibility to church. Well, at least the Church as an organization, it's the responsibility of the Church as the people of God. And the way we handle money can easily sideline us from being able to be engaged in mission in the way that God calls us to. It's not that money is evil. It's not. Money is just powerful. I like the way the authors of the book "God and Money" put it. They said, "Money is like dynamite." It's got great potential for both good and harm. And unfortunately, the harm side of it comes when we don't follow God's instruction about money, and it can sideline us from ministry because it does really destructive things in our lives when it gets mishandled.

Fifty-nine percent of all divorces in this country cite struggles over money as a significant contributor to the dissolution of the marriage, 59% of all marriages. 37.5% of all people, adults, who commit suicide when they do the study to figure out what



contributed to that, studies have indicated that 37.5% of all adult suicides are rooted at least partially in money struggles. 79% of all adults experiencing significant clinical depression cite financial struggle as a significant contributor to their depression. Those are sobering statistics, right? And it just highlights the potential negative power of money.

Now, sometimes we have those kinds of struggles with money because of things that happen that are completely outside of our control. You know, you can be doing everything right with money, and then suddenly find that the economy takes a downturn and your company lays you off. And that's not any fault of your own, but you're suddenly in really difficult financial circumstances. So certainly, it can happen that it has nothing to do with the way we handle money. But the reality is, and studies support this, that people who have handled their money in a biblical way before those unexpected things happen are able to weather those difficult downturns in a much better way.

I mean, I genuinely have come to believe that most financial damage, most financial damage we experience as people could be avoided simply by submitting to God's teaching on money. If we generally listen to what God had to say about money, we would find that most of the damage that happens related to money would be avoided. And God has a lot to say about money.

Did you know that there are 2,000 verses in the Bible that talk about money? 2,000. To put that in perspective, there are only 500 verses that talk about faith and prayer. Clearly, God has a passion for speaking about how we deal with money, and that's not because God needs our money. It's because God loves you too much to see you sidelined from the work that He's made you for, by allowing the negative impact of money to wreck your life and to sideline you from ministry.

So when churches don't talk about money, honestly, I believe that is a sign that they don't care enough about their people. I think a second thing happens when we don't teach regularly about money, and that is that the church itself struggles to be on mission in the way that we were called to be. I genuinely believe that the Church is the most powerful agent for transformation in the world bar none. I love what Bill Hybels said years ago at Willow Creek, he said, "The local Church is the hope of the world," because it is the instrument that Jesus has chosen to use to impact the world, to transform the world. And so, I could not agree more, but the reality is that most churches are struggling just to keep the doors open and the lights on. They're not on mission. They're just trying to make it.

When a church has to take every dime that comes in just to keep the place open week after week, they're not able to engage in mission in the way that Jesus called them to. They're not able to engage in outreach and loving their community and their region, and even to the ends of the earth. It's just not possible. The reality is the average church in America is so financially starved that it can't fulfill its mission in the world. And so I think we have to talk about money on a regular basis. Honestly, I believe that any church that claims to care about its people and its mission has to talk about money on a regular basis. We just do.

Now, we're gonna be looking at one passage this morning out of 2,000. So obviously, there's not a whole lot of detail I can give. But what we're gonna do this morning is we're gonna look at one of the most common teachings on money in the Bible. And that is the common teaching that generosity is the foundation of a God-centered approach to money. And you might wanna jot that down somewhere because it's gonna guide everything that we talked about today. It's the idea that generosity is the foundation. It's the starting point for a God-centered approach to dealing with money.

If you have your Bible, and I will hope you do. I would love to have you turn with me to 2 Corinthians Chapter 9. Again, just one verse about money out of 2,000, but a verse that tells us some very significant things about generosity and his heart for generosity and his people. 2 Corinthians 9 starting in verse 6 is this. He says, "Remember this. Don't forget this. Write this down. Grab a hold of this. This is important. Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." I mean, the principle that he's giving us very simply is that generosity is a matter of the heart, not the bottom line. Generosity is a matter of the heart, not the bottom line. What I mean by that is somebody can give \$2 and be generous in a way that somebody who gives \$200,000 is not being. It all has to do with the matter of the heart. It has to do with



the attitude that's going on.

