

Base Camp | Beyond Me: Joyful Generosity

Aaron Brockett | Acts 5:1-11

Alright, how's everybody doing? Great, good to see all of you and I want to welcome you if this is your first time to be with us. Would you put your hands together and welcome everybody joining us on the other side of the camera right now? I want to say hello to our North, Downtown, and West campuses as well as to all of you joining us online. So glad to have you with us.

And of course, right now our thoughts and prayers are with everybody in the path of the hurricane down in Florida. We want you to know that we're praying for you as well as those in Houston during the clean-up effort there.

I want to encourage all of us in our church family to be getting on the website in the next day or two. We'll try to keep our information updated as to how you can contribute and even serve in some of the recovery down there. We partner with a couple of really trusted organizations that we know and love Convoy of Hope and Operation Blessing International. So be looking on our website. We'll try to keep that information updated throughout the week.

I'm really excited because in a couple of weeks, two weeks from today, we're starting a brand new series of messages we're calling BYOG and it stands for Bring Your Own God. Basically what we're going to be talking about is this idea that every single one of us listening to this right now—we have either invented or inherited a view or an understanding of God that isn't entirely accurate, helpful, or true.

So maybe we've heard some things or experienced some things or assumed some things about God that just aren't true. In fact, a lot of times whenever I get together and meet with people who are not believers and they say that they don't believe in God, when I ask them to describe the God that they don't believe in, most of the time I'm like, "I don't believe in that God either." Oftentimes there are these misperceptions that we have about God that keep us away from Him. We're going to talk about that in this next series that starts in two weeks.

So if you really want to believe but you are struggling to believe because you've got some questions and objections and past experiences that you can't get over, this series is for you. And I want to encourage you—if somebody comes to mind as soon as I said that, maybe a friend or a family member or a coworker, invite them to come with you. This is a perfect series to invite them to. Call it BYOB if it will get them here. For those of you who don't know what that means, bless your heart.

Anyway, today we are in week six of this series called *Base Camp* and we're walking through our church values. Next weekend Jake is going to wrap all of this up. But basically we've been

talking about things like Relational Evangelism: how we're going to share who Jesus is and what He's done in our life but we want to do it in a natural way. We know that the most effective way to do that is within the context of a relationship.

We've talked about Biblical Authority: how we want to hold on to God's word long enough to let it get a hold of us and it will if we don't let go of it first. So we're going to trust that what God's word says is good, right, and true even if we don't initially like it, agree with it, or understand it.

Then we talked about Intentional Discipleship: how there is no such thing as a one man or a one woman show. We are not self-made people. We need others and God is going to use other people in your spiritual growth and He will likely use you in theirs.

And then in the last couple of weeks we talked about Outstanding Environments and Healthy Culture: how we need to remember, always, that it is somebody's first weekend at any one of our campuses and if they decide to show up, it's probably because they are looking for something.

You've blown off church invitations before, you can watch it online. But if you actually take the energy and have the courage to show up at a campus it's probably because, whether you will admit it or not, you're looking for something. You're probably looking for hope. And we want to be ready to give it to you. How tragic would it be if you came and didn't find what you were looking for or you came with excuses ready to not come back and we just gave you more reasons not to come back. So, as a church, we've said that we want to be prepared to love the people God puts in our path.

Now the analogy that we've been using in this values series is one of a base camp because if you ever decide to climb a mountain, you're probably going to stop at something like a base camp. And base camp is really important because it helps you acclimate to the altitude and to re-group with friends so that way you can reach the summit.

We've been saying that as important as base camp is, don't ever confuse it for the summit because it's not the summit. And when it comes to our walk with Jesus, just generally believing in God or attending a church when you can is not the summit. I think many times people view it as that. We think, "Well, that's all that God really wants of me." But that's just base camp. These things are just here in place to help you to get to the summit, which is personal transformation as you seek to follow Jesus.

So I just want to reinforce this one last time. Our church values are not just a set of well-practiced statements that we teach through every couple of years or that we hang on the wall and it looks nice and pretty, but our church values should be tools that you can put in your pack to help you along in your journey as you seek to follow Jesus. Really what this is is a discipleship series. It's helping us learn how to follow Jesus better in our lives.

