
What's up church family? How are we doing today? It's good to be with you all. I want to say hello to all of our campuses, anybody tuning in online. We're so glad to have you today as we continue in this message series with the funny name of *modgniK*.

modgniK...Kingdom

This is all about this backwards, upside down, counter-cultural, radically different Kingdom of God that Jesus just couldn't stop talking about. In fact, he brings it up in conversation and in teaching 126 times in the four gospels. He was always using word pictures and analogies to help us understand and visualize it.

Jesus would say things like, "The Kingdom of God is like a treasure hidden in a field," or "The Kingdom of God is like seeds on a path," or "The Kingdom of God is like a wedding party." He did that so we could visualize and understand, not only the Kingdom that our heavenly Father wants us to inherit one day, but the Kingdom of God our Father wants us to experience right now.

One time, Jesus prayed this prayer in Matthew 6. He is praying to God the Father, "May your **kingdom** come soon. May your will be done **on earth** as it is **in heaven**." And that's a very different prayer than, "God, please save us so we can go to heaven one day when we die."

It's "God, would you bring a little bit of what's going on up there down here so we can begin to experience elements and traces of your Kingdom right now. God, in this crazy world full of abuse, violence, division, and hatred, would you bring your Kingdom of compassion, joy, love, and kindness? And God, may you bring it through us."

But it's a backward kind of a Kingdom. It doesn't come naturally to us. What we've been doing is looking at each of the letters in this word *modgniK*, which is basically Kingdom spelled backwards, to try to help us understand some of the elements of this Kingdom:

More is less

Others first

Descend into greatness

Today, we hit the letter g, which simply stands for:

Generosity Flows

As residents of the Kingdom of God, we don't stockpile or hoard our stuff. Instead, generosity flows through us, or at least it should flow through us, like a river. In fact, we experience a rush when we give.

Jesus said one time that it's a whole lot more fun to give yourself away than it is to always be on the receiving end of things. But in our earthly kingdom, generosity isn't necessarily the rule. It can be difficult for us to give ourselves away.

But generosity... Have you ever noticed this? Whenever you see someone who is really generous, it stands out. Several years ago, my wife, Lindsay, and I went out with another couple. We had dinner and played duck pin bowling down in Fountain Square right after that.

This couple, they were really generous. They offered to come pick us up, so we wouldn't have to drive. And as soon as we got in the car, he was really generous with his encouragement, and she was generous with compliments. Then it continued into dinner. When the waiter brought the bill, he reached for it and said, "It's on us tonight." I was like, "You don't have to do that." He said, "No, we really want to."

So, we go to the duck pin bowling place, and they are standing in front of us as a couple. I thought they were going to pay for themselves and then we would step up and pay for ourselves, but he paid for all four of us. And I was like, "Man, you are embarrassing me. You really don't need to do this." He was like, "Aaron, no. We really want to."

And it didn't end there. As we were playing duck pin bowling, there was a group right next to us. They are wrapping things up. One of the guys in the group orders a pitcher of beer, pours himself a glass, takes one sip, and then they all leave. And they didn't pay for it. The waiter comes over to us and he says, "Were you guys with that group?"

I could see where this was going. I knew the waiter was going to try to put that on our bill. I'm ready to power up. I've got my defense at the ready. I don't do this often, but I was ready to break the glass and pull the pastor card. And he was like, "You can't make me pay for a pitcher of beer, I'm a man of the cloth. God frowns upon such things, especially domestic."

Right then, our friends looked at the waiter and said, "Oh man, that is terrible. You know what? Just put it on our bill, we'll take care of it. No big deal." And the waiter was like, "Really?" And I was like, "Really?" And he was like, "Really. It's no big deal." Here's what it did. It disarmed the whole situation. The waiter said, "You don't need to do that. Don't worry about it."

In our world of self-preservation and always looking out for ourselves, when you see generosity with no strings attached, there is something about that that stands out in every way.

