

# MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

AWAKEN TO THE MOMENT | ASLEEP

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## Video

I believe it was a Wednesday night. Youth group had just ended and a bunch of us high schoolers got in the car and we were kind of like, "Hey, we know that up the road they started construction on the site. Let's go."

We got out of the car and we started to wander the grounds. There was just this excitement of what could be. And it was so vivid as the two main staircases... I just vividly remember we actually climbed the stairs and I stood at the top and I had this moment thinking, "This is the Northwest campus of Traders Point."

There was significance in that moment standing at the top of the stairs because right around that time that we were building the new building, I was discovering who Jesus is and my eyes were being opened and I was understanding the gospel for the first time.

I knew in that moment that what I was learning mattered. I knew that this was eternal. I knew that this was something that I could put my trust in.

Everything changed, like my perspective changed. The lightbulb clicked that church matters. And I was going to follow Jesus for the rest of my life.

I grew up with an understanding of God, but it wasn't until friends in school invited me to come to youth group at Traders Point Christian Church I really started thinking like, "There is something different here." I was intrigued by the truth that I was learning. I just came week after week.

And it was there that I found community. I found a small group of girls from other high schools. We all connected because we were all beginning to grow in our relationship with Jesus. I was invested in by older, wiser women that were just committed to teaching me, discipling me.

We all went on a spring break trip. I was a sophomore in high school. And on the way, on the bus ride to Panama City, there was this feeling in my spirit that said, "I just need to be baptized. Because this is real." There was a real change within me that said, "I want my friends that don't know Jesus to come to know Jesus."

That really began the journey of a committed walk with Jesus. Things started to change. My perspective changed. The way that I spent my time became different. I started thinking about how I could serve in the church. And I knew that the people around me didn't know Jesus. I so desperately wanted them to know Jesus.



I remember thinking, “I don’t have much. I’m a high schooler. How can I contribute to this?” I knew that I wanted my resources and my money to go toward something that was going to last longer than just a temporary satisfaction. My faith grew as I was contributing and seeing at the same time the building being built. I was contributing to the future generations of the church.

As a high schooler, I was excited that one day there would be high schoolers in this building down the road that would come to know Jesus. And I was able to think, “This money, while it’s not much, I am completely trusting that the Lord is going to use this in ways to further the kingdom.

Today I serve in Traders Point Youth as a small group leader with freshman girls. The reason I serve is because I look at them and I see the future of the church.

Here we are in the middle of *Awaken* and we are seeing what God is doing in our own lives but also in this city and to know that these high schoolers get to be a part of that future, I recognize that right now is the time to be pouring into this generation because they are the future of our church.

I think about the moment that I had at the top of the stairs. I saw the vision in front of us and the future of the church and I think as I serve in Traders Point Youth I wonder what the moment is going to be for them when they are awakened and they recognize the impact that they have.

Aaron

Hey, can we give it up for Betsy? I just appreciate her sharing her story. That honestly means a lot to me, watching that, because Betsy has and continues to invest in my own daughters. To be able to see that and hear her story is just so encouraging. And there are so many other people just like her.

I want to welcome you here today. I want to welcome you back. And hopefully you brought your *Awaken* book with you. If you weren’t here last week hopefully you got one on your way in. If you don’t have one you can stop and get one at the *Awaken* hub on your way out.

For those of you watching online from around the world, we’ve also got a bunch of fall breakers joining us, you can access this electronically at [vision@tpcc](mailto:vision@tpcc).

And if you haven’t really had a chance to flip through it you can do so later today. Inside is just going to have more of a description around the vision initiatives of *Awaken*, what we’re seeking to accomplish in the next two to five years, some group content material, and places to take notes. In fact go ahead and turn to page 56 because that’s where we’re going to be today.

Inside of this book you’ll find this commitment card. And last week I just encouraged you to put this in a prominent place where you can just see it every day, do a little bit of business with God around it.



And really, how I want us to think about this is using it as a devotional tool to ask ourselves, “God, what does awakened generosity look like for me in this season?”

And then we’ll come together here in a few weeks for something called Commitment Sunday that will really just be the result of us praying big, bold, courageous prayers together as an awakened church.

You know, several years ago I woke up in the middle of the night and there was a faint light on downstairs. And I knew that I had shut all of the lights out before I went to bed so I didn’t know what was going on.

I decided to get up and check it out, went downstairs. The light to our pantry was on and then between the pantry and the garage was the utility room. And the door to the garage was wide open.