I mean, he says, "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly." And we probably all get the analogy, right? It's a farming analogy. The idea is if a farmer only puts two seeds in the ground in the spring, chances come fall, he's not gonna be overwhelmed by the harvest, right?

But what's interesting is that the natural way to say that would be, "Whoever sows little reaps little." But that's not what he said. He actually says, "Whoever sows sparingly." And I'm actually not sure that's the best translation because the word "sparingly" in English is a neutral term. It's not positive or negative. It's just neutral. It just kind of has to do with quantity. But the word in Greek that Paul is using here is not a neutral word. It's a very negative word. It's kind of an unusual or, in fact, we only see it this time in the Bible. It only shows up in this one verse.

But when we look at other Greek literature from the same time period and we see this word being used, it's always negative. It basically means somebody who's miserly or stingy. It's not about quantity. It's a quality, it's an attitude issue. And so what Paul says is whoever sows in a way that is resentful and they're kind of coming from a place of hoarding, but they're kind of forced into it, so they're doing just to bear in a sense, it's a stingy miserly approach. He says, "God's response to that is a similar kind of attitude." The flip side of it is whoever sows generously, he says also reaps generously, which is a good translation, but the word generously there is literally the word for blessing. So what he technically says is whoever sows as an act of blessing, reaps as an act of blessing. Again, it's not about quantity, it's about an attitude. His point is that when we look at our generosity as an opportunity to be a blessing to other, God loves to be able to bless us in return.

Generosity is a matter of the heart, is not a matter of the bottom line, which is probably why he says next, "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion." Each of you must decide in your heart to give, and what he's saying here is just that the generosity has to be voluntary, right? You can't force generosity. There's no such thing as forced generosity. Well, you can force people to give, but you can't force people to be generous. I was talking to one of our missionaries just a couple of weeks ago, and he was telling me a story of a young man that he's been working with, who grew up in a village in Poland. And this young man basically shared that once a year, the priest from the Russian Orthodox Church would come around to all the houses and demand the offering for the year. And this boy remembered this time when he was about 11 or 12, that the priest came and knocked on the door and his mom answered it. And his mom said, "I'm really sorry. I've always tried to give as generously as I could, but this year I just don't have anything." And the priest said, "You have to give." And she said, "Well, but this has happened and this has happened, and we're in a really difficult place. I just generally don't have anything to give." And he said, "You will give, and if you do not, all those things that you shared in the confessional will be made public."

She probably ended up giving, but it wasn't out of generosity. That's out of compulsion, and you can't compel generosity. That's why we don't do wave offerings. That's why we don't do things like, "God's gonna call me home if you don't give this level," because what we're longing for is not a quantity of money. What we're longing for is a quality of generosity in God's people. This is a kind of quality that God loves to offer, and He responds to it. In fact, He says this. He says, "For God loves a cheerful giver." God loves a cheerful giver, which is a little bit of an odd thing to say because if you understand the essence of the Christian faith, if you understand the essence of what we call the gospel, it basically boils down to "you don't have to do anything to earn God's love." God loves you regardless of what you've done. Our sin does not keep God from loving you. God loved us first. In fact, we only come to love Him because He loved us first.

While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us because of His love for us. His love is not based on anything we do. And yet Paul says, "God loves a cheerful giver," which feels like a little bit of a contradiction, doesn't it? But you need to understand he's not saying that God doesn't love people who haven't developed a generosity, he's not saying He doesn't love those who don't give with a generous spirit or don't give voluntarily, but what he's saying is that God gets excited about generosity. In fact, we might say that God has a special affection for generous people. He gets excited. When He sees generosity, He goes, "Yes, that's what I



was talking about, yes.”

And I think there’s two reasons why that happens. The first is that God is not looking for spectators. He’s looking for participants. He’s looking for people who join Him and His work in the world, and giving generously is one of the ways that we begin to get on board with what God is doing in the work. It’s one of the ways we join with God in spirit, in the work that He’s doing in the world because He wants us to become participants, not spectators. Generosity is a sign that we’re moving in that direction. He gets excited about that.