When you're generous with your time, efforts, encouragement, and your very life, that's the mark of someone who is radically different. You are living by a different set of values and standards. It should be one of the defining characteristics of someone who is a resident of God's backward Kingdom, but oftentimes it isn't.

Statistically speaking, Christians aren't necessarily any more generous than the rest of the world. I've spoken to a lot of waiters and waitresses in our church, and they say, "Honestly, we really don't like to work the Sunday afternoon crowd because they are hard to please, and they are not very generous tippers."

I'd love to be able to stand up here today as your pastor and say, "Listen, I've got generosity figured out. It just comes easily, naturally, and joyfully to me." But, that wouldn't be true.

I'd love to be able to tell you my days of selfishness and stinginess are long gone. Like, "It used to be a problem for me way back, like in the 1990s I was a very selfish individual, but I've come such a long way and I've grown to be such a super-Christian. So now, today, I'm going to bless you by sharing what I've learned, so you too could be like me."

That just wouldn't be true. If I'm going to be honest with you, I still struggle with this. There are days when I wonder and worry if I make enough, if I'll have enough, and if I'll be enough.

Here's the deal. I want to be generous, I really do. You know, what I think I know about you is that I think you want to be generous too. I think we all do. I think we all have enough head-knowledge to know this is a good thing. I've preached dozens and dozens of sermons on this topic from this stage. I know all the Bible passages. And I believe them.

I want to be generous and I want to be part of what God is going in the world, and yet life gets in the way. That's what happens. I make a decision to be generous, and right that same week the transmission goes out on both cars. Right in the exact same week I want to be generous, the kids go back to school and they need new clothes. Right when I want to be generous, they come out with a new iPhone and I lose my mind. I've had it, "God three cameras?" And I bet I'm not the only one. I bet my words connected to somebody today.

This guy named Paul writes to a group of people who are not so different than you and me. I think we oftentimes fail to remember that much of the New Testament is letters written to regular people like you and me, trying to make a living.

Paul writes to this group of people whom, I'm sure, had some anxiety about finances. They were just trying to provide. They weren't necessarily trying to get filthy rich, just get

by. They were trying to save up to put a down payment on a house, they were trying to keep up with the camel payments. They, I'm sure, wanted to take the occasional vacation to Disney over Jerusalem, I don't know.

But they're just like you and me. Paul writes to them and says these really powerful words. He says in 2 Corinthians 9, starting in verse 6, "Remember this," in other words this is not brand-new information. This is review. "A farmer who plants only a **few** seeds will get a **small** crop. But the one who plants **generously** will get a **generous** crop."

That just makes sense. But then he says this, "You must each **decide in your heart**," in other words this is a very personal matter, "how much to give." In other words, this is a matter of the heart. "And don't give **reluctantly**," and what's that look like? "Well, I guess if I've gotta. I guess if you're going to put that on me, I guess I will."

"...or in response to **pressure**." What's that look like? "Well, if you're going to twist my arm, if you're going to give me a high emotional appeal." Think sweaty TV preacher. Somebody is going to manipulate emotions trying to get money out of you. Don't give reluctantly or out of pressure. Why? "...for God loves a person who gives **cheerfully**."

Now here is the question I have. Why? Why does God care how we give? Nobody else does. Think about this for a minute. Think about all the people you owe money to or that you pay. So, think about the utility companies, the bank, the service person.

How many of you have ever had anybody sit down with you and say, "Look, we just want you right now today to decide in your heart how much you'll pay. We don't want you to give reluctantly. We don't want you to feel pressured into this. In fact, at the end of the day we want you to walk out of here today knowing you paid cheerfully."?

Nobody does that. Because they don't care. As long as they get the amount that is owed to them, they don't care how you gave it as long as you gave it. And here God says: Listen, I don't need your cash to pay my bills so I don't want you to give reluctantly or in response to pressure. Here's what I care about. I care about your character. I care about your heart. And I want you to give cheerfully, because that is a reflection of your heart.

And then Paul finishes it up in verse 8, "And God will **generously provide** all you need. Then you will **always** have everything you need and **plenty** left over to **share** with others."