Now, the garage door was shut. The door from the house to the garage was open and the light in the garage was out. So I was really alarmed by this because I was like, “Who in the world left the door open?” Because I knew for sure I had shut and locked the door.

So I go into the garage, flip on the light, and my son, Conner, who was five or six years old at the time, he’s 21 now, (time goes by fast) was sitting on the dirty garage floor in a dark garage.

He had gotten into one of the storage bins that we kept all of our beach toys in. So he had all of the buckets and the shovels that you use to make sand castles out playing with them on the dirty garage floor.

And it freaked me out. He was in the pitch black. He was in the dark in the middle of the night. So, I was like, “Conner!” His eyes are open, but he’s unresponsive. He doesn’t look at me. Finally, he stands up, walks right past me, goes upstairs, gets in bed, falls asleep. He was sleepwalking.

The next morning when I asked him about it, he had no memory of what had happened. And last week, if you missed it, this is kind of the big idea where we walked through Ephesians, chapter 5, where Paul is writing to the Ephesian church, and they were spiritually sleepwalking. They had sort of fallen into this slumber.

And the way I posed it last week is really this question of, “Am I currently coasting?” I’ve heard from a number of you who said, “Man, that question kind hit me right between the eyes. I feel like for the past several years, that describes me. I’ve been coasting. I’ve been spiritually sleepwalking.”

There are a number of things that can kind of lead us to that state. One could be a massive, global crisis like the one that we went through back in 2020, 2021. And we just haven’t woken up from that.

Or maybe it’s a personal crisis that we’ve gone through, whether there was unemployment, or maybe a broken relationship or a health thing. And when we get burned out or when we just get overloaded with anxiety and stress, we can end up



numbing out. And that can sort of lead us to kind of shrinking back, playing it safe. We're just spiritually sort of sleepwalking through life.

And the real tragedy of this is what Jesus said that He intends for our lives in John, chapter 10. Now if you've ever wondered, "What does God want for my life?" Then you look to the words and the person of Jesus. And the reason why is because He is God in the flesh. So, whatever Jesus said is what God intends for you.

In John, chapter 10 Jesus said this. He said, "I have come that you may have life." And then He uses this word, "...an abundant kind of life."

Now, that word *abundant* is not necessarily a word that I use on an everyday basis. And that's kind of unfortunate because it's such a great word. It's this idea of abundance. Or you might even say it this way, "God desires to bring every ounce of potential out of us in our 80 to 90 plus years of life that we might have here.

It's this idea that God doesn't want us to waste a moment. Time is too precious. God has given us these opportunities, these moments in front of us, and the question is, "Am I awakened to the power and presence of God in my life, to really use my life to the best of my ability to further His kingdom here on earth?"

Now, in that same passage, Jesus says we have an enemy and his intentions are the exact opposite. His intentions are to and I quote, "Steal from us, kill us, and destroy us."

The enemy is perfectly content with sleepy Christians. And if the Spirit of God hasn't come alive in us, we haven't gotten Satan's attention, and we are not a threat to Satan. He's totally fine with that. He'll just let us sleep.

So the question last week was, "Am I coasting. Am I awake?" Here's where I want to go this week. If you've got your notes, open to page 56. If you've got a Bible, go ahead and find Hebrews, chapter 11. Here's where I want to go today. How do we become awakened to the moment in front of us?

Some of you had that realization last week, "I'm coasting. I'm spiritually sleeping. Okay. I've got it. Now, how do I wake up? How do I become awakened to the power and presence of God in my life?"

So, if you're taking notes the first thing to write down is simply this:

Being awakened is a call to live by faith

That's how you wake up. You begin to walk by faith. And the best chapter to go to to really understand what faith is and then see examples for us to know what that looks like in real life is Hebrews, chapter 11.

Some of you may know that Hebrews, chapter 11, is sometimes called the Faith Hall of Fame. It's this idea that ordinary men and women who have come before us began to walk by faith—actually you'll see as you read through the chapter those two words are the most common words in the whole chapter: by faith, by faith, by faith, by faith.

And what happened is they invited God into their lives and they began to do extraordinary things because they were tapping into the power and presence of God in their lives.

So, if we're going to walk by faith, we've got to ask ourselves, "What exactly is faith?" And verse 1 of chapter 11 gives us a really, really good definition. Here's what it says.

