

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

AWAKEN TO POSITION | AWAKEN

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Hey, give it up for the Smiths. Isn't that incredible? Nine children. Nine kids. I have no problems. That's incredible to see. And I'm just grateful that they were willing to share their story.

I want you to not miss what they said in the video. I just love their vulnerability, how Tony was like, "Hey, man. I'm kind of a natural skeptic. So it's been difficult at times for me to actually step out to do this." And I love what Diedre said at the very end of the video. She said, "If we hadn't have stepped out we would have missed this."

I want you to know that that is really what *Awaken* has really been about. If you're just now joining us for this series, we're wrapping it up next weekend. And we have just been entering into this season together, as a church, where we don't want to miss what it is that God wants to say to us and do in us so that He can do something through us.

That's really what faith is all about. If we wait 'til we have all of our questions answered, if we wait 'til we have everything in our sphere of control, that's not really faith. And then we end up missing the power of the moment in which God wants to supernaturally intervene and do something in our lives.

Man, last night we had a really historic event in the life of our church with Advance Commitment Night. We met right here in this room. And there were several hundred people who gathered together. We worshipped. We prayed and then we made our pre-commitments to what God is going to do in this *Awaken* initiative. It was a sweet and powerful and unifying time together. It was just incredible.

Afterward, nearly an hour after everything was over, people were hanging out in the lobby in the atrium spaces. And part of that is because we fed them. But, they were still hanging around. There was such a sweet spirit in the room. And it made me really excited. Just a little taste of what we're going to experience next week on Commitment Sunday. So, I want you to make it a priority to be here as we wrap this series and as the rest of the church comes together and makes a two-year commitment to what God is going to do in a through us in this *Awaken* vision.

If you have your Bible, go ahead and find 2 Corinthians, chapter 8. That's the passage that we're going to be in. Hopefully, you also have your *Awaken* book that you brought with you. If you do, go ahead and turn to page 74. That's where we're going to be together today.



I don't know how many of you are aware of this, but when it comes to the subject of money, giving, material, financial possessions—that subject is mentioned over 2,000 times in the Bible. There are over 2,000 Scripture references that address that.

Now, that may not mean a whole lot to you, because you might be like, “Well, the Bible is a really thick book. You know? Genesis to Revelation—2,000 references, is that a lot?”

Well, let me just give you a little bit of context here when it comes to other really important subjects in the Bible:

40 verses address BAPTISM

There are 40 verses from Genesis to Revelation that address the subject of baptism. Baptism is a pretty big deal.

275 verses talk about PRAYER

There are 275 verses that talk about prayer.

350 verses on FAITH

There are 350 verses that talk about faith.

650 on LOVE

There are 650 verses on love.

2,350 that deal with material and financial possessions

But a whopping 2,350 verses deal with material and financial possessions. It's not even close between first and second.

Now the reason why the Scriptures address the subject so often, and if you've been here during this series, you've heard me say this, is not because God is short on cash or that He wants yours. The reason why there are so many references is because, as Jesus would say in the gospel of Matthew, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

So it is as if there is this thin fishing line wire between our treasure and our heart. And wherever our treasure goes, there our heart follows. So the reason why the Scriptures speak so often to the subject is because God wants our hearts. And, what we do with money, how we think about money shapes our hearts.

I remember years ago I had it explained to me this way and it was super helpful. Maybe it will be helpful for somebody here today. If you were to wade out into a creek or a stream where water flows, and roll up your pants legs and walk out ankle deep, and you were to reach down and pick up a few of the rocks that have been in that creek bed for a number of years, you would see that the flow of water over the rocks has shaped them. It has smoothed out the rough edges. The flow of the water will shape them over time.

I would say, in a very similar way, money, as it flows in and flows out, easy come easy go, as they say, from the very first pay check you ever got, maybe mowing yards or babysitting, to the very last paycheck you receive before you retire and start collecting Social Security, as money flows in and as you pay expenses out, that money and the way you think about it shapes your heart.

That is what the Scriptures speak so often to it. And many of those 2,350 references, many of them are found in our text today and next weekend, 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. These two chapters, together, make up the longest, continuous teaching on giving and generosity in all of Scripture. And they contain some really powerful principles, if we're willing to really listen to what it is they have to say.