Now, if you were here last week you heard me say that my teaching is always going to be out of God's word, because apart from it I have nothing substantial to say. But it is going to be, unapologetically, through the lens of the guest in mind first. When I teach, I am primarily thinking about that person who doesn't yet know Jesus. Somebody who's got some objections, some hurts, some hang-ups and things that are keeping them from God, I'm thinking about them first. It's not that I don't want everybody else to be fed, I do. It's just that I'm going to feed them first.

After saying that last week, I need to say to you this week as we jump in—this particular message is going to be primarily for believers. So those of you who are already followers of Jesus, even more specifically than that, those of you who would call Traders Point home, this message is primarily for you.

If you are a guest or maybe this isn't your home church, then I just give you permission to audit this message. If you've ever audited a college course, you know what I'm talking about. You're not going to get graded for this. This won't go on your permanent transcript, alright? It's very rare that you will ever hear a pastor say that you can audit a message, but if you're a guest I just want you to feel free to do that.

Now that doesn't mean shut off your computer, turn off your phone, or turn off your brain, because I think that there is going to be some really helpful information here that, if you listen to it regardless of where you are with God, it's going to be beneficial to you. I just don't want you to confuse this with unnecessary pressure. This is not for you. This is for believers, and more specifically than that for people in our church.

A few years ago, Lindsay and I—many of you know this—Lindsay and I lived in California for a while. We planted a church there and we lived outside of Sacramento. And the lady who did my taxes every year was this sweet lady in her 70s and she lived in Napa Valley. She lived in this home that was built in 1920. It was in perfect condition. And she did taxes out of her home. So I would show up. She had this little parlor out front—that's what it was. I would sit there and she would sit in her office with this big, old fashioned ledger. She didn't own a computer. And she would do my taxes with pencil and a calculator. It took her about an hour or so to do my taxes.

Now, I have no idea why I went to her other than that I was just looking for excuses to drive to Napa Valley, which I think is probably a good enough reason. So I went to her. It was probably three or four years that I had gone to her and on the fifth year that she was doing my taxes, she came out into the parlor about 40 minutes or so in and she said—she had a very, very concerned look on her face. And she said, "Aaron, do you have such and such form filed with the IRS?" And I had no idea what she was talking about.

She said, "Well, you've been taking this deduction, which you have every right to take, but you need to have this form filed with the IRS first and they send you a confirmation letter for it in order for this to be legitimate. Do you have it?" And I was like, "No, I don't even know what you are talking about." And she said, "Oh dear." Not what you want to hear from a 70-year-old tax

accountant.

She proceeded to explain it to me. She said, “Well, because you don’t have that form filed with them, you owe about \$20,000 in back taxes.” Oh dear. And I’ve got to tell you, driving to her house that day the sun was shining, the grapevines were glistening. Driving back the sun was gone and the grapes were melted—shriveled up. Melted?

So I’m driving back to our apartment in Sacramento and my mind was moving a million miles an hour. I was asking all of these questions like, “Man, what are we going to do?” And, “What am I going to tell Lindsay.” And, “Which kid are we going to have to sell first to figure this thing out?” Isn’t it amazing ... I mean you probably have your own story, don’t you? Even as I share this some of you are like, “Oh, I’ve been in a similar spot.” Maybe it wasn’t that specific thing but you’ve been in something similar—some kind of financial bind. Isn’t it amazing how those types of circumstances can just totally unsettle your spirit and just sort of make you feel a bit uneasy? And maybe for you it was the fact that you lost a job or maybe a deal fell apart or the hospital bill came or the tuition increased—you’d like to save more but by the time you get finished paying all of your bills there is just nothing left to save. It knocks us off balance.

I’m curious. How many of you are like me? How many of you have an amount that you set in your mind and how you arrive at that is totally arbitrary. But you get this amount in your mind that when your bank account balance stays at or above that then you feel secure. It feels good. You’re like, “Hey, we can go to Benihana’s Friday night. Things are looking good with PNC.” Or, when it drops below that balance all of a sudden you start to feel really uneasy. You even feel a little bit irritable.