*"Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see."*  
Hebrews 11:1 (NLT)

And I really want you to circle, highlight, double underline those two words *show* and *evidence* because I find it fascinating that in the description of faith those two words are given. I don't know about you, but oftentimes I kind of believe that faith is something that you do blindly. Faith is like, "Cross my fingers. Hope really hard that God comes through and if He comes through I'll take a deep sigh of relief."

But the author of Hebrews actually defines faith as something that God wants to show us. God wants to give us evidence. Here's how faith works. God wants you to take a step that shows that you trust Him first and then He'll provide the evidence for what we hope for.

It kind of reminds me of that great scene from one of the very first Indiana Jones movie. Maybe you remember it. Indiana Jones is on the edge of this canyon and he's got to cross but there is no bridge. And whatever it is that he is reading, whatever clue (it's been a while since I've seen the movie) said, "You've got to take a step."

And he's like, "This doesn't make any sense but I guess I'll go ahead and do it." So he takes a step. You remember the very next scene? He steps out and actually there was a bridge there all along, it was just an optical illusion. He couldn't see it until he took a step. Then he had the evidence. Then he had the proof.

That is a pretty good description of faith. Which is why, in chapter 11, you'll see these men and women like Abraham and Sarah and Noah and Joseph and Moses. It says, over and over again, by faith. By faith they did it. By faith they took a step.

In other words, they didn't wait for God to come through and then take a step. That's not faith. They took a step and trusted that God would come through.

### **Without faith, it's impossible to please God**

Do you know that it is actually impossible to please God without faith? Some of you are pumping the breaks right now going, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Pastor Aaron, I think you're over stating it just a little bit. Where in the world did you get that idea?" I got that idea from verse 6:

*"And it is impossible to please God without faith."* Hebrews 11:6a (NLT)

I'm just reading the Bible to you.

Now, what this means... This is not... Certainly please don't hear that this is a salvation thing like this idea that God is displeased with you until you have faith. You just can't earn His approval. This is not what this is.

This is the idea that it is impossible to please God without faith. What this means is it is impossible to tap into the power and presence of God to awaken you to what it is that He wants you to do without taking a step of faith.

In order to have the power and presence of God, it is impossible to do that without you first stepping into faith. If you want to be awakened to this abundant life that Jesus offers, then you've got to take a step of faith so that God can begin to do something in and through you.

See:

### **Before God does something through you, He wants to do something in you**

Now remember what I said last week, the primary goal of *Awaken* is that God would do a transformational work in you. And I mean that. A distant second is all the through us stuff. See, what it means for us... At the end of the day if someone asks me, "How will we know if *Awaken* accomplished what it is that we want accomplished with *Awaken*?"

It's not the numbers. It's not the commitment. It's 100 percent of our people who call Traders Point home, whether you do that here locally in Indianapolis or you're a part of our community online, that 100 percent of us would be engaged.

Well, what does that look like? That 100 percent of us would ask ourselves, "What does it mean for me to take a step of faith? What does it mean for me to walk by faith?" Because God wants to do something in you.

And if God can do something in 100 percent of us who call Traders Point home, to awaken us, all of the other stuff takes care of itself.

I don't know about you guys but I have a tendency to want to fast forward the in me part and I want to get right to the "God, what will You do through me?" I'm kind of like a forward thinking, achiever. I'm kind of like a productivity is king kind of a guy.

And I married somebody who is constantly, lovingly reminding me to be fully present in the moment. Like, "Hey, Aaron. Don't bypass this. God wants to do something in you first. That's the most important thing."

So, practically, what this looks like is I want to run the mini marathon in sub two hours. I just don't always want to train for it. Any of you relate to me?

I want to take my family on an incredible vacation that the kids will never forget. I just don't want to plan it or pay for it.

I want to have deep and meaningful friendships. It's just that sometimes I forget to invest in those friendships.



I don't want us to bypass this too quickly. I want all of us to be fully awakened to what it is that God wants to do in us first and then all of the through us stuff is fruit. That's just a byproduct of what God is going to do.

This is what we see in Hebrews, chapter 11. I want to hone in on two individuals. There are a bunch of people we could look at. But I want to look at a guy by the name of Abraham and a guy named Abel.

So Abraham, most of his story, or the most real estate in chapter 11 is given to the story of Abraham. And if you know anything at all about him, you might think that his story begins in Genesis, chapter 12. But it actually begins in chapter 11.