I wish I had time to unpack every single verse in these chapters, both this week and next, but due to time constraints I just simply don't have the time. So what I want to do is I want to encourage you to read chapters 8 and 9 continuously on your own over the course of this next week. As you do, ask God to just point out things to you. And He will. Ask God what the principles are that are found in these chapters—principles. Write them in your own words and internalize them, because there are some really powerful insights here as Paul writes to this church in Corinth.

Now, a little bit of context for the letter, Paul, one of the primary things that he did is he traveled around and he did new church startups. He started brand new churches. And if any of you have ever been a part of a startup business then you know that you've got to raise a lot of capital on the front end in order to get that started.

Well, the same thing is true for a church. So in a lot of Paul's writings he was imploring the churches that were already in existence to give offerings to other churches so that way they could get started. A lot of our giving theology comes out of Paul's teaching here. And Jesus obviously backs up a lot of this that is found in the gospels as well.

Every time Paul encourages these churches to give, this is so important for us to understand, he's never asking them to give to something, meaning he's not asking them to give just to meet a need, just build a thing, just to meet an expense, he's asking them to give *from* something. And that *from* is a heart that has been changed by God.

In fact, Paul would even say that it's much more important that you give from a changed heart. And if you can't give from a changed heart, we'll mention this next week in chapter 9, it would probably be better for you to not give at all, because you're actually giving from the wrong kind of heart and that's going to be toxic to your soul.

So, here's the principle that we find in this chapter:

Generosity is a matter of the heart

And always, when Paul is saying, "Hey, here's a tangible need," he always takes the time to disciple the heart of the giver who is doing the potential giving. And that's so



important to understand because I don't know of anybody else, any other business, any other entity that is interested in my heart when I give them money.

When I go to my favorite restaurant and the waiter brings me the bill, and I put the credit card in there and he whisks it away and comes back and says, "Hey, thank you so much for dining with us," I've never once had a waiter say, "But, what I'm really interested in is your heart in the right place to pay the bill today?" I've just never had that happen.

I've never made a mortgage payment and then the bank sends me an email or gives me a phone call and says, "Mr. Brockett, I just want to follow up with you here and thank you for paying your mortgage payment on time, but what we're really interested in is the disposition of your heart as you make your mortgage payment this month." That has never happened. Because, really, what they are interested in is the bottom line. They get their money, then they are good. Who cares about your heart?

That's the opposite with Paul. Paul is like, "I'm really interested in your heart because what you do with and how you think about money and generosity is heart-shaping." Paul knows this. So here's what he is doing in this letter. He is writing a letter to the Corinthian church. And this was a church with so many problems that it required two letters. The Christians in Corinth were Christians gone wild. They were off the rails. All kinds of issues.

So, Paul writes them a letter in 1 Corinthians and now he is following up with a second one. And part of what he is doing here is he is urging... And actually, they were pretty well off, by the way. They had a strong economy, people were in a different season of life, they were doing pretty well. And Paul is urging them to be generous toward the churches in Jerusalem.

Now to give you a frame of reference, here's a map of the day in which he writes. So he's writing to the churches in Corinth and he's saying, "Hey, guys. I want you to be generous all the way, 800 miles, across the Mediterranean to a place where you likely may not know anyone, likely you have never been there, and you might not ever go there.

You know 800 miles for us is not that big of a deal, you can get there in a day. But back then that was a pretty big deal. And it was likely that they were just like, "Why in the world would we give to a place 800 miles away? Paul, we could give in our own back yard. We've got needs right here in our community. We can be generous there. Why would we give all of the way over there, Paul? We don't like their weather. We don't like their food. We don't like their football team. Paul, why would we be generous toward them?"

And I think he got a little bit of a push back from them and that is why in the passage we're going to see that he's actually using, if you look at the map, the churches in Macedonia as an example of generosity. He's trying to use their generosity as inspiration and even conviction and challenge for the church in Corinth.

Now here's what you need to know about the churches in Macedonia. The church in Corinth was well off, but the church in Macedonia was not. In fact, in the passage Paul is going to describe them and say that they were going through a severe trial.

Now, I would imagine that everybody listening to this has been through one of those before in your life, if not multiple. Maybe you're going through one right now. And a severe trial could be a health issue. A severe trial could be an emotional or mental health issue. A severe trial could be unemployment. A severe trial is that you just found out you lost your job. A severe trial is unexpected medical bills. We all know what that is like.