I think the second reason it happens is because He made us be like Him. We’re made as the image of God. We’re made to be similar to God in certain respects and in certain ways, and we’re not because of sin. But what happens when we come to Jesus, the Holy Spirit begins to work on us from the inside out, making us more and more like Jesus, making us more and more like the God in whose image we were made. And here’s the thing, God is a generous God. He loves to pour out blessing upon us. He loves to serve those who have no capacity for serving Him back. He’s just generous in His love. I mean, the greatest example of that is the fact that He sent Jesus to the cross to die for our sins while we were still enemies of God.

He’s a generous God, and as we develop in generosity, we become more and more like Him, and that fires Him up. He gets excited about that. It’s because God loves a cheerful giver, because we’re becoming like Him and we’re joining Him in His mission. He gets so excited about it, in fact, that He’s interested in funding our generosity Himself. Look at what He says next. He says, “And God is able to bless you abundantly so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound every good work,” which is actually kind of a difficult sentence to translate because Paul crammed five all words into one sentence. They almost like fall over. He basically says, you know, “God is able to make all grace abound you so that in all ways at all times you have all that you need to abound in all good works to others.” You’re like, “Dude, get a thesaurus.” That’s a lot of alls in there.

But you understand what he’s saying is that everything that we need to be generous is available to us. God long support into our lives so that it can be poured out of our lives into the lives of others. What are we saying is that God is anxious to fund our generosity. God is anxious to fund our generosity. He’s not anxious to fund our selfishness. He does not promise to fund our self-centeredness. But generosity, He is ready and willing to pour everything into us that we’re already willing to pour out in blessing others. To that 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.” That last sentence is important, pay attention to it. In fact, if you’ve got a Bible where you can underline things or somewhere you can highlight, highlight those two words, “so that.”

He says God is able to bless you abundantly, God is anxious to enrich you in every way “so that.” So that what? So that you can be generous. God is anxious to fund our generosity. And from our generosity to reap, to use Paul’s words, a harvest of righteousness.

It’s interesting though. The average American Christian gives 2.5% of their income, 2.5%. It’s just a number all by itself, but if you put it in a historical context, something interesting emerges. And that is that during the Great Depression, the average Christian in this country gave 3.3%, which means that during the worst economic period this country has ever known, we were 25% more generous than we are now, which suggests that as our prosperity has increased, our generosity has decreased. Now, if it is true that God is anxious to fund our generosity, what do you think happens to the funding when generosity begins to go away? There’s no way you can talk about this in Congress, but what if our economic woes as a nation, the majority of whom and the majority of our citizens claim to follow Jesus still. It happens to a nation that claims to be a Christian nation as it becomes less generous. What do you think happens to the divine funding of that nation? That’s a little negative.

Let’s go the other direction. Let’s ask the question, what would happen if we were generous? RELEVANT Magazine several years ago did just this amazing article, and took a month to do it because they did all kinds of study and talked to all kinds experts.



But the question they wanted to ask was basically this. They would say, “What would happen if Christians tithed?” And if you’re not familiar the word “tithed,” kind of a church word, it basically means tenth. It means 10%. It comes from the Old Testament commands that God’s people were to give 10% of their income to the work that God was doing in the world. And so the question that RELEVANT Magazine asked was, “What would happen if Christians actually gave 10%?” All over the world, they kind of looked at incomes and they looked at numbers of Christians in all the countries, and they kind of added the numbers up and said, “What would happen?” And what they discovered would happen is there would be an additional \$165 billion each year available for ministry, additional. That would what would come in over and above what is already coming in on a yearly basis right now, \$165 billion extra every year. And I don’t know about you, but I don’t know what to do with that number. \$165 billion, I can’t even begin to wrap my head around.

So they also asked the question, “What could we do with it?” And this is where I thought it became really interesting. Here’s one of the things they discovered we could do with that extra \$165 billion. We could end, not impact, end global hunger, starvation, and death by preventable diseases in five years. It would take five years to set up everything that needed to be done, but within five years, no one in this world would be dying from starvation or preventable diseases. It would become a thing of the past. We would create a world in which 10, 15, 20 years from now when we describe the world that we’re living in right now, they would, “What are you talking about? What do you mean there were children who died every day because they didn’t have enough food? What do you mean people couldn’t...? What are you talking about?” Like my kids can’t understand that when I was growing up to use the phone, you had to go into a room. And there was just a thing, there was just the phone, and that was your only option. My kids can’t imagine that world. Can you imagine a world where our kids and our grandkids cannot even begin to understand a world where people died because they didn’t have enough food? With the additional money that would be raised if Christians tithed, we could absolutely end world hunger. It would become a thing of the distant past.