In chapter 11 of Genesis, the world was at the darkest it had ever been, spiritually speaking. And all of this kind of came to a head when humanity, at the time, decided to invest in a building project called the Tower of Babel. They were trying to build their way up to God so they could dethrone God and be their own God. That's called humanism and it's the number one religion today. So it was this idea of, "We'll be our own god."

There was this one family still faithful to God during that time. The descendants of Shem. But it ends up in chapter 11 with them living in a place of idolatry and they were just completely consumed by it.

And the final person in the line of the descendants of Shem was a guy by the name of Terah who had one son, Abram, before his name was changed to Abraham. And Abraham grows up. He and his wife Sarah have these fertility issues. Interestingly enough, Terah's name literally means moon, which is a Hebrew metaphor for the end.

So by the time we come to Genesis, chapter 11 at the end of it, it's as if the last flickering light of God's hope is about to be absolutely consumed by the darkness in the world.

Then, in the midst of that great darkness, God wants to awaken this childless man, Abraham, and He gives him a promise that he and his wife, Sarah (they've been unable to have kids) you're going to have a son and your line is going to continue. And through your family line, I'm going to bring a light and a blessing to the whole earth.

But it doesn't seem that God was going to fulfill this promise because he and his wife Sarah were not spring chickens any more. So they are just waiting for God to bless them in this.

And then they finally do. They give birth to a little boy by the name of Isaac and it seems like God is going to fulfill His promise, which is why when what God asked Abraham to do next (many of you know the story) seems so unreasonable. God asked Abraham if he would be willing to sacrifice his one and only son, Isaac.

Now this story really only makes sense when you begin to realize that all of the Old Testament is a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ. God has never asked us to do what He is



unwilling to do Himself. God would sacrifice the life of His only Son, so that we could be redeemed and restored back to Him. This is all a foreshadowing.

So God asked Abraham to do this and Abraham is perplexed over what it is that he is going to do. And if you know the story you know that... I love Abraham's faith. There is this little reference in verse 19 that said that Abraham is wrestling with this decision and he says to himself, "Well, I guess if I sacrifice Isaac back to God, God has the power to bring him back to life."

I don't know if I have that kind of faith. That's the kind of faith that he demonstrated and God honored him by interceding and preventing him from sacrificing the life of his son. But in order to enact the power and intervention of God, Abraham had to walk by faith.

So here's the question that I just want to ask you today. You might jot this down in your notes.

What's your Issac?

What is the one thing, right now in your life, that if God were to ask you if you would be willing to release that back to Him, it scares you. It frightens you a little bit. In fact, you don't even want to think about it too long because you're afraid that God will ask you. It's like, "Well, if I don't think about it, maybe God won't ask me."

Maybe for some of us we're like, "Well, I'm fine to give God this and this because that's not going to cut too deep. That doesn't really feel too sacrificial. But this thing over here, this is where I'm finding my identity and this is where I am finding my security. And if God asked me to give up that, I don't know what I would do."

Listen. I, nor anyone else, can tell you what your Isaac is. What I can do is be your pastor and pastorally ask you to consider talking to God about that. I just want you to do that in the course of the next coming days and weeks, "God, what is my Isaac? And am I willing to let go of that, trusting that whatever it is, if I'm willing to sacrifice and let go of it for You, that You'll return it? You are a good God. You're a God who fulfills Your promises."

And on the commitment card there is a line that I've just kind of begun to call it the Issac line. And it's this idea, "These are gifts from my stored resources." And I'm already beginning to hear from people as I'm talking to them about how they are contemplating what it looks like to give up a house or a car or stored dollars or possessions to invest in the line over the dot for the kingdom of God.

Saturday, November the 4<sup>th</sup> is a date I want you to circle on your calendar because we're calling that Advanced Commitment Night. And this is where we are all going to come together, leaders go first.

We're just going to come together and worship and we're going to say, "God, we just want to be openhanded with you. We want to walk by faith, inviting Your power and presence into our lives to do what only You can do." And if that makes us a little bit fearful or uncomfortable, that's good because that just shows us where we need to be.





Last week I told you the story about how God gave us the Downtown campus. Remember that story? If you were here I told you about how there was this building and we wanted to purchase it for the Downtown campus but it was too much money so we passed.

But then for two years every time I would drive by I would just pray and say, "God would You please give us that building?" And one day a family in our church contacted me and the gentleman and I went down to the building and we looked through it.

The real estate agent said, "Hey there is another group who has put a letter of intent on this building. If you're going to make an offer you better do it quick and it better be a solid offer if they are going to entertain it."