He says that the churches in Macedonia, that's what they were going through. They were in extreme poverty, not just poverty, extreme poverty. So what does that look like? Well that could be. "I'm a college student working my way through college, I don't have any money." That could be, "We're a young couple. We just got married and we want to buy our first house, but interest rates are eight percent."

This could be a little bit later in life and, "We've got five kids in college all at the same time." And as you've heard me say before, putting kids through college is like buying a brand new BMW every single semester and pushing it off of a cliff. That's what that is like.

So, you are like, "Man, we don't have any money. We've got to put kids through college." Or maybe beyond that you are like, "We didn't get quite enough saved for retirement." Or, "We've got aging parents and they don't have good health insurance so we're supplementing that."

So extreme poverty: severe trials, extreme poverty. Those were the characteristics of the Macedonian churches. And Paul asked them to give generously.

Here's usually our logic. Why would he do that? That kind of seems a little bit insulting. "Paul, why wouldn't you find somebody who was better off and ask them to give?" That's usually the logic that we use. And Paul tells us why. Look with me at verses 1 through 4. He says:

"Now I want you to know," he's writing to the Corinthians, "dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done," notice these words, circle, or underline them, "through the churches in Macedonia."

And that is why we've been saying through this whole series that the primary goal for us in *Awaken* is that God might do something in you. Hard stop. We really mean that. We're not just giving voice to that. We're not just saying that we want that. It is genuinely what we want. The primary goal of *Awaken* is that God might awaken you to what it is that He desires to do in you, because you stopped listening to His voice at some point in your past.



And I don't know how many conversations and DMs and emails and texts that I've had from people who have said, "We just didn't know how much we needed this series until we got into it." And most of my conversations with people during this series has not been about money. They have been about being awakened to the voice of and the move of God in their lives.

And since our hearts are oftentimes connected to our money, that's usually the thing that oftentimes gets our attention and wakes us up. See, I think that if you've ever, and I know I'm not speaking to everybody, but I'm likely speaking to somebody, if you have ever had an experience in a church where the church went through a capital campaign or a generosity initiative and it left a bad taste in your mouth, I have enough experience to know that this is probably the reason why.

I think many times it is well intentioned but there is a tendency to skip over the *in you* part and go right to the *through you* part, so we begin to say, "Hey church. We've got to do the thing. Build the building. We've got to climb the mountain." And we can end up, even if it is unintentional, beginning to feel a little bit used and manipulated. And we feel a little bit like a cog in a machine, because we skip that *in you* part. And I don't want God to do anything through you until you've taken enough time for Him to do something in you.

This is what has happened in the church in Macedonia. He says that God was clearly at work in their lives. Severe trials. Extreme poverty. But God was at work in their lives and He was doing something through them. And then he says this. Alright? Buckle up. This isn't good news. It's kind of good news, but it's not good news, at least in the short. Does that make sense? Okay here we go. He says this:

"*They are being*," what's the word? Tested. How many of you like a good test? It's like, "Come on man, bring on the good test." No. Nobody likes being tested. But it's absolutely necessary that you and I are tested, because that actually shows what kind of faith that we have. See, God never promised that life would be easier with faith. He said that you'll be stronger because of it.

So he says, they are going to be tested and then they are going to go through:

"...*many troubles*,"

Paul, can't we just have one trouble?" No, it's going to be many troubles. Life is filled with trouble, meaning that there is never a season where you and I are not being tested and not going through some sort of trouble. If you wait to be test free and trouble free in order to be totally available for God to use you, you'll be waiting an awfully long time. And then you'll get to the end of your life and realize, "I never once engaged God on that faith journey. I played it safe through my whole life and I never made myself available to Him."

And he said:

"...they are very poor. But," notice this, a dichotomy of words here, "they are also filled," that's sort of a surprising word given their circumstances, "they are filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford," in other words they weren't playing it safe, they gave, "far more."

Now that could be monetary, doesn't have to be. It could actually be that God saw the conditions of their heart and realized, "Wow. Man. I'm so pleased with what they are giving even though the amount may be far less than what the Corinthians could give. I see that they are giving out of an abundant and joy filled heart."

And they did it of their own free will. 2 Corinthians 8:1-3 (NLT)

In other words, nobody shamed them into it. Nobody guilted them. Nobody was twisting their arms. They did this because they wanted to.

So notice the characteristics in the passage. They gave beyond their ability. They gave of their own free will. They gave with great joy. In fact, at one point Paul says that they were pleading him for the privilege of participating, "Paul, we want to do this. Don't leave us out of this because we know that if we do this we're inviting God into our lives. He is awakening us. We actually get to see a demonstration of His power when we take our weakness before Him and it gets matched with His strength.