We would still have a little bit of money left over though. We could also end illiteracy in five years. Five years, the idea that there is a single child on the planet that does not know how to read or write and therefore can take advantage of educational opportunities to free themselves for other opportunities, illiteracy would be gone, it would be a thing of the past. Nobody would even be able to understand how there could have been a world where illiteracy was a thing. We’d still have a little bit of money left over. Next thing we could do with that extra \$165 billion is we could solve, not impact, solve the world’s water and sanitation issues. It would be a thing of the past that people did not have clean water to drink. It would be a thing of the past that people live in conditions where the streets that they live on are covered in human excrement. I’ve walked those streets, I’ve been with those people. It’s a real thing, but it could be a thing of the past.

There would still actually be a little bit of money left over. With that additional \$165 billion, in addition to things we’ve already talked about we could do, you could also fund all overseas mission work, fund all of it. I don’t know if you’re like me, but if you connect with missionaries on a regular basis, you get letters from them, and usually in that letter, there’s another little envelope, because they’re asking for more money because in order to stay in the place that God’s called them to, they need additional funding. In fact, missionaries spend a tremendous amount of their time that could be used sharing the gospel, that could be use making a difference in those places that God’s called them to, they have to spend a tremendous amount of their time just asking for and going back to the United States to get the funding that they need to be able to stay where they are. With the extra \$165 billion, we could completely fund all overseas mission work. We would still have a little bit left over. In fact, having done all of that, there would be a \$100 billion still available every year to expand local ministry work. In addition to everything we’ve said, there’s \$100 billion extra for churches to extend their ministry into their communities and in their surrounding regions. That’s what would happen if Christians tithed. So why don’t we? Why don’t we give more generously?

I wanna suggest that there’s probably four main reasons why people don’t give more generously. And the first one is selfishness. Sometimes we struggle to be more generous simply because we’re selfish. We’re not interested in what God can do with the resources He’s entrusted to us if we put them into work in ministry, we’re only interested in what they can do for us. And I understand, I’m not saying that as to you, I’m saying it as from me. I get that. I’ve been there, I’ve been in these places, and I’ve come to those places where it’s easy for selfishness to rear its head. And my primary concern is how is this gonna impact



me? What is this gonna do for me? But then I remember God doesn't promise to fund my selfishness. He promises to fund my generosity. And listen, if selfishness is the issue, what we have to do is we have to call it what it is. We can't play games with it. We can't justify it. We just have to call it what it is, which includes calling it sin, ask forgiveness, and know that Jesus is faithful to forgive us. We can be forgiven of that sin and the Holy Spirit can begin to change us so that selfishness is no longer an obstacle. That's the first obstacle I think.

I think the second obstacle that we face, especially as Americans, is debt. I think sometimes we struggle with being generous because we're too deep in debt. Not just deep in debt, drowning in debt. I mean, let's talk some numbers. The average American household that has credit card debt, they don't all, but the average household that does have credit card debt has \$16,000 of credit card balance. That's the average. You know how long it takes to pay off \$16,000 of credit card debt, especially if you're paying the monthly minimum? 6.6 years. Paying the monthly minimum, it will take you 6.6 years to pay off \$16,000 in debt, and during that time, you will have paid \$9,265 on interest on that debt, which is roughly \$1,400 a year, \$1,425 a year in interest. If you really want to get out of the weeds on it, check me on this. The average American Christian gives \$1,400 to Christian ministry every year. That means if you could get out of that debt and stop paying that interest, you could literally double your giving to Christian work and not even feel it. It would have literally zero impact on your life because you don't get to do anything with that interest money anyway. If you got out of debt, you could literally double your giving, and it wouldn't even require the slightest ounce of effort or commitment on your part.