He looked at me... I'm just recapping the story for you. He looked at me and he said, "Hey, go ahead and offer 2.825 million dollars in cash. If you get into a bidding war, I authorize you to go up to 3.3 million." He patted me on the shoulder and he said, "Tell me how it goes." He hopped into his Porsche and drove off. Remember that story?

I shared that with you and then at the very end I said, "Every time I say this publicly I wrestle with this because that's such a huge, astronomical number that most of us can't relate." And most of us will let ourselves off the hook and go, "Well, clearly he has so much money. That was probably not very big... He probably did that all of the time. That probably didn't take very much faith for him at all."

I got a text from him last week. And I got his permission to share this text message with all of you. Now, he shared something with me in this text that I didn't know last weekend. Brand new information today.

Here's his text that he sent to me. He said, "I still remember the feeling I had when I said to you in the parking lot, "Let's pay cash."

I remember the feeling I had too. Ironically.

Here's what he said, totally unexpected by me. I did not know this. He said, "My stomach felt uneasy and maybe I was a bit scared."

Guys, I had no idea. He seemed so confident. He was as cool as a cucumber when he said it to me. Probably part of the reason why he's a pretty good business man. I don't know.

And then he said this, "I knew God was asking me to do this." In other words, this was his Isaac. "I knew God was asking me to do this, but at that time I had never done anything like that or given an amount that big."

So much for the, "He probably did this all of the time," kind of thing.

And then he said this. I love these five words, "I'm so glad I did." I'm so glad I did. Can I just say this? That's the largest gift, experientially, of anything I've seen. That's the



largest gift. But I have heard, regardless of the gift, I have heard those five words from faithful followers of Jesus over and over and over again.

When somebody says, "I'm going to choose to walk by faith and put God first and give Him my best, I've always heard people come back and say, "I am so glad I did."

I've never had anybody come back and say, "Well, God kind of hung me out to dry there. I trusted God and gave Him my first and my best. We kind of lost our shirt." I've never heard that. I've always heard, "Man, I'm so glad I chose to walk by faith."

Why? Because you are leaning into the power and presence of God when you do that.

Abraham believed God for the impossible, which meant that his stomach likely felt uneasy and maybe he was a bit scared. But he trusted God with that.

So can I just ask you this today? Does your current faith look anything at all like Abraham's and like our friend's who gave the gift of the Downtown campus? Does that look anything at all like the way that you're following God?

Or are you asleep? Are you coasting? Are you a little bit closed off? Maybe a little tentative? Maybe you're kind of hedging. You're trying to control things that you cannot control. And you end up cutting off the promises of God that He wants to give to you.

Man, I can remember when I first started following Jesus when I was... I grew up in church but I had a re-awakening at the age of 18. That's when I really began to follow Jesus. And I remember writing in my journal when I was 18 years old, this prayer to God. I said, "God, the answer is yes. Now, what's the question?"

And I've got to tell you, the older I've gotten the more tentative I've gotten wanting to write that out. It just kind of seems like, at the time, I didn't have a whole lot to lose. But now I've got a lot to lose so I'm kind of afraid to write God a blank check like that with my life. And I end up cutting off the power of God in this new season of my life.

So can I just say this to you? If you feel like your spiritual life is stagnant, if you feel like you're not hearing from God, if you feel like God is eerily quiet the answer isn't necessarily another Bible study or a book or an experience.

The answer might be that you need to begin walking by faith. And when you begin to walk by faith you invite the power and the presence of God into your life.

If you're playing it safe, there is no room for God to flex. So, without faith it is impossible to please God. That's what that verse means. Okay. So how do we know if we're doing that?

Well, I want to give you the next example in Hebrews, chapter 11. That is the example of a guy by the name of Abel. And it gives us his story in verse 4. It says this:

*"It was," there are these two little words, "by faith that Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did." His brother. "Abel's offering gave evidence," there's that word again, as it relates to faith. It "... gave evidence that he was a righteous man, and God*

*showed his approval of his gifts. Although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us by his example of faith.” Hebrews 11:4 (NLT)*

Now, Abel’s story is found in Genesis, chapter 4. Many of you may know that Cain and Abel were Adam and Eve’s sons and that Cain killed his brother Abel. Maybe you know that part of the story. What you may not know is why. And in verse two of Genesis, chapter 4, it tells us why. It says:

*“When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd,” in other words, he was a rancher, “while Cain cultivated the ground.” He was a gardener. He was a farmer. “When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented...”*

*What’s the word? Say it out loud with me. Some. That’s key. It’s not that Cain didn’t give anything, it just said that he gave some, “...of his crops as a gift to the LORD. Abel also brought a gift—the...”*

*What’s the word? Best. So those two words in contrast, Cain gave some, Abel gave best. He gave:*

*“...the best portions of the,” here’s this common word again, “firstborn lambs from his flock. The LORD accepted Abel and his gift, but he did not accept Cain and his gift.”*

*Actually, when you dig into the original languages it is, “He could not accept it.”*

*“This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.” Genesis 4:2-5 (NLT)*

This is what prompted him to murder his brother.

Now, here’s a question. I don’t know if any of you have ever pondered this. Maybe in your small group it just kind of got thrown out one time, maybe when you were studying this. Have you ever wondered why God didn’t accept Cain’s gift?

Was it because Abel was a rancher and Cain was a farmer and God prefers meat over vegetables? (Which is true but that’s not why.) Is that the reason why?

Now, the key to understanding *why* is found in the word *first* from verse 4. And that’s not random. Actually, that is pointing to a principle. There is a principle that is woven all through the Scriptures and the principle is the first and the best. And with that principle there are a lot of promises attached to it. So let me give you the principle and then I’ll unpack it. Here’s the principle. You can write it down:

**When you put God first in your life, He puts everything else in order**

When you put God first in your life, you give Him the best you give it to Him first, it is an opportunity for Him to bless the rest and He puts everything else in order.

Now, please don’t misunderstand the principle. I did not say when you give God first and best that He gives you everything you want and He makes your life trouble free. That’s not the principle. The principle is that when you put God first and best He puts everything else in order and He blesses it.

So, here's the idea. Jesus said that we would all go through trouble in this life. That is true for the redeemed and the unredeemed. But would you rather go through trouble in this life, with your life in order, with the hand of God blessing upon it or without? The answer is with God's blessing.

So this is the idea of, if you are in a storm out in the middle of the ocean—here's another way to look at it. Do you want to be in an inflatable dingy that is leaking or do you want to be on a cruise liner that is stable?

This is the idea that when you put God first and best in your life, you invite Him in and He puts everything in order and He blesses the best.

We see this principle all through Scripture. We could go Exodus 13:1–2.

*"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Dedicate to me every firstborn among the Israelites. The first offspring to be born, of both humans and animals, belongs to me.'" Exodus 13:1-2 (NLT)*

Chapter 23, verse 19:

*"Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God." Exodus 23:19a (NIV)*

And when you do this, here's the promise that's attached to it. Proverbs, chapter, 3:9-10:

*"Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine." Proverbs 3:9-10 (NIV)*

Guys, that's actually a promise of the principle. And this type of trust is at the very heart of the gospel message. It's found in John 3:16:

*"For God so loved that He gave."*

And what did He give? He gave His first and His best in the person of Jesus, which is why Jesus is referred to as the firstborn. It's why Jesus is referred to as the first fruits of creation.

Romans 5 doesn't say that God would wait for us to get our act together and then He gave the first and best. No, God gave the first and best so that we could be redeemed out of our sin. So, when we return that to God, that's simply a response to the gospel message.

Exodus 13 doesn't say, "Hey, if you're a rancher, wait until you have all of your livestock and then bring the one that only has three legs and walks around with a limp, and it's really annoying you because it keeps pooping on your front porch. Go ahead and return that one to God."

No, it actually says, "Take the best out of your livestock and return that to God first." Why? Because:

**It takes faith to give the first, and God wants you to walk in faith**



The shorthand word for first and best in the Bible is the word *tithe*. And oftentimes we think that tithe is a tenth of everything back to God. A lot of times we think that is the finish line. That's what we're working up to. And actually, in reality, that's the starting line. That's actually where God wants you to start and then progress forward from there.

I'll never forget when I was in college I did an internship at a church in Los Angeles and I stayed with one of the elders and his wife. They were in their late 50s early 60s at the time. They didn't have any children at home or anything like that. It was just the two of them. Every night I would have dinner with them.

He was the quality manager at Dryers Ice Cream, which was glorious because he brought home rocky road like every night. It was amazing. His wife, Betty, oversaw all of the nurses at Kaiser Permanente in the Los Angeles area. So they had done very well for themselves.