It’s amazing how our perspective on money can unsettle our spirit and we rarely think about it this way. Number one: the subject of personal finances is just that—it’s personal. So we have a tendency to keep it very, very private. But we don’t often think about the fact that money is a spiritual issue. Money, the way that we think about it, the way that we feel about it, the way that we use it is a discipleship issue. That’s one of the reasons that Jesus talked about it so much.

I don’t know if you know this but Jesus talked about the subject of money—now I didn’t say giving I said money, there’s a difference. He talked about the subject of money, how we think about it, feel about it, use it more than any other subject including love and forgiveness. And it’s not because it’s more important to Jesus, it’s because He knows that that is the chief competition for our affections and our hearts.

In fact, one of my favorite things that Jesus said about the subject is in Matthew, chapter 6, verse 21. At all of our campuses let’s read this out loud together, “Wherever your treasure is, there the **desires of your heart** will also be.”

So I think that you know that when He is talking about heart He’s not talking about that thing in your chest that pumps blood, He’s talking about the essence of who you are. And He basically

says that wherever your treasure is your heart won't be far behind. And your treasure will always lead your heart. It's never the other way around. In other words, maybe you could summarize it this way: whatever I choose to treasure will reveal the truest things about me.

Now please understand, I think that many of you know this. Money is not evil in and of itself. The Bible never says that. It's amoral. It's not good in and of itself, it's not evil in and of itself it's just a tool that we use. It's something that is necessary, even. You need it to provide for your family. It's not a bad thing to even save it up and take your family on a nice vacation. That's not bad.

What the Bible says is that the love of money is the root of all evil. And you've probably heard that before. But I was thinking about that this last week and I thought, "You know, very rarely would I think that any of us would openly admit or say out loud that we love money." Would you? I mean unless your Conor McGregor or Floyd Mayweather, alright? But the rest of us kind of realize that saying out loud that you love money kind of makes you sound like a little bit of a dirt bag, right? I mean we know that we shouldn't love money.

Here's the thing. Worrying about money incessantly, being stingy with money, obsessing over it, fighting over it—isn't that the same thing? It's this over preoccupation with money and it will reveal what's really going on inside of our hearts. In fact, I would even say that it will cause us to do things and say things that we wouldn't ordinarily do and say.

We see an example of this in Acts, chapter 5. So if you have a phone or a Bible app in front of you, and I really hope that you do, would you meet me in Acts chapter 5? We've been looking at the book of Acts throughout this entire series because it explains how the first century church got started. So we want to see where each of our church values can be found in the book of Acts. And this is Acts 5, so keep in mind that the church officially gets started at this thing called Pentecost in Acts, chapter 2 so they haven't gotten a lot of history under their belts just yet. It's only chapter 5.

I want you to think about it this way. The church in chapter 5 is still a newborn baby. And if any of you have ever brought a newborn baby home from the hospital you know that that baby is fragile and so you are going to be a bit more attentive, you're going to be a little more overprotective of that baby, than you would say your fifteen-year-old.

I remember when we brought our kids home from the hospital when they were babies, I didn't just let anybody hold them or if I did I would constantly watch them ready to jump underneath if they dropped them. If the binky fell out of one of their mouths I incinerated the binky and got them a new one. But by the last one I was like, "Here you go."

I would go into their bedroom at night—I think I would wake up every hour on the hour, not just to change a diaper but to lean down and put my ear over their little noses and mouth just to hear if they were breathing. Now I don't do that with my 13-year-old and 15-year-old. That would just be weird. But when they were babies, I did. Why? Because they were much more

fragile.

I want you do think about the fact that the church is the newborn baby here in Acts, chapter 5 because what we're getting ready to read is quite possibly the most disturbing story in the book of Acts, maybe even in the entire New Testament. It's going to be a little shocking.