Debt cripples generosity. Debt cripples generosity. And we're not even talking about the impact that debt has on our minds, and our hearts, and our souls. We're not talking about the impact that it has on our marriages and our depressions and things like that. We're just talking about the fact that it cripples generosity. One of the reasons that the Mission Hills is so committed to Financial Peace University simply because we found that it's a powerful tool for helping Christians escape from the oppression of debt. If you've never been through something like Financial Peace University, and we're gonna pop it up on the screen, I want you to jot this information down. Financial Peace University is a multi-week course where people are given direct teaching from scripture, principles for dealing with money in a biblical way that often helps them to come to the place where they're able to begin to move out of debt and find themselves free from that crippling influence of it. And I've talked to hundreds of people over the years who have just told me, "This is one of the most transformative things that I ever been a part of, not only for my ability to be part of what God is doing because of generosity, but honestly, just setting me free and setting my heart and my soul free by getting out from underneath that." If you've never been part of something like this, I got it coming up September 5th. I strongly encourage you to go online and sign up for that. God will use it in unbelievably powerful ways in your life. Debt cripples generosity.

I think a third reason that we sometimes struggle with generosity is just fear. Sometimes we struggle with being generous because we're afraid. And I've been there, I understand that. And I understand the fear that says, "But if I'm more generous, if I give more generously, I'm not gonna have enough." Let me tell you what I began to understand is that when I asked the question, "What's gonna happen to me if I'm more generous?" I wasn't asking another more important question, which is, "What's gonna happen to me if I'm not generous?" Because what happens is when you go, "What's gonna happen to me what...?" What we're saying really is that money, material goods, these are the source of my security. And we know that because the very thought of having less of that makes us feel less secure, which means that we're putting our sense of security in our stuff. But listen, if our sense of security is in our stuff, we're on shaky, shaky ground.

God is the source of our security. And so the question is not, "What happens if I give away more?" The question is, "What happens if I don't develop as a generous person. What does it do to my heart? What does it do to my soul? What does it do to my dependence upon the Lord and the Lord alone?" I understand that fear, but let me tell you from my own experience, and I've heard this from so many people over the years too, is that when we begin to ask the question, "What is not being generous gonna do to me?", when we begin to develop and grow in generosity, what we find is we never lack for what we need. I don't think God's gonna give us everything we want. This is not one of those kind of churches. I'm not gonna tell you that if you develop in generosity, you're gonna be able to move into a bigger house and get a nicer car, take better vacations. I'm not saying that.



That's not what God says. He promises to fund our generosity. But I will tell you that as I have become more generous over the years, even when I had less and less to give, God has always made sure that I have everything that I need over and over and over again without fail, every single time. And more and more, my trust has been transferred to Him and to Him alone. And that is a place you wanna be. Rooted firmly in Him will allow you to go forward in life with a confidence and security that you can't even imagine.

There's a fourth reason that we sometimes struggle with generosity, and that is simply that we don't have a plan. Sometimes we struggle with being generous simply because we don't have a plan. We don't have a plan for moving forward. I mean, we know that money is a gift from God, and we know as we said a couple weeks ago, that every resource we have is on loan to us from God so that we can be a blessing to others. We know that God wants us to use our treasure to bring Him glory by serving others. We know that money is not the source of our security. We know all that. What we don't know is how to get from where we are to where we need to be when it comes to money. And so I wanna suggest a very simple plan. This is an oversimplified thing, but it helps me and I think you'll find that it helps to clarify some of your thinking. I'm gonna call it the path of generosity, and it has basically five steps. Step number one is nothing, step number two is something, then something significant, then tithing, then spirit-led sacrificial. These are the five steps in the path of generosity. And I think most of them are pretty self-explanatory, right? I mean, nothing means you're giving...Work with me here.

Audience: Nothing.

Craig: Nothing.

Now, let me be really clear here. There are a couple of different reasons why you might be giving nothing, and one of them might be that you're not a follower of Jesus. Near but you're here this morning because somebody dragged you along, maybe you're here because something was stirring in your heart and you felt like you needed to come to church for whatever reason. And if you're not a follower of Jesus, I want you to hear me really clearly. I don't want you to give anything. I do want you to receive something. If you're here today and you do not know God through faith in Jesus Christ, I want you to receive the gift of eternal life. This is how Jesus describes that. He said, "I came that they might have life and have it to the full." And not only to the full here and now, but full that goes on forever and ever and ever with God. That's what we call eternal life.