I'll never forget sitting down at the table with them and they were just kind of telling me their story. And they said, "You know, Aaron, when we first got married we didn't have a whole lot. And we just decided to trust God with our first and our best, which meant that we started at 10 percent. We didn't work our way up to that. We just started there.

"And then we saw how God was faithful that first year. So we said, 'You know what? Why get stagnant there? Why not continue to walk by faith, just like going on another faith journey with God.'"

So they said, "Let's just add a percent." So the next year they did 11. And then they were like, "Let's just add a percent after that." And they did 12.

And they said, "We've done that for the last 35 years of our marriage." And at the time, as I was sitting at the table with them they said, "Right now we've worked our way up to about 48 percent of our income that we give away. We can't outgive God."

### **Bringing our first and best back to God is the way we put Him first**

This is the idea of trusting God with first and best. So if you sort of like... Some of us are treating the tithe legalistically. You've been there for years. What if God is urging you to take another step of faith? You won't even miss it.

Some of you aren't even trusting God with that at all. God is asking you to take a step of trust in Him.

This is what Abel did. Abel brought his first and his best, Cain brought what was left over. In today's vernacular, here's what that would look like.

Cain gets paid and then he pays the rent or the mortgage, which is usually the biggest expense of ours out of the month. Then he paid the utility bills. Then he likely made the lease payment on that high mileage camel. Then he got a little bit of groceries. He made the credit card payments. Then after shopping at Cabela's and Amazon Prime, he gave God some of what was left over. That's what God couldn't accept.

And that's why you've got to go, "Well, you know, this is why God is after our resources not our heart. Because if God was only after our resources, why not accept some? That's better than none."

But God couldn't accept it. That actually has everything to do with what theologians call the identity and character of God. Here's what I mean. Follow me in this.

The reason why God couldn't accept Cain's offering is because of His very identity and character. So, what this means is that God can't do anything that violates His character. God cannot lie. God cannot change.

Theologians refer to this as the immutability of God. So God cannot get any better because He's already best. You will never find God shopping at Barnes and Noble in the self-help section. He's not looking to self-improve because He's already best.

The second thing is that we can't think like God thinks. God would say it this way, "My thoughts are not like your thoughts." Theologians call that the omniscience of God. So omni means all and science in Latin means knowledge, so all knowledge.

God already knows what has, what is, and what will ever happen at the exact same time. Don't think about that too long because if you do you'll flip a breaker.

God has never had a brand new thought. Think about that for a minute. You will never talk to God and God would be like, "You know what? The other day I was thinking and this thought popped into my mind that just totally blew me away. And I thought, 'Oh My Self.'" You'll never have that conversation with God.

Here's the third. God cannot be second. Theologians call that the preeminence of God. That means that He is first of all, above all, and before all things.

Cain did not put Him first. That's why God couldn't accept it.

Now, listen. Just because you may not be putting Him first in your life, doesn't mean that He isn't first in the universe. World order doesn't change His order. He is preeminent.

So bringing our first and best back to God is the way that we put Him first. Think about it. Statistically speaking, money and finances are usually in the top three things that we worry and stress about the most.

I'd ask you to raise your hand if that is true for you but I know a bunch of hands will go up around the room. And why do you think that is? I think part of the reason is because we've excluded God from that area of our lives because we're not walking by faith. We're not giving Him first and best. Because when we do, we're inviting Him in to put everything else in order and bless the rest.

Now, we see how big of a deal this is to God in the book of Malachai. Malachai was a prophet saying some very difficult things to hear. And Malachai said this in chapter 1, verse 9. He says:

*“Go ahead, beg God to be merciful to you! But when you bring that kind of offering,” what is that kind of offering? Well, that means the leftovers, that means the lame, that means some. If you bring that kind of offering, “why should he show you any favor at all?” asks the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.” Malachi 1:9 (NLT)*

Verse 12:

*“But you dishonor my name with your actions. By bringing contemptible food, you are saying it’s all right to defile the Lord’s table. You say, “It’s too hard to serve the LORD,”” in other words, I don’t have enough faith to do this, “and you turn up your noses at my commands,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.*

*‘Think of it! Animals that are stolen and crippled and sick are being presented as offerings! Should I accept from you such offerings as these?’ asks the LORD. Cursed is the cheat who promises to give a fine ram from his flock but then sacrifices a defective one to the Lord.” Malachi 1:12-14 (NLT)*

Translation, they were showing up to God’s table with expired Chinese leftovers. And God is dishonored by this. And God is trying to wake them up to it.