Now if there is anybody who could have pushed back from the table and disengaged from this opportunity, it would have been the churches in Macedonia. They had good reason too. It is totally understandable. They could have said, "Paul, this is not a good time. We're going through a really difficult thing here. Can you check back with us maybe a year from now when the economy has recovered? Maybe we'd be happy to participate in this."

But they didn't do that. They chose, in this moment, to engage with God. I think they knew something that oftentimes you and I forget:

Other financial obligations, wants or desires

Regardless of our circumstances, we have a tendency to resource the things that give us joy. Man, we just do. We'll figure out a way. You know. If shoes bring you joy, you'll figure out a way to resource that. If that vacation brings us joy, we're going to figure out a way to resource that, regardless of our circumstances.

I read this last week. Last year, 2022, Americans spent 10.6 billion dollars on Halloween: costumes, decorations, and candy. Now, I'm not judging, nor am I advocating. So keep your emails to yourself. Alright? This is just an observation. I just read this in the news. Alright? So 10.6 billion last year. I don't know, that seems like a lot.

So, I thought, "Well, I don't know if the economy is doing any better this year than what it was last year." So, I wondered what it was this year. This year we upped it: 12.2 billion.

So, once again, not advocating, not judging. Just an observation that we usually find resources to do the things that give us joy.

So here's the question. Do the characteristics in the passage describe you?" Joy. Overflow. Far more. Privilege. Do those words describe somebody who is facing severe trial and extreme poverty? See, these Macedonians, they could have taken a back seat. They could have said, "Paul, hey man, we're all in. We want to see churches planted in Jerusalem. This just isn't the season for us."

I just want to get real for a minute. I would imagine that there is somebody right now, today, and you're going through a financial storm. I've talked to several people already that God is just doing some... He's at work right now. I've talked to somebody who said, "You know what, man? I just found out that I'm getting ready to lose my job. This is going to be a step of faith for me."

Maybe right now there are just unexpected financial storms that have come into your life. I just want you to know that I would never, ever diminish that. That is a fact. That is not fiction.

But I guess the question that I'm asking is, "Are you choosing for God? Are you predetermining your course of faith by saying, 'God, this just isn't... I'm all in. But this just isn't the season for me. Let me take a pass. Revisit in a year whenever circumstances are different.'" And when we do that we are actually disengaging, we're actually distancing ourselves from the voice and the power of God in our lives.

This is why we've said the primary goal of *Awaken* is 100 percent engagement. And that is a purposeful and biblical word: *engage*.

Engage. So, what does that look like? Well, right now are you on your face praying big, bold, courageous prayers with God? Are you hungry saying, "God, I'm going to the Scriptures today, not to check a box, but I'm going to the Scriptures because I need to hear a fresh word from You.

"God, right now I'm watching what is happening in the world and this thing just feels like it is accelerating out of control with wars and with AI and with all of the technology and all of the instability and all of the political division. God, this is just so frightening. And my tendency is to either be overcome with fear and anxiety or to become enraged with anger.

"God, instead of being hijacked by those emotions, I want to be fully devoted to You, to be Your ambassador for Your kingdom coming, to bring a light into the darkness."

Are you engaged with God or have you disengaged from God due to circumstances that you're trying to control when control is simply an illusion?

Listen. If God is asking you to do something scary, that's a good thing. Because if you're scared, that's usually what can change you. It requires enough faith to say, "God, I don't know how this is going to work out, but I choose to give it to You."

So the question I just want to place in front of you is are you disengaging from God? Eighter saying, "Man, right now my life is kind of crazy. This just isn't the season for me." Or, here's the other reason we oftentimes give, "I just don't know if I have enough trust to be that kind of generous."

Those are usually the two cards that I play. Oftentimes, by the way, my sermon outlines are just me confessing to you. That's my sermon outline. I just know in my life, whenever I want to disengage from God, it's because, "God, I've got four kids. I don't have nine. But I've got four, I've got four. I've got four kids and I've got these obligations and I've got things that I need to provide. I need to provide, God." That's actually my code word for control.

Can I trust who I'm giving it to?

Or here's the other one, "God, I just don't know that I trust other people, people are shady, people are broken, people are dishonest." And I actually use that as a reason to disengage.