You see, the fundamental nature of who God is, he is a giver. God created life, he didn't have to. God gave us a body, personalities, and giftedness. He didn't have to. God gave us his Son, Jesus, to reconcile us back to him. He didn't have to. God continues to generously give us grace when we fall and mess up. He doesn't have to.

Therefore, it only makes sense that if we are residents of his Kingdom through his Son, Jesus Christ, that generosity would flow in and out of our lives as well. So, here is the

question. Why doesn't it? Why doesn't generosity flow? What are some of the things that block generosity from flowing through my life?

What I want to do today in the remainder of our time is to give you a few myths I have bought into throughout my life that have actually blocked the flow of generosity in my life. And then I want to offer a few counters to those myths, so we can dislodge those blockages and let generosity flow.

So if you're taking notes, here is myth #1:

IT'S ALL MINE

Have any of you ever fallen into that one? When it comes to resources, and when it comes to possessions and money, we say, "I earned it. I made it. I own it. It's my name on the paycheck." This myth kind of leads you and me to believe everything placed in our hands is for our own consumption.

And if we start to look at our stuff like that, not only will it begin to block the flow of generosity in our lives, but we will most likely become very impulsive spenders. Because our appetites are always screaming at us, "You've got to have that. You've got to experience this. If you don't, you'll be less than. You won't measure up."

So, we're always chasing after the next purchase that will give us a little dopamine hit and give us a fix to help us feel meaningful and live purposeful lives. That's a myth.

Here's the counter to that myth:

IT'S ALL GOD'S

Some of you aren't ready to believe that yet. Some of you are not sure you're there yet. That's fine. But I want you to know that this simple little truth has dramatically changed my perspective on my stuff.

How many of you, across all of our campuses, have teenage drivers at home? Do any of you have a teenage driver at home? Just raise up your hands, at all campuses. Look around the room. Let's just have a moment of prayer for you right now, because I know you need it.

We've actually got a teenage driver at home, and he is doing great. He is a great, responsible driver. About a year-and-a-half ago, we bought him a car. Actually, I need to clarify this. We bought a car we let him drive. Because my name is on the title. I pay the gas, the insurance, and the repairs.

And he possesses the car most of the time. It's his source of transportation. He has responsibilities for it. He needs to keep it up. He needs to maintain it, keep it clean. But I

own it. I can take it over, or I can take it back whenever I want because I maintain the right of ownership. He just manages it.

And you know what? In the exact same way, all my stuff belongs to my Dad, my heavenly Dad. I might possess a few things for a little while, but I don't own anything. Eventually its all going to go back to him. He holds the title to all of it.

In Psalm 24:1, it says this, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

God owns it, I just manage it. I'm not even talking about my checkbook. I'm talking about my body. I don't own this body, I didn't have a say in how it was made or what it looks like. It's slowly wearing out. And eventually one day I'll turn it back into him, because I don't own it. I possess it for a while.

And all the relationships God has blessed me with, my wife, my kids, the house that we live in, the few possessions we have. I don't own any of that stuff, I'm just responsible for it. I'm just managing it. God owns it.

In fact, it's sort of like King David when the nation of Israel gave generously to build Solomon's temple. David said this in 1 Chronicles 29, "But who am I, and who are my people, that we could give anything to you? Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us!"

And I've got to tell you, I love the generous spirit of our church, the way that people are helped in our city and all over the world through you. People who have been forgotten, they find healing. People who have felt hopeless, they found hope. The way you all set the table for the generations coming up behind us, it is inspiring to watch all of you paint a picture of what life in the generous Kingdom of God is like.

And I just want you to know right now that in the 12 years I've been here I've never been more excited about where we are as a church and where God is leading us as a church. There are just some really, really exciting things ahead of us.

Every now and then I'll have somebody come up to me and say, "What's the vision for our church?" And I don't know how many of you have been in church for a while. Maybe you've heard sermons on this, or you've heard church leaders talk about vision. Maybe you get a little nervous, because as church leaders we have a tendency to be type A, driven individuals. It's easy to fall into this trap, and I've done it.