And if you're here today and you know you don't have that, I want you to receive it. You can have it before you leave today. It just requires a couple of basic beliefs that Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sin for the wrong that we've done, and the belief that He rose again from the dead. And then it just requires accepting that gift. Giving our lives to Jesus, and in return, getting life back with a fullness and a depth that we can't even begin to imagine. So if you're here today and you don't have that relationship with Jesus, I want you to receive something today. I don't want you to give anything. And a couple ways you can do it, you can come talk to me after the service. I'd love to talk to you about that. There'll be some other people down here praying, come talk to one of them. Grab the connect card and indicate that you've got some questions about our relationship with Jesus and drop them off in the box, and we will get in touch with you. But if you're here today and you're not giving because you're not a follower of Jesus, just forget the giving. We just want you to get something incredibly important, infinitely important.

But if you are a follower of Jesus and you know that you're in the nothing category, then I wanna challenge you to move forward in generosity by going to the something category. And it's a pretty easy one to understand too. In the something category, you start to give?

Audience: Something.

Craig: Something, okay? It's not complicated. I'm not talking percentages, I'm not talking dollar amounts. I'm just talking about giving something. That's the first step in generosity. I genuinely believe that little steps today are better than big steps tomorrow because the problem with big steps as we hesitate, right? We're like "Yeah. That's a really big step," and be, "I'll put that off



another day.” And then another day, and then it never happens. Little steps today far more powerful than big steps tomorrow because they happen. So the little step for you if you’re at the nothing stage, is just to begin to give something and see what God begins to do in you. See how He begins to open up your life and to set you free from some things that you’re in bondage to. See how God begins to supply your generosity.

If you’re at the something stage, then the next stage for you moving forward is to move to the something significant stage. And what I mean there is actually a percentage. I’m not saying what percentage it is. I just think there’s something very powerful that was in my life where I began to go, “You know what, I’m gonna give a percentage of everything that comes to me.” Maybe for you it’s 1%, maybe it’s 2.5%, maybe you wanna be better than average so you’re gonna go to 2.6%, or 3%, or 5%. But the point is that you begin to go not... It’s not kind of the random like, “Oh, I got a little bit, I’ll do this.” That’s great, that’s a first step. But if you’re already there, the next step is to begin to go, “You know what, I’m gonna take a significant portion of my income and I’m gonna contribute it to the work that God is doing in the world.”

And if you’re at that stage, the next stage is just to move to the tithing stage. And tithing, as I said before, it’s 10%. And there’s a little bit of a debate in the Christian Church about the tithing command because in the Old Testament, it’s clearly a command. All of God’s people were to contribute 10% of their income to the work that God was doing in the world. In the New Testament, that command doesn’t get repeated. And so there’s a debate about whether or not we’re supposed to pay attention to that 10% command anymore. And I certainly understand that debate, but in my mind, the debate misses the point a little bit, which is that tithing is kind of a threshold of generosity.

And I think at the time, you can read about it in Matthew 22 this afternoon if you want, Jesus was talking to the group of Pharisees. They were very religious people. They dotted all their T’s and crossed all their eyes. That’s wrong. They dotted their eyes and crossed all their T’s. They got it right, not like me. And one of the things they did a lot was they tithed. They made sure that they gave 10% of everything that came in. And what Jesus said of them was interesting. He said, “You know, you tithed a tenth of everything that comes in, but you’re neglecting mercy and justice. You’re not being merciful and just to people.” And He said, “I want you to be merciful and just to people while not neglecting that tithing business,” which doesn’t exactly make tithing a command, but Jesus clearly affirmed that. He said, “Yeah. You should keep doing that.” And so to me, tithing is kind of a threshold. It’s a significant stage in our journey of becoming like Jesus and joining Him in His mission of loving others in terms of generosity.