Several years ago I was in the Meijer parking lot. I walked up to my truck and I briefly made eye contact with a lady who was walking toward me. I didn't know that I recognized her, but she kind of made a little bit of eye contact walking my way. So I got into the truck and she starts walking really quickly toward the truck and she's trying to flag me down.

I was tempted to just pretend like I hadn't seen her and drive away, but you never know, she could be one of you. So, I was like let me stop. She wasn't one of you, it was very clear she didn't know who I was. She was from out of town.

But she walks up, and you've had this conversation, likely at a gas station where somebody walks up and they start leading with the whole rehearsed speech, empty gas tank, no cash, no phone, all by herself, trying to get to Chicago or out west or wherever, "Could you spare enough change so I can fill up my gas tank?"

Man, during the whole thing, I'm like, "I've heard this before," and I'm sitting there and I immediately disengage and I get annoyed. Man, I'm sitting there going, "Why should I give her my hard-earned cash. I've got responsibilities of my own. I've got four kids at home." And here's the next thought that I had. I was like, "I don't really think she is using this cash for gas. She's probably using it for booze or drugs or whatever. So, I can let myself off of the hook here."

And it was right in that moment, it was as if the Spirit of God was like, "Hey, Aaron, actually both of those things might be true but I want to know, are you willing to be used

by Me, right now in this moment? Even if she does use the money on booze, that has nothing to do with you, your heart. Let Me take care of her and her integrity, I actually want you to be obedient to Me in the moment.”

So, literally, I reached into my wallet and I didn’t even look to see how much cash was in there because I didn’t want to talk myself out of it. I just grabbed whatever was in there and handed it to her. And I could tell it was more than she was expecting me to give her because she looked at it and she goes, “My, my, my. I’m going to fill up my gas tank and I’m going to take my girlfriends to Golden Corral.”

That’s what she said. I was like, “Alright, good luck with that.” I’m driving away and it was in that moment where God was like, “Hey, Aaron. You actually excuse yourself from trusting Me in those moments of faith because you’re playing the control card and you’re actually playing that card to say, ‘You know what, I don’t know that the other person is trustworthy. And it has nothing to do with them. You’re not giving to them. You’re giving to Me.’”

Can I just say this, because I know what kind of environment we live in. I don’t live under a rock. I know that there is high skepticism toward large organizations and institutions and churches. And quite possibly you’ve been hurt, maybe by a group of Christians or a church that actually mishandled money in some way, even in some initiative sort of like this.

And I think this is actually as old as time, because actually this is in the text. I think the Corinthians pushed back on Paul for this exact reason. I think that they pushed back on him, we don’t have the letters that they wrote to him, but I think that in their letter back to him they were like, “Paul, how do we know that you are trustworthy?”

And he mentions this in verse 16. Actually verse 20. Look at it with me. He says this:

“We are traveling together,” meaning nobody is traveling with money alone, there are always two of us together, *“to guard against any criticism,”* you could use the word accusation, *“for the way we are handling this generous gift.”*

And then he said these two things:

“We are careful to be honorable before,” who? *“before the Lord,”* meaning God is our audience, audience of One. Other people may not be able to see what we do with the money behind closed doors, but God does. We actually want to be honorable to Him.

And then he goes, and:

“...we also want everyone else to see that we are honorable.” 2 Corinthians 8:20-21 (NLT)

We are operating with integrity. And can I just say to both of those things: yes and amen.

I want you to know that we take the stewardship of what is given here super seriously because, I’ve told you before about the passage that not many of you should teach and



preach because, actually, you'll be held to a higher standard... Judgment day is going to be kind of sobering for all of us.

It's going to be especially brutal for me, because God is going to hold me accountable for my personal life. He's also going to hold me accountable for everything that I've taught from this platform and believe me, I have delivered some stinkers. So, God is going to be like, "Hey, man."

He's also going to hold me accountable for the stewardship of dollars. And, guys, especially in this environment where we see leaders falling all of the time, I don't want to give the bride of Christ a black eye. So we want to be honorable. This is why we have accountability limits and controls and also recognize that we want to be as honorable before God as we possibly can be.

Can I just say this to you? Human beings will break our trust and let us down. That is an unfortunate reality about life. But, man. Don't push back from the table and not go on a faith journey with God because of other people's lack of integrity. You're not giving to humans. You're giving to God. And, if human beings do lack integrity in the way that they handle it, guess what? God is keeping record and He'll hold accountable.