Check it out. Chapter 5, verse 1. It says, "But there was a certain man named Ananias who, with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property." That's not unusual. They had a vacation home; they had some rental property somewhere. They decide to sell it and, "He brought **part of the money** to the apostles," which isn't such a big deal but here's the big deal, "**claiming it was the full amount.**"

So here's what's going on. The church is collectively coming together. They are raising some funds for something. Or there was some sort of initiative that they wanted to be generous toward, and if you rewind, if you go back to the very end of chapter 4 you see that there is this guy named Barnabas who does the same thing.

Barnabas sells a piece of property and he brings all of the money and he lays it at the apostles' feet and you would have known that Barnabas probably would have received some accolades for that. Not that that was his motivation, but I'm sure that there were probably conversations that Barnabas didn't even hear that Ananias and Sapphira probably overheard like, "Wow! Barnabas is so generous." And they were like, "You know what? We could do the same thing. We have that property that we can sell." So they sell the property.

Now I think ... I want to give them the benefit of the doubt. I think that Ananias and Sapphira had every intention of being generous but something happened between the moment that they made the decision to be generous and when the time came to write the check. Life happened. Taxes went up. An unexpected bill came in. The kids needed new soccer sandals. Or the camel blew a transmission, alright? You name it, life happens. You've been there.

I don't think that they were this evil, conspiring, first century Bonnie and Clyde type of people. I think that they were a lot like you and me. I think they had really, really good intentions but when their treasure got threatened, they panicked, it was unsettling, and it caused them to do a very foolish thing.

Look at what it says in verse 3, "Then Peter said, "Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself. The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren't lying to us **but to God!**"

Do you hear what Peter just said? He basically just said: Listen, you didn't have to do this. If the property was yours, you could have done with it what you wanted. You were under no obligation. Even after you sold the property you could have kept 100 percent of it and that would have been totally fine.

See it wasn't that they didn't give all of the money, the problem was that they claimed that full amount that they had publically committed to give had been given, and it hadn't. See, here's what was going on. They wanted the **notoriety and admiration** for generosity without the **inconvenience and sacrifice** of it.

And you know what? Oftentimes, so do I. And if you were being honest, you do too. All of us know that it is a good thing to be generous and maybe on those occasions when we have been generous we felt blessed by God. And you know it's nice to sort of feel admired for generosity. Maybe that's not why we do it but it's still nice to have people tell you that you're generous. But the inconvenience and sacrifice of it often keeps us from doing it. So if we could be looked upon as generous without inconvenience and sacrifice then there's a small part of us that would maybe jump at it.

Not long ago Lindsay and I were having dinner with two other couples and we were eating a really nice meal. And right toward the end of the meal one of the couples got a phone call from their babysitter. So they jumped up from the table and excused themselves to deal with that. As they were gone, the waitress came and dropped the bill off at the table and there was that awkward moment there, "Okay, who's going to pick up the bill?" Finally my friend was like, "I'll get it." And I'm like, "Oh, no, no. I'll get it—you'll get it?" That whole thing.

So finally my friend took the bill. He paid it. And I said, "Man, that's very generous of you. Thank you so much." And he signed it. Right then, as the waitress walked away, they excused themselves to go to the restroom or something. The other couple came back, saw that the bill was paid and assumed that I had paid it. So they said, "Aaron, thank you so much for dinner." And there was a millisecond—don't judge me, alright—where I wanted to be seen as generous and go, "Oh, man, you're absolutely welcome." It caught me and I was here's the word—obligated—to tell them that I didn't pay the bill.

See, I think that's really what's going on in Ananias and Sapphira's heart. And what happens next is going to sound extreme. And if it sounds extreme that's because it is extreme. Look with me at verse 5. Buckle up.

It says, "As soon as Ananias heard these words, **he fell to the floor and died.**" Now notice that it didn't say that he was killed. It said that he died. My hunch on this is that he probably walked in, he realized what had happened and he had a heart attack and fell to the ground. "Everyone who heard about it was terrified." I bet. "Then some young men got up, wrapped him in a sheet, and took him out and buried him. About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Was this the price you and your husband received for your land?"