Where we develop a vision for our church, meaning we develop some really, really cool ideas and then we come to God and say, "Hey God, will you bless what we want to do?" I don't want to do that.

I'd actually rather think about the vision for our church this way. We want to enter into a season of praying, fasting, leaning into God, and then pray this, "God, will you give us the

vision to see what you are already doing? And then can we get in on that with you? God, would you give us the courage, faith, and generosity to get in on what you are already doing in our city and around the world?"

I want you to know that over the last year, just very quietly as a staff and leadership, that's what we've been doing. We've been praying, fasting, leaning in. "God, what do you have for us next?"

We believe that God, through months, and months, and months of that has kind of bubbled up four primary things. We're actually calling them vision lanes. They are the lanes of what God is doing in our city and around the world. I just want to introduce them to you today. You'll be hearing more about them in the coming months and throughout 2020. They will all be on the website. You can get more information about them. I just want to introduce them to you.

Vision one is this:

CAMPUSES IN OUR CITY

And many of you know, we are one church that meets in multiple location. But you may not know why. The primary reason why is because I just believe healthy things reproduce. And the New Testament church reproduced. And so, for us, we just wanted to reproduce ourselves in our own city.

This started about seven years ago when we realized we had hundreds and hundreds of people driving more than 20 minutes from the Northwest campus. Which was great, but it was holding people back from getting into groups and serving and inviting friends. Even though they were willing to drive, their friends weren't.

We really want you not to just come and consume a service, but we want you to be on mission. We want you to grow in your relationships. So, we decided to start a campus in the first location where we had a cluster of people driving for more than 20 minutes. It happened to be our North campus. We sent about 300 people there. They started meeting in a middle school.

A couple of years later we did it again downtown. About 300 people started meeting in the public library downtown. Then in 2017, we sent about 350 people to our West campus in Avon. They are meeting in a middle school. Today, the North campus and the Downtown campus will have roughly about 1,600 people. The West campus will have about 1,000 people who meet in a middle school.

But the number I'm really most excited about is, since we started to go multi-site, there have been 2,600 people who have gone public with their faith in Jesus and been baptized. And it's just amazing. As we've spread, what's happened is several thousand people have gotten into groups, they've begun to serve, and we've seen so many stories

of peoples' lives being changed and getting on mission as we've continued to reproduce.

We're getting ready to launch campus five in the mid-town, Broad Ripple area as well as number six in Northeast, the Fishers area in 2020. There are so many exciting things to share with you, I just don't have the time to do it now. You'll just have to wait.

Here is vision lane number two:

VULNERABLE CHILDREN

We want to make an impact for the fatherless in our city so that they know they are seen and loved. Indy is the third worst city for the number of kids who are in the foster care system. There are about 16,000 of them.

In 2018 we launched our foster and adoption ministry, otherwise know as FAM. We hired a director to lead that. She is doing an amazing job. We helped launch something called The Care Portal in the state of Indiana. It's a portal that communicates all of the needs, and then churches throughout the state can give through this portal. Your generosity helped contribute to that.

We provided \$40,000 in funds for 15 families to adopt children internationally and domestically. We helped build a special needs resource center in Mexico with a great ministry called Back2Back. The center is going to provide holistic care for vulnerable children all over the country of Mexico.

We helped build a school in Nairobi, Kenya with Missions of Hope International. There are 1,000 children in that school right now who did not have a school a few years ago.

We've created care communities here locally to come around families who have decided to foster children. You'll be hearing more about that vision lane in the coming months, as we close out this year.

The third vision lane is this:

NEW CHURCHES

We want to be involved in planting new churches in urban areas all over the world because we believe the most effective way to reach people who are really far from God is to start new churches. It's proven over and over again. And we want to go to the cities, because that's where the people are.