So how were these early believers able to give in ways that they did? How were they able to go above and beyond this? Well, verse 5 is how. Look at what it says in the passage:

"They begged us again and again for the privilege," that's how they saw it, *"Man, this is a privilege," "of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. They even did more than we had hoped, for their first action,"* here's how they did more than what we had hoped, *"...their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to us, just as God wanted them to do."* 2 Corinthians 8:4-5 (NLT)

This is a matter of first and best. And the way in which they were able to be generous is that they said, "Hey, we've given ourselves fully to God. We are recognizing that it's not even being generous because God has provided it all. We're just simply returning to Him what He has richly provided to us and He has our hearts. So, because of that, we've made Him first priority in our lives." They were fully engaging with what it was that God wanted to do within them.

And then it says in verses 6 and 7:

"So we have urged Titus, who encouraged your giving in the first place, to return to you and encourage you to finish this ministry of giving. Since you excel in so many ways — in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm," in other words, guys, this is a talented church. They had gifted speakers, they were really, really smart, they were enthusiastic, like a charismatic church, "Man, you guys are so, so gifted." But he also goes:

"I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving." 2 Corinthians 8:6-7 (NLT)

Do you know what that tells me? That tells me that generosity is actually something that can be strengthened and developed like a muscle. And it's one of those things where you if you're like, "Man, I just really want to get strong so I'm just going to keep looking in the mirror until one day I'm actually strong." No, you've actually got to put in the reps. And you've actually got to flex it. That's very similar when it comes to generosity.

I don't know how many people I've had come to me and say, when it comes to spiritual gifts, inventories, and other things that they are really good at, I don't think I've ever had anybody come to me and say, "You know what? My top gift is generosity." It's nobody's top gift. I don't know of anybody who is like, "I just feel like I'm actually very generous."

And you want an example? For those of you who have small kids at home. How many of those little demons—I mean angels—have been born into the world just naturally very generous? That's actually one of the top priority things, as a parent, to teach them. It's to teach them how to be generous.

And the way that you are generous, this is the heartbeat of the sermon right here, regardless of your stage of life, regardless of your circumstances, regardless of the size of your bank account, are you beginning to get the reps in now?

Here's the problem with this. I've used this logic before. "God, once I graduate from college and get a steady job, I'm all yours." And then what happens? "Well, I got the job. It didn't pay as much as I thought. And Uncle Sam is taking more than what I was hoping. And I got married, and, you know, we've got rent. So, God, once we get the promotion, or she goes from half-time to full-time, hey, then we're all yours."

And then what happens, "Well, we're buying a house and the mortgage payment is pretty high and we've got some extra repairs around the house and once we kind of get enough saved for an emergency fund, then we're all yours."

And then we have kids and kids are expensive. And then we get them out of diapers and then they go to college and then we've actually got to focus on retirement. Here's the thing. All of a sudden we wake up at the end of our life and we've never flexed, we've never gotten the reps in.

And you keep thinking, "You know, one day, when I'm set, I'll be generous." Statistically that just simply is not true. This is where God is saying, "No, I'm actually not concerned about the amounts, I'm actually concerned about your heart right where you are at." "But God, uh..." "I'm not asking what you don't have. I'm asking you to be trusting and faithful with what you do have. And are you willing to take those steps of growth."

And most often, when I'm willing to do that, God puts somebody in my life who actually is an inspiration, a challenge, and an encouragement for me to take steps of growth in that area.



When Lindsay and I first moved here we didn't have any friends. And so we were asking people to be our friends. It was sad. It was pathetic, "Will you be our friends?"

So there was this one couple who invited us to go to dinner with them. And they were very, very generous. They were a few years older than us. And they came over. They picked us up so we didn't have to drive downtown and spend our own gas money. So we rode with them downtown and we went to this nice restaurant. And then they grabbed the bill and said, "No, it's on us. We're going to pay."

And then they took us to duck pin bowling. We'd never done duck pin bowling. We'd just moved to Indy. So, we go to this place. They paid for us to do duck pin bowling.

And right next to us was this group in a lane and they ordered a pitcher of beer. They drank about half of it. And then they left pretty quickly. And I remember thinking to myself, "Did they pay for that?" They leave and the waiter came over to us afterward to settle up. And the waiter said, "Hey, is that your pitcher of beer?"