So he's giving her an opportunity to be honest. "Yes" she replied, 'that was the price.' And Peter said, 'How could the two of you even think of conspiring to test the Spirit of the Lord like this? The young men who buried your husband are just outside the door, and they will carry

you out, too.” It sounds like *The Godfather*, like Marlon Brando here, alright? Verse 10: “Instantly, she fell to the floor and died.” Notice it didn’t say she was killed. “When the young men came in and saw that she was dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. **Great fear gripped the entire church** and everyone else who heard what had happened.”

Now you read that story and it causes your eyebrows to go up. Man, I wrestle with this story a bit. I mean, I’m familiar with it but every time I read it I still walk away just kind of shaking my head and I always think this, “Man, is the punishment worth the crime, really? I mean really, that seems pretty drastic. Poor Ananias and Sapphira.”

Yet as I was studying this last week this question popped into my mind. I just want you to consider it. I don’t even know that I have all of the answers to this. I just want you to consider this question. What if God would have allowed it? What if God would have said: Hey, no big deal? No sweat. Hey, I get it. I know you wanted the admiration and the notoriety of generosity, our little secret, no big deal. I guarantee you it would have leaked. And if God would have allowed this what would have happened next, and next, and next, and next?

Some of you know one of the reasons why you’re apprehensive about church is because you wonder about the discretionary use of funds or you worry about hypocrisy or dishonesty. And where would the trajectory of the church have gone if God would have said: Hey, no sweat it doesn’t really matter?

See the text never specifically says how they died, whether it was their own guilt and shame that caused a heart attack or whether it was the judgment of God. I would say that it’s probably a little bit of both. But I want you to know this. This is a rare story in the New Testament. There is nothing else like this in the New Testament, which tells us that this is a dramatic exception during the formative years of the church when the church is a newborn baby. And you just do things with newborns that you wouldn’t normally do with grown adults.

I want you to know that nowhere in the passage does it say that Ananias and Sapphira did anything to lose their salvation. I don’t think that God’s grace pulled back from them. I think that God’s grace still covered them. I think that God was just saying: You know what? The most loving thing to do here is to not let this go.

I am sobered by this story because, as I have already said, I see myself—at least a little bit of myself in Ananias and Sapphira—it’s an overactive, preoccupation with money that can cause us to feel unsettled and then do a very, very foolish thing.

See here’s the thing about money. Money is so crafty that it sets traps for us that we can’t normally see, like other sins. If you’re wrestling with a lust problem—you know it. If you’re wrestling with anger or jealousy or anything like that—you know it. But when it comes to greed you’re usually the last person to see it in your own life. Now, you can see it in other people real clearly, right? Like you’re scrolling through Instagram—greed, greed, greed, greed, like, like,

greed. We can see it in other people but we are usually the last to see it in ourselves. And I'm usually the last to see it in myself.

Why? Because I can camouflage it and make it seem like other things that are more spiritual: I'm not greedy, I'm just trying to provide for my family. I'm not greedy, I'm just trying to save for the future. I'm not greedy, I just can't do that right now.

See, here's the thing. The antidote to this greed in our lives or this over preoccupation with money is our church's sixth value. It's simply this: Joyful Generosity. Joyful Generosity is the antidote. And what we mean by it is: we will, as a church, **lead the way** (we want to lead the way) with the kind of generosity that only makes sense in light of **God's grace**.

So we know that God is a giver. God is a gracious God. And since we've been saved by grace, we want to be givers as well. This value comes directly out of a passage in 2 Corinthians, chapter 9, verses 6 and 7. It says, "Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop." In other words, he's talking about our giving being like an investment. "But **the one who plants generously** will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give." Meaning that it's a private thing between you and God. "And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. " Let's say this out loud together at all of our campuses, "**For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.**"

Now do you know that word *cheerfully* there is better translated as *hilarious*? That's the word. I find that fascinating. Now hilarious is a word that you don't use very often because not everything that is funny is hilarious. Would you not agree? Like something can be humorous, something can be cute. Something can give you a little chuckle—ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. Not funny. That doesn't mean that's hilarious, right? Hilarious is reserved for the kind of funny that makes your cheeks hurt, your abs cramp, and stuff come out of your nose. That's hilarious.