So, right now we are partnering with church plants in Paris, France, East Germany, Harlem, New York, Santa Barbara, California, North Hollywood, just to name a few. And we've got more projects we're honing in on in the future.

And then the fourth vision lane would be this:

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

We believe God uses humble, hungry, and healthy leaders to change the world. Not just within the church, but within the marketplace, the community, and the home. So, in 2019 we launched our Leadership Development Program to raise up new leaders in ministry. We hired our first Leadership Development Director, and he is doing an incredible job.

We are working right now to partner with an accredited university to offer an onsite degree program in ministry leadership right here in our church, where students will spend half of their hours in class and half of their hours in the field serving, because we want to invest in and raise up leaders in the church, the marketplace, the community, and the home.

And so, we'll be sharing with you more and more updates. And we will move at the speed of your generosity.

I don't like capital campaigns. I don't like high pressure appeals where you write a number on a card, you turn it in, and you make sure you do it. Let's just let generosity flow. I just want to make you aware of how we feel God is moving, and you just know we always, always have more vision than we have resources. And God is up to something really, really big and I want to do this together.

Here is the second myth:

I'LL BE **HAPPIER** WHEN I HAVE JUST A LITTLE **MORE**

Just a little bit more, and then I'll settle down, and relax, and then I'll feel content. That just almost never works, at least long term. I think we all get seduced with the myth of more. It's sort of impossible not to because of social media and technology. We look around and we see what other people are wearing, what they are driving, where they are living, and where they are traveling all the time.

We somehow begin to feel we're not enough. And we become discontent with our lives. We develop this sort of scarcity mentality and we fall into this false idea:

See, money can **add meaning** to your life, but it can never **be the meaning** of your life.

Don't get me wrong. It is not a bad thing to have money. It is not a bad thing to have ambition, success. Some of you, God has gifted you in amazing ways to be successful and to make money. That's not a big deal, just don't put your trust in it.

The wealthiest individual who ever walked the face of the planet was this guy named Solomon. He had everything. And Solomon had a journal. We call it the Book of Ecclesiastes. And in it he describes that he had all these real estate deals going on, he was raking in the cash. He was like: I never looked at a price tag on anything. I didn't need to. I had all the money in the world. Do you know what his conclusion was? It is all meaningless. At the very end, it didn't give me what I thought it was going to.

The year before last we took our family on fall break. We usually go to southwest Missouri. We stay in a little condo at the lake. And we pulled out the game Monopoly one night. We sat down at the dining room table to play with our kids. We have four kids, at the time they were ages six to 16.

We put everything out and started going. I've got to tell you, the competitive side of me came out. And it ain't pretty. I want you to know that I love my family more than anything else in the world. I would give up anything for them. But that night I drove each and every one of them relentlessly and ruthlessly off the board.

And I had no shame. I would pull out Boardwalk and say, "Honey, I see you've got Boardwalk there. I've got St. Charles Place. You like purple, don't you? Do you want to trade?"

My kids were like, "Don't do it." And I'm really ashamed to admit this, so don't tell anybody but I even cheated a little bit. I stole a couple of 100 dollar bills out of the bank and put them in my pile when they weren't looking. And just one by one I was driving them off the board.

Eventually, it was me and my 14-year-old daughter, we were like the last two. And I finally like pried the last bit of money out of her hands. I was just sitting at the table all by myself. I had all the cash, all the hotels, all the houses, all the railroads, and all the utility companies.

I was just sitting back looking at my kingdom saying, "This is amazing." And that's when my wife walked through and said, "Way to go, honey. Why don't you put it all back in the box? It's time for bed."

It's not so different than real life, really. Solomon said this in Ecclesiastes 5, "Those who love money will never have enough. How meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness! The more you have, the more people come to help you spend it. So what good is wealth—except perhaps to watch it slip through your fingers!"

And chasing after more and more, it's tragic for your soul and your relationships. How far do you really have to travel down that road before you see where it leads? This is why you will never see, in a funeral procession, a U-Haul attached to the hearse. It just doesn't happen, because it all goes back in the box.