I could immediately tell where this was going. The waiter was a little bit irritated. And I was kind of like, "Oh, man. He's going to pin that on us." And man I started to internally flare up a little bit. I was ready to kind of go toe to toe with him. If I had to, I would break the glass and pull the pastor card. And I pull it for special circumstances just like this. Alright? It's like, "You're going to make a pastor pay for a pitcher of beer?"

So, I'm ready to kind of... Now here's the thing. I don't know what I was all wrapped up about. I hadn't paid for a single thing all night. But here I am ready to fight the guy over this thing. I'm kind of ready to go at it with him.

And I'll never forget my friend. He didn't act bothered. He was calm and collected. He just looked at the guy and he goes, "Oh, man. They didn't pay for it?" So he was like, "No, man. That's not ours. But actually, just put it on our bill. I'll take care of it."

And I remember that the whole disposition of that waiter changed. And he was like, "Oh, man. That's not necessary. You don't need to do it. We'll take care of it."

Once again, as I've done so many times, I walked out of there going, "Brockett, what is your problem? Why are you trying to control things? Why was that such a big deal?"

It's because it's a matter of the heart. It's like I'm not willing to fully trust God in those areas of my life. Why is this so important? Well, look with me at verses 8 and 9. He says:

"I am not," this is so important guys, *"I am not commanding you to do this."* He is not commanding them. This is not a salvation issue. This is not something you should feel strong armed into. This is not something you should feel guilty or manipulated to do.

And he goes:

"But I am testing how genuine your love is by comparing it with the eagerness of the other churches. You know the," here it is, *"generous grace..."*

Man if that is not how you see the generous grace of Jesus, there is something wrong. I never want to get to this place where I feel entitled to God's grace. I always want to stay in this place like, "God, I don't deserve it at all. And the fact that You would give it to me, the fact that You would redeem me and cleanse me of my sin, not because of anything that I've done to work it off, but it's because of Your generous grace..."

And then he says, here's how he describes Jesus:

"Though he was rich,"

Rich where? In heaven. Something about being the Son of God. He stepped off of His throne, laid down His crown so that He could come to us and He:

"...became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich." 2 Corinthians 8:8-9 (NLT)

Guys, that's the gospel message and that is the motivation for all of our generosity. Paul would go as far as to say that if your generosity, the way that you think about resources, is not a mirror image of that, then you're actually giving from the wrong place. You're actually giving to kind of bolster up your pride. It's like a legalistic kind of a thing where you're actually giving begrudgingly, which is toxic to your heart.

And he's like, "Oh, man. I want you to really recognize the generous grace of God and out of that begin to be generous recognizing that it all comes from Him."

Never once in the Scriptures do we see God saying to us that He wants us to give everything we have away and live in a cardboard box. About the closest He came to that was with the rich young ruler. And He said to the rich young ruler, who the guy, by the way, thought he had it all figured out—Jesus said, "Sell everything you have and give to the poor and come and follow Me."

He couldn't do it. And the reason why Jesus told him to do something that extreme is because He knew that that was his idol. That was where he was finding his sense of control and his security. And Jesus said, "Until you let go of those things, I can never be your Lord."

Actually, what God is asking you and me to do is much more difficult in the sense that He's asking us to view everything that we have as His. He's the owner. We are the managers. He's the owner. We're the stewards. And we have a tendency to think, "Well, I'm the owner so God, here's Your cut, stay out of the rest." And God says, "No, actually I have given you all and I just want you to return to Me a portion to keep your heart soft and for you to actually participate in My kingdom coming here on this earth."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, God. This is really not Yours because, you know, I'm actually pretty smart. I graduated from MIT. And I actually have some skills." And God would say, "Who gave you those skills? Who gave you the ability to make the money that you have? Who gave you those smarts? Who gave you that body to be able to function and to maneuver it?"

When we begin to recognize that we own nothing, we are just temporarily stewarding it... One day, like it or not, it will all be returned. So right now God is saying, "Don't miss this opportunity for your heart to be shaped by this faith journey that I want you to go on."

Let me finish up this passage, verse 10. He says:

"Here is my advice: It would be good for you to finish what you started a year ago. Last year you were the first who wanted to give, and you were the first to begin doing it. Now you should finish what you started. Let the eagerness you showed in the beginning be matched now by your giving."

Here's the principle:

"Give in proportion to what you have."