And as a dad, and some of you know this to be true, I love it when my kids belly laugh. There is just something about the sound of that that just gives me joy because I delight in their joyfulness. And when they belly laugh, that's just pure joy, I love it.

The second thing I see in my kids is when my kids are generous with each other and with others—generous with something that I know is important to them, without being prompted or threatened like, "You will give that away so help me..." That's a different thing. But when they are generous with something—not like, "Here, you can have my Brussels sprouts. No the stuff that I know that they really love and value—when they're freely willing to give it to a sibling or to another, oh my goodness, man, that just swells my heart up with pride.

You want to know my response when I see that? I'll give them anything in that moment—don't tell them. But I'll give them anything in that moment because they've been so generous. But the opposite is true, when they are stingy with it—it saddens me because that tells me that they don't have confidence in me as a dad that I will give them what they need.

Listen. God loves your joy more than your wallet. He doesn't need your money. He knows that your money has your heart and He wants your heart. So the way to get your heart is to ask you to let go of your money. God says: Listen. I just want you to be a cheerful... In fact even in the Scriptures where it says this, God's like: Man, I'd rather you not give if you're going to give reluctantly or under compulsion.

What does that look like? Well, I'll give because I have to. I'll give to get. I'll give to be noticed or admired. I'll give to feel better about myself. I'll give to get God off of my back. I'll give to get pastor Aaron off of my back. I'll give to get my wife or husband off of my back. I'll give to be a good example to my kids. That's reluctant giving. Have you ever done that? Me too.

God says: Man, I want a cheerful giver. And Joyful Generosity says: I'll give because God has given everything to me and for me. I'll give and not even have to think about myself. I'll give when I stop comparing up, and that's what we always do when we compare ourselves with others—we never compare down. I realize how blessed I really am. I'll give because I have a good, good Father who will make sure that I have all that I need and then some. How about this? I'll give because God has asked me to trust Him. And if there is no other reason, that's a good enough reason right there.

In 2 Corinthians, chapter 8 it says, "You know the **generous grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty **he could make you rich.**"

I want to shift gears to our church, specifically. As a church we want to have the mentality of generosity in the sense that Traders Point Church does not exist just for itself. We are not just trying to build up Traders Point Church but we are trying to build the kingdom of God and the big "C" church.

There is not a week that goes by that we don't get requests of time, and resources, and money from other churches and we want to freely give them away because we are not in competition with other churches, we are in partnership with other churches and it takes all kinds of churches to reach all kinds of people. So we'll offer coaching. We'll host other staffs here on sight. We'll give resources away because we want to be open-handed and kingdom-minded.

I want to share with you just a portion of some of the things that we are investing our dollars into. I can't go through the whole list. We'd be here all day. But I just want to share with you some of the things that God is doing in and through our church.

We are investing in something called the International Justice Mission in the Philippines. They seek to rescue young ladies who are caught in sex trafficking. Since we've started our partnership with them they've seen 62 rescue operations, 224 victims have been rescued, 103 suspects arrested and there have been 10 convictions.

Missions of Hope International (MOHI) exists in Kenya. Many of you have been there to visit

and they provide care and faith-based education to over 14,000 vulnerable children in the slums of the Mathare Valley. Some of you were here in 2007 when we took up-to-date the largest church offering we'd ever taken up to build a school in Bondeni. And since that time that school has grown from 83 children to over 900. You did that.

TCM International: many of you have been over to help Edelweiss in Austria. They are like a graduate level school for training over 1,000 Christian leaders from more than 40 nations in Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, and beyond. I know many of you have been there. I spoke at their graduation a few years ago. It was humbling to talk to these Christian leaders who received their education and were going back into hostile countries so that they could start churches

Just a few weeks ago, I don't know if you know this or not but we are partnering financially with a brand new church plant in Paris, France. And some of you are like, "Can I go on that mission trip?" They had over 60 people at their grand opening, which may not sound real big to us but man that is huge in Paris, France and we're excited about what God is going to do there.