Here is myth number 3:

I CAN SPEND TOMORROW'S MONEY TO FIND TODAY'S FULFILLMENT

I'll never forget, as a young man, getting that letter in the mail for the very first time. In bold letters, on the front it said, "Aaron M. Brockett, you're approved." I'd been looking for approval my whole life, and here was this company telling me they were going to give it to me—at 21 percent APR, but still. I got introduced to this world of borrowing for things on credit.

And man, I'll tell you what. That's a really slippery slope. Managing money is complex enough as it is. To add an avalanche of debt on top of that is a feeling of desperation that can overwhelm you and just rob you of peace and freedom.

Proverbs 22:7 says, "The borrower is servant to the lender." If you've ever been there, or if you are there right now, you know exactly how that feels.

Did you know the number one reason given for divorce in America today is financial problems? Bills mount up, you feel like you can't breathe, and panic sets in, and you can't sleep. You can't stop worrying, and you can't be generous. You can't enjoy that occasional night out, because you're so buried in debt.

It is an awful feeling that God never intended and he never wanted for any one of us. And if you're there right now, I want you to know you are not alone and there is hope. If you'd like to get out of debt, we want to encourage you and help you. Not by coming and paying all of your bills for you, but by offering you tools and guidance.

We want you to know it is never too late, but you've got to be proactive. If you're married right now and under a mountain of debt, you need to sit down with each other and look at each other without any blame or pointing fingers. Simply say this, "Hey, we're in this together," and don't say, "It's because you went to Nordstrom too much." It's, "We're in this together, and we're actually going to climb out of it together."

And you've got to face the brutal facts with hope. And you've got to take ownership. You've got to ask for help. And listen, it's going to take a while. And it involves some very non-glamorous things like sacrifice, delayed gratification, self-control, and establishing a budget and living within your means. That's the kind of lasting stuff God wants to develop in you anyway.

Part of the American dream is to get rich quick. There are a whole bunch of people who want to get rich quick. So, we play the lottery, or we hope that rich uncle kicks the bucket and leaves us with all of his wealth so we get all this money.

But here is the question we never ask. Let's just say that tomorrow morning you wake up a multi-millionaire for whatever reason. Here is the question we never ask. Would you

be any good at it? Would you be any good at it? Some of you are like, "I don't know, but I would like to try." Statistics say you wouldn't be very good at it. It's called the lottery effect. You can google it.

Most people who win the lottery, their lives are ruined within a year. Why do you think that is? God's wisdom on this says the way to build financial wealth is little by little. Why do you think that is? It's because your character gets developed little by little. By the time you actually have amassed some financial resources, you've got the character that can handle it. You get rich quick, you won't.

In Proverbs 21:5, it says this, "Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty."

So, you consistently work a plan. You live within your means. You honor God by being generous. You save and invest little by little. What it does, it develops those priceless things within you that you can never purchase. Things like trust, faith, commitment, and confidence in God's ability to sustain you. I guarantee you the state lottery will never show up on your front door and tell you any of that.

Here is myth four, the last one:

WHEN I HAVE MORE, THEN I'LL BE GENEROUS

And I think a lot of us fall into this one. It's an easy logic to sort of fall into. It goes like this. When I decide what I want to do for a living, when I get the job, when I get the promotion, when I get the raise, when I get the student loans paid off, when my kids get through college, when we are financially independent, then we'll be generous. Right now, in the first part of our lives we're saving, saving, saving. When we get to this other season, then we'll enter into generosity mode. It sounds really good, but stats don't back it up. Most people in our country who make more give less.

And then, if I could just go back to the character development thing. You're missing out on how God wants to develop your character through your generosity even when things are tight.

Here is the counter to that myth:

WHEN I'M GENEROUS, THEN I'LL HAVE MORE

More of what? The things you can't purchase: more peace, more joy, more contentment, more satisfaction, freedom. And you'll be entrusted with more resources. That's actually a promise God's word gives to us over, and over, and over again.