So, here’s the question today. How do you know or how can you get awakened to God? Here’s the question:

### **In my heart, is God first?**

And if you answer that question like, “Yes, I want God to be first, but I still haven’t taken a step of faith. I’m still not offering Him my first and my best.” Then you might think that He’s first in your heart, but until He’s first in your resources, He’s not first.

Some of us would say, “You know what? I just can’t afford to do this right now.” And I would very lovingly say that you can’t afford not to, because when you put God first in this area of your life, He puts everything else in order and He blesses the rest.

And that is not TV preacher health and wealth stuff. Guys, I am just leading you to the Bible and the principle that is woven all through the Scriptures. Let me give you a quote from Jesus, Himself in Luke, chapter 6, verse 38. He says:

*“Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you,” Isaac. He says your give will return to you. How? “... in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.” Luke 6:38 (NLT)*

That’s not TV preacher stuff. That’s Jesus saying that. He’s like, “When you trust Me with this you’re inviting Me in. And watch, guys. I don’t want to leave you hung out to dry. I actually want to take you on a faith journey. I want to be invited into the rest of these areas of your life. And I can only do blessed when you invite me in.”

Malachai chapter 3, verst 10 says this:



*“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,’ says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, ‘I will open the windows of heaven,’” for who? This is for you, guys. “I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in!”*

Now, notice these two little words. Try it. *“Try it! Put me to the test!”* Malachi 3:10 (NLT)

This is the only time in recorded Scripture that God talks trash, most of the time He prevents us from testing Him. Here He actually says, “Test Me.” Why? Because we are actually asleep to the voice of God and we aren’t living that kind of full life that He’s intending us to live. Actually, we’re missing out on so much that our Heavenly Father wants us to have and to experience.

Guys, I know the theology around this and I know all of the Bible passages. But this, honestly, didn’t come to really ring true for me until I had kids. And as a dad, man, I don’t want to withhold anything from them. I actually want to bless their socks off. But I don’t want to do that at the expense of hardening their hearts.

So, my 11-year-old daughter, Kadence, every Monday when I pick her up from school she kind of sheepishly looks at me and I can tell she wants to ask me something. She just doesn’t really want to ask it. But I make her ask it anyway.

She just looks at me and she’s like, “Daddy, it’s Monday. Can I get a treat and go through Starbucks?” She uses Monday as her excuse because she needs a treat. I love that so much. Right?

And I’m always like, “Okay, we’ll go through Starbucks. You need your Monday treat.” So we pull up and I’m like, “What do you want?” And she’ll usually order some sort of caramel crunch frozen latte thing.

So, I’ll order that. I don’t want a whole one of those, but I might want to have a little sip. You know? So, I get her the latte and I just look at her, “Hey, sweetie. Could I have a sip?”

And if her response was, “No, this is mine.” Then that may be the last caramel Frappuccino latte she ever gets. Monday treat days are over. They’re done. Why? Because I see that the gift hasn’t changed her heart. She actually put her trust in what she has right in front of her, rather than the giver of gifts.

Because what she fails to realize is that, guys, I don’t want to brag, but I have enough in my bank account to buy a lot of lattes. She could be swimming in caramel crunch Frappuccino lattes because I have the capability of giving that to her. But if she’s not willing to be openhanded with the gift, then that will cut off the blessing.

That’s true with our relationship with God as well. So, here’s what I just want to ask you to do. I want to ask you to be awakened to the principle of first and best in your life. That’s how you walk by faith.

And if your faith has been coasting, if you’ve been spiritually sleepwalking, if you don’t feel the power and the presence of God it could be because you’ve not invited His power



and presence into your life because what enacts it is when you take a step by faith. So can I just ask you today if you are willing to do that?

Father, we come to You right now and I just ask that You'd be honored by our gifts and by our worship and by our very lives. Some of us have fallen asleep. We are not walking by the kind of faith which You desire to flex in our lives by presenting more of Your power and presence.

God, I know right now that I am speaking to a lot of people who are maybe in pain, who maybe have some real, significant needs and God right now I just pray that You'd become so real and alive in their lives that it would just be undeniable. And that we would be willing to take a step of faith.

Right now, we just want to identify what that might be. What would it be for us today, God, to say to You, "God the answer is yes, now what's the question?" Because we want to have that kind of faith, we want to be awakened to what it is that You want to do in us and through us to a hurting world.

We trust You, God, we trust You. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