We are a part of a church plant in Harlem, New York. Many of you guys, if you were here at the men's conference heard Kenny Hart speak. Kenny is the lead church planter of that church. They have over 50 people on their core team.

We're getting ready to send Jake and Trudy Barker out to Santa Barbara to plant a church and we are so excited for the great church that they are going to get started out there.

Man, that's just scratching the surface. I could talk about so much more. I could talk about Wheeler Mission, and Bag Hunger, and Special Needs Prom, and on and on. I just want you to know this. We exist as a church to give ourselves away. Our posture, as a church, if we could have a visual for it would just simply be open hands. Open hands to say, "Listen. These are not our resources. They are God's resources. God, take them and use them how You see fit. When we have closed hands, not only can nothing get out, nothing can get it. And we want to have open hands.

I share those things with you—all the things that we are doing. If you want to know more about what our church is doing around our city and in our world, just contact us. We'd be happy to share with you what's going on.

I just want you to consider this, thought. We're able to make a significant impact around the world and right now only about 15 to 20 percent of those of you who call Traders Point home, we estimate, are what we call tithing. And I don't say that to sound heavy-handed or anything like that. I just want you to know if we can do all of that and only about 15 to 20 percent of us are tithing, imagine what more we could do if more of us trusted God with the tithe.

Now when I say tithe, this is maybe one of my favorite definitions of a tithe. It's just simply:

Planning my generosity as opposed to just spontaneous generosity. Now, spontaneous generosity is fantastic and there are going to be plenty of opportunities to do that. In fact, just yesterday I was at Costco and I was checking out and the lady said, “Do you want to donate to the hurricane Harvey victims?” So we can donate to something like that. That’s called spontaneous giving. We should do that. That’s fantastic.

But don’t just say that it stops there because the principle of the tithe—and that’s what I want to drill down on ... I’ve read secular financial books that have nothing to do with God and they will talk about the importance of tithing 10 percent. They talk about the financial well-being of your own mind and your own spirit by practicing the discipline of tithing. Tithing is just simply planning and budgeting your generosity.

The way that it was taught to me when I was growing up and I turned 16 and I got my first job bagging groceries at Smitty’s Grocery Store—that store doesn’t exist anymore so may it forever rest in peace—when I brought my paycheck home (it wasn’t much) I was taught, “Aaron, you need to give 10 percent of it, save ten percent of it, and live on 80 percent of it.” And I’ve just stuck to that discipline throughout my life. I’m going to give 10, I’m going to save 10, and I’m going to live on 80 percent.

Now I realize that when it comes to tithing there are all kinds of questions. And I’ve had all of these questions thrown at me before so I know what they are. Many of you say, “Well, wait a second. Wasn’t the tithe the Old Testament thing and since we’re not under the law anymore, we’re under grace, then the tithe is no longer required.” And I would say yes, the tithe is no longer required but consider this: Since we are under grace, why would we give any less?

What about this? “Should I tithe off of my gross or should I tithe off my net?” Well that’s largely up to you. The question is do you want God involved in your gross or in your net? Very nervous laughter ...

This is more of a recent phenomenon but I’ve heard this increasingly more and more. In fact Barna even reports on this. More and more Christians are assuming they can tithe their time. So the time that you volunteer, you’re like, “That’s part of my tithe.” I would just simply say okay but how would you quantify it? Are you a minimum wage volunteer in the Kids’ Ministry? Or are you charging premium? Like \$150 an hour? I don’t know about you but I’m changing diapers—that’s \$150 an hour. The simple question is how would you quantify that? I don’t really understand how we’d be able to do that.

Here’s a big one. “Do I tithe just to the church or can I spread it out to different churches or organizations or individuals and causes?” Listen. This is largely up to you, but I would say that wherever you land on this make sure you build your case Biblically and not just on your personal feel or desire for it. I believe that the Bible teaches the principle of the storehouse. And so if you go to Malachi it talks about this whole idea of the storehouse—and this is for you who are already believers, those of you who already have a church home and if this is not your church home then you have a storehouse somewhere else, so don’t give here. The storehouse

is where you're primarily being spiritually fed and where you are on mission.