One time, Jesus was teaching on this. Listen to what he says, “Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—**pressed down, shaken together** to make room for more,” What is he talking about?

I’ve taken my kids to the M&M store in Times Square in New York. I’ve given them an empty plastic bag and said, “Go nuts.” They will go around and fill up that bag full of M&Ms until it gets full. And then what do they do? They press it down and shake it to get as many M&Ms in the bag as possible.

That’s the image Jesus uses here. He says, “It will be **running over**, and **poured** into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.”

Now this isn’t some sort of health and wealth prosperity gospel. This is just a good, good promise from a good, good Father who wants you to be free from the anxiety and worry over resources. The Kingdom of God is just counter-cultural.

This was my logic for a long time. This was the financial plan I ran as a young adult. When I got a pay check I would live off what I received, then I would save a little, then give what was left over. That’s a whole lot of me-first living, and leftover giving.

Live
Save
Give

After a year or so of our marriage, Lindsay and I decided to do this the modgnik way. We decided that when we got a paycheck we would give first, and then we would save, and we would live off the rest. This means we had to establish a budget and live within our means. That’s just good wisdom.

Give
Save
Live

Proverbs 3:9 says this, “Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the **best part**,” not the leftovers, “of everything you produce. Then he will **fill** your barns with grain, and your vats will **overflow** with good wine.”

You see, very generally there are two different types of generosity:

Spontaneous generosity...a need pops up and I give whatever I have to help. That’s a good thing. But the transformational generosity is this next one.

Premeditated generosity...I will decide ahead of time a percentage of my income I will be generous with before my circumstances talk me out of it. And they always will.

The Bible has a word for premeditated generosity. As Christ-followers, we oftentimes have a reaction to this for number of reasons. But it's just simply called a tithe. We get all bent out of shape over that, "That was under that law, and now we're under grace. God doesn't want us to do that anymore." "Do we need to tithe off the gross, or do we tithe off the net?" And all the other hoops we try to jump through to weasel out of this one. But a tithe simply means this:

Pre-meditated and proportionate.

At the end of the day, that's what God is after. And God does throw out this number of 10 percent. I believe this is the starting place. I think that is what God wants us to do, not in a legalistic way.

You might ask why? Why 10 percent? I've thought about that a ton over the years, and there are a number of things I could say to you. But they real boil down to two things.

Ten percent of your income is enough to get your attention, but it's not enough to ruin you. It's enough to make you rearrange some things. It's enough to make you live according to a budget. It's enough to hurt a little bit. But it's not enough to put you out on the streets. It's enough to be transformational.

But here is the second thing. Numbers were a big deal in the Bible. Numbers always meant something. For example, seven is the number representative of God. It's the number of perfection. The number six is Satan's number, 666 is one less than seven.

The number 10 is always used in God's Word to coincide with testing. For example, when God tested his peoples' obedience, how many commandments did he give them? The answer is 10. He gave them 10 commandments.

When God was testing Pharaoh, how many plagues did he send Pharaoh? Ten. In the New Testament, how many virgin brides were tested to see if they were prepared for the bridegroom? Ten. How many lepers did Jesus heal, wondering if they would come back to say thank you? Once again, 10.

How many disciples did Jesus have? He had 12. I'm just testing you. I wanted to see if you are with me.

Ten seems to be a picture of testing. So, when God says: Would you just return a tithe to me it's not because he needs your cash to pay his bills. He owns the cattle on 1,000 hills. He says: No, no, no would you just test me in this? Would you trust me in this? I'm a good, good Father. I want more for you. And it's so difficult at times to do that.

I remember years ago, when my kids were really little I took them to Chick-fil-A and I didn't order any waffle fries, because I thought they would give me some of theirs.

Wishful thinking there. We sat down in the booth and I said, "Can I have a couple of your fries."

"No, daddy, these are ours." You selfish little me-monsters. "Do you know where these waffle fries came from? Do you know that I, your father, am lord of the waffle fries and I can see to it you never see a waffle fry again until your 18th birthday?"