But there’s another stage beyond that, too, and it’s what I call the spirit-led sacrificial stage, which is where you’re meeting that threshold. You’re tithing to your local church, but beyond that, you’re praying for other ways that God is leading you to be generous. You’re looking for opportunities on a regular basis. And I’ll just tell you how this plays out in my life. We give 10% of everything that we make to Mission Hills. And I want you understand the reason for that. It’s because I believe that Mission Hills is doing incredible work in the world through the power of Jesus Christ. So for me, Mission Hills is a little bit like a mutual fund for the financially minded among you. Do you know, you can invest in stocks as an individual company, or you can invest in a mutual fund where it kind of divides your investment over a whole lot of different companies, and it’s run by experts who are making sure the investments are well placed. Yeah, I’ve got a few stocks but the problem is like I’m like flipping a coin basically, like I like the pretty colors on the graph. And like, “I’ll invest in that company. I don’t know.” But most of my investments are in and mutual funds because it diversifies and it’s being run by experts.

And I kind of think of Mission Hills in the same way. And we have a diverse number of ministries. We got local ministries here in the church, like kids ministries and student ministries and men’s ministries and women’s ministries, and we’ve got local regional ministries, like the Life Center and other opportunities that we have to bless churches and people in this community. We have global ministries, we have partners all over the world. They’re doing incredible work. And we have people on staff here who are making sure that those ministries are using the resources effectively. They’re even going, I heard Danny talk about some missionaries we’re looking at in Alaska. Our outreach staff does this on a regular basis. They go and they meet with missionaries, and they support them and they help them be more effective in their work. And I love giving my 10% to Mission Hills because I know that it’s being diversified into a lot of great Kingdom work that’s being very, very well managed.



But beyond that, my family talks about how we can be generous in other ways. And so every spring, the letters start pouring in from kids who're going on mission trips, and we pray about those and we give significantly to those. And beyond that, we have some individual missionaries that we support. We have seven individual missionaries and some Compassion kids that we support. But that's over and above the 10% that we're giving. And we're constantly asking God how we can be more generous, and we're consistently seeing that God just blesses us and funds our generosity. It's an incredible thing.

So three questions for you. Question number one, where am I on the path of generosity? And I want you understand, I don't care where you are. And I mean that in two ways, I'm not gonna be disappointed in you no matter where you are. I'm not even gonna know. And just so you know, I don't know. I know people always wondered like, "Okay. Well, you know, giving records are kept at the church." Yeah. They are. I don't know anything about them, and I've said very clearly, I don't ever wanna know. I don't know who are big givers, I don't know who are little givers. I don't know. I don't wanna know. So I really genuinely don't care where you are, except that I care enough about you to want you to be able to move to the next stage because I believe God will do powerful things in you and God will do powerful things through you as you move forward. So wherever you are, just acknowledge this where I am.

The second question is, what obstacles are keeping me stuck where I am? Maybe it's debt for you, maybe it's fear, maybe it's selfishness, but wrestle with it this week. What step am I on and what's keeping me stuck at this place? And then third question, what is one step I can take this week to get unstuck? And notice the one week this, right? Not a step that you can take in a month or a year or when things change. Right now, what's one step that I can take to get unstuck from where I am? Little steps today always better than the hope of big steps tomorrow.

I understand, any each church that really cares about its people and its mission has to share these kinds of things on a regular basis. And I genuinely care about you. I care about your potential to be part of what God's doing. And, you know, if you're visiting from another church, you'll notice we already took the offering. There's no guilt inherent in this. And if you're coming from another church, I want you to understand, I want you to go back to that local church and I want you to be generous there for what God's doing.

Let's pray. Jesus, we know we can never approach your generosity. We think of your death on the cross and your offer of forgiveness simply by trusting in you. That is incredibly generous. Heavenly Father, we understand that your generosity is what motivated You to give your Son as a sacrifice for our sins. We can never approach your generosity, but Lord, we acknowledge your invitation to become generous with You and we acknowledge the power that it will have in setting us free from bondage to various things and also the power that it has as we're able to become participants in what You are doing in the world, which is the purpose for which You made us. So while we can't match your generosity, we pray that your Holy Spirit would stir us to generosity for your glory and for your sake, in Jesus name. Amen.