I just believe that the Bible teaches that principle. Why? Because the Bible divides categories of giving into three different categories: tithing, offerings, and alms. And if it was meant to be just one category that you could spread out, the Bible would just say just be generous. But there is a reason why it draws the distinction between the tithe, offerings, and alms. So my personal conviction, take it or leave it, is Lindsay and I tithe 10 percent to our storehouse, which is this church. If there are other people and organizations that we want to support, we give above and beyond it and we call it an offering.

Here's where I just want to challenge you on this. If you are not currently tithing as a follower of Jesus, I want you to know that's usually normal. Usually the last thing that we give to Jesus is our checkbook. When you got baptized you probably held it up in the air, and you went down and then you came back up and you switched hands so you could get your right arm and you went down again. It's like, "You're not going to touch my money," alright? It usually has the tendency to be the last thing that we let go of. It's the last piece of our discipleship that we let God deal with so I get it.

I want to ask you to try it. Just try it. And if you don't trust me, if you think that I've got ulterior motives don't tithe it here. Tithe it somewhere else. Just try it. Try it for six months. And some of you are like, "Aaron, I don't know how we will do it. I ran the numbers. I just don't see how." That's part of the faith of it. That's part of the adventure of it.

I've been challenging people to tithe for the last 20 years. I have never, ever, ever, ever had anybody come back to me and regret tithing. In fact, I've had the opposite. I've heard tons of miraculous, just amazing stories of how God came through.

Did you know that this is the only area in all of the Bible that God challenges you, taunts you even, to test Him? In Malachi He says: test me in this and see if I won't just blow the doors of blessing off in your life. Do you realize what God is doing? He's talking trash. He's talking some serious smack. He's like: Come on, man. Test Me. Try it. Just try it. And I'm going to ask you to just try it. Test Him. For the next six months just say, "You know what? We're going to try the tithe and just see what God might do.

I want to leave you with these final two questions that will really kind of tell you where your heart is. Are you asking this question right now? Some of your inner attorney is coming out and you're debating with me in your seats or through the camera? Are you asking this question?

How much of **my money** does God want me to give?

That's a reflection of where your heart is at. Or what about this question?

How much of **God's money** should I spend/save for myself?

... because it's all His anyway. Listen. God loves your joy and He's not so much interested in your wallet. He's interested in your joy. God wants your heart. And He knows that your heart always follows your treasure, never the other way around. So decide right now where do I want my heart? And wherever you want your heart, send your treasure there and it will follow it.

Father, we come to You today and I know that this is tough to hear. And this is convicting. And maybe it can be confusing for some of us—overwhelming. God I know that for many of us money is a big, big deal because we're just in a financial bind right now. Maybe we've been unemployed for several months. Maybe the bills have piled up.

Maybe we are in a bad financial situation right now that wasn't even our fault. Maybe our spouse hid some stuff from us or we got hit with something unexpected or there was a downsizing at work. God I just pray that the most important thing that our people would hear today is that You love them and You love their joy and that You are their heavenly Father who will supply all of their needs and then some.

So God, I pray that each one of us individually would begin to do kind of a heart check around this particular issue and many of us may not be able to see that there even is an issue until we start planning our generosity and then You'll start to reveal some things in our heart. So, Father, I pray that You would meet us right where we are today and do a work within us.

If there are some who do not know You but they are ready to follow you and give their lives to You, I pray that they would know that they can do that right in the seats where they are right now. That they would just confess their sin and trust that Jesus is Your Son and invite You to take up residence in their heart. And then right after, I pray that they would have the courage and conviction just to find one of us, a prayer counselor or a pastor or somebody at Connection Central who would just pray with them and follow up next steps with them.

We thank You for being a good, good Father who loves our joy more than our money and so now we want to send our money to where we want our hearts to be. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.