"Or, I can open up both lanes of the Chick-fil-A drive thru and pour on you so many waffle fries you won't know what to do with them. Because I am the lord of the waffle fries. You need to return a percentage of the waffle fries back unto me". It still didn't work, but I gave it a good effort.

Hey, can I tell you that you just can't out give God? And God says to try it. Test me. Just see.

There have been times, plenty of times, in my life when I've had buyer's remorse. That's a sickening feeling.

You got all wrapped up, you made an emotional purchase. And you pulled that new car off the lot, and it immediately depreciated in value. You loved that new car smell until the very next day when a kid pukes in it. And then, after three months of payments and you see your bill is hardly going down you are like, "Oh my goodness, I shouldn't have bought it." Buyers' remorse.

I have never, ever had giver's remorse. And some of you are missing out on an element of something God wants to do in your emotional and spiritual life, because you've just not trusted him in this area, or you did but you got away from it. Can I just ask you today to test God in this? You don't need to tell me. I won't even know.

It's between you and God. You decide in your heart. Maybe for some of you right now, it's the last thing you're holding onto with a death grip. It's the last thing you're trying to control. God says: Just test me with this.

I want to challenge you. Over the next three months, just try it. See what he might do. And when you honor God with the first part, what you're doing is inviting him into your financial world. And I'm telling you this, he will engage himself supernaturally in your financial affairs. He just will. And when you don't, God simply says this: You're robbing me.

You might be like, "God, how in the world am I robbing you?" He's like: You're robbing me of a chance to be involved with you in your finances. You're robbing me of an opportunity to reassure you that you're not alone. You're robbing me of an opportunity to provide for you and to show you who I really am, a chance to demonstrate my love and faithfulness to you, to fill you up with peace and contentment with an opportunity to touch someone else's life through your generosity.

And we've learned that generosity will not happen until you make it a priority. It doesn't happen until you decide, "This is who I want to be. I've been saved by grace, and I'm going to let generosity flow through my life. I want to be seen as the kind of person who is a resident of the Kingdom of God, and let generosity just flow. How could I not, after all God has done for me?"

And out of all the voices that are screaming at you right now, telling you that you are not enough and that you won't be enough and you won't make enough, there is a still, small voice that cuts through all the lies, all the noise, and all the pressure. And he reassures you that you are priceless, chosen, accepted, unique, and you are lavishly loved.

God's got this. And he just simply says: Invite me into it. And when you know you are lavishly loved, that is a game changer in the way you live your life, and in the way you think about your stuff.

The tithe trains me to honor God with the rest of my spending.

The tithe increases my faith in who God is.

The tithe gives us an opportunity to make a **big impact** together!

Father, we come to you right now. We just want to take a few moments to quiet ourselves down and come before you to ask you to do a transformational work in us.

God, maybe there are some people here who are suffocating in debt, and it is literally and physically making them sick. God, I pray you begin to give them a little bit of hope. Give them some tools, a path, and help them to see the light out of that tunnel.

God, maybe there are some here today, and they've just been wrapped up in building their kingdom here on earth. It's not a bad thing they are successful. It's not a bad thing they are good at what they do. But God, I pray they would begin to have a vision for what you want to do through them in this world.

God, I pray that if there are some who have just been very individualistic, seeing our church as a place they go to get something, to get spiritual needs and services on the weekend; that they would begin to say, "No, I'm actually part of a family. I'm part of a movement of God in and through this particular local church."

And God, we know we cannot do it on our own. But there are other churches in the city, and we need every single church chasing after Jesus to be at their absolute best, to reach as many people as possible if we're going to make a dent.

But God, you've placed us in this church. So, we want to come together and link arms. God, in our lifetime would you do something so big and so outrageous that the only way we could explain it is your grace?

So, meet us in this room right now, and work on us. Give us the grace we need to have the courage and the faith to trust you in this area of our lives, because it's so deeply personal, and even painful.

We ask this in Jesus' Name: Amen.