Which means that none of us can let ourselves off of the hook, regardless of what stage of life we are in, regardless of our employment status, He says, "No, I'm asking you to give in proportion to what you do have, and that actually fluctuates through life."

"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 8:10-12 (NLT)

So Paul is saying to these Corinthians, "You guys made a commitment a year ago. I'm just asking you to finish it." And then he is saying, "I'm asking you here to make this a matter of first priority."

So, here's the application question that I just simply want to leave for you today:

Are you?

You don't need to defend yourself. You don't need to explain your full financial position to God. He already knows it. Are you saying, "You know what God? You're first and I'm making You priority in my life."

Guys, that commitment card that we're all going to fill out and turn in next Sunday—all this is is a statement before God of our trust level in Him and the priority space that He fits into our lives.

So is it mortgage then God? Is it vacation then God? Is it house then God? What is it? We just simply want to say, together as a church, "God, You're the first priority in our lives and we trust You."

And here's the biggest thing. One hundred years from now, everything that you own will be somebody else's: your bank account, your house, your possessions, all of that, somebody else is going to manage that.

Right now, if life was a board game, and all of the pieces are out on the board, eventually they are all going to go back in the box. So while they are all on the board are you letting God in and through them, or are you waiting for some special set of circumstances

where you can finally have everything kind of in control and feel secure, then you'll invite God into it. God just simply says, "That's not the way faith works."

So let me finish with this story from a guy named John Orthberg. This is in a book of his. I'm just going to read it and then I'll be done. Here's what he says:

My grandmother taught me how to play Monopoly, a board game. She was a lovely woman but she was the most ruthless Monopoly player you have ever seen. Imagine what would happen if Donald Trump would have married Leona Helmsley and they would have had a child. That's what my grandmother was like.

Now you have a picture of what it was like to play her. She understood that the purpose of the game was to acquire, acquire, acquire. When I played, I liked to hold onto my money because it was fun to have it. But I was just a kid. My grandmother would buy up everything that she could and eventually she would become master of the board.

Every time I landed on one of her properties she would stick out her hand and smile. And every time that we played she would take every one of my dollars and I would have to quit in utter defeat. She would always hold up her money and say, "Someday you'll learn how to play the game."

Well, that someday finally came. I spent one whole summer with a neighborhood friend who taught me how to play Monopoly. We would play for hours and hours. And I came to understand the name of the game. It is the acquisition of stuff. It was all about money and possessions.

So I would bend the rules or even break the rules if I had to to get ahead. At the end of the summer, with more cunning and more experience, I sat down and had a big showdown with my grandmother. Slowly I began to expose all of her vulnerabilities, relentlessly driving her off of the board completely.

But then it hit me. It happened at Marvin Gardens. I looked at my grandmother, she's the one who taught me to play the game, she was an old lady, an old widow, the one who had raised my mom and loved me deeply. And I had just taken everything she had. I had destroyed her financially and psychologically. I watched her hand me the last dollar as she quit in utter defeat.

And it was the greatest moment of my life. And I did a dance and I ran around the room and I gloated and flaunted my victory. When I finally settled down she said, "There is one last thing I need to teach you about the game and that is that it all goes back in the box." But I didn't want it to go back in the box. I wanted to leave the board out, flaunt it frame it as a reminder of my ability and great victory. I slaughtered my grandmother.

"No," she said. "None of it is really yours. You got all excited about it for a while. But it was around a long time before you sat down and it will be here a long time after you're gone." She said this, "Players come and go, but eventually it all goes back in the box."

Guys, eventually it all goes back in the box. So while it's out are we inviting God into it or are we keeping Him out of it?

Father, we come to You today and we want to be awakened to Your voice in our lives. And that means that we're going to have to trust You with our idols. We're going to have to let go of them because they've taken Your place on the throne of our hearts.

So, Father, would You please give us the courage and the faith to step out. I can't even begin to presume what that means for each individual listening to this message, but I pray right now, just in the quietness of this moment that we would be open to Your voice, Your prompting, and the conviction of Your Holy Spirit.

Because, honestly, right now we know, we know. We know what it is that You are asking us to give up. We know what it is You're asking us to let go of. We know what it is that is oftentimes keeping us entranced and asleep and detached from the power of Your presence.

God, this life is far too important for us to chase after things that are eventually just going to go back into the box. We want to live for eternity. We want to go on a faith journey with You. So we invite You in. Would You please give us the courage and the faith to do just that. Meet us in the moment. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

