



Sermon – 09/10/2023
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered

2 Corinthians 9:6 – 11
Malachi 3:10

Well, as you grab a seat, let me invite you to open your Bibles with me. We're going to be in 2 Corinthians chapter 9 this morning. 2 Corinthians 9. And if you're a guest in the room, welcome home. Tomorrow is a big day in the life of our church. It's our 98th anniversary tomorrow. So, happy birthday Central family. Isn't that exciting? And as you know, we've been talking over these last couple weeks about how in just two short years, we'll be hitting our 100th anniversary. That's why we've launched our initiative called NEXT. And I want to remind you what this is all about. We want to take next steps now so that we can see God reaching the next generation over our next century. And so, you'll see up on the screen, we talked about how we want to take some next steps with our renovation efforts and our facilities to help take them to the next level and to push those forward starting with our students space and our worship and gathering spaces. In addition to that, we want to take the Gospel to the next generation when it comes to mobilization. That's why we've got seven different areas of focus that we want to zero in on this time. Whether it's planting seeds in a community garden or planting a new church in the coming years or planting seeds of the Gospel in people's hearts through intentional Gospel relationships. That's what our church is all about. Being a church where every generation reaches the next generation. And as I've told you over the last few weeks, the focus of this sermon series during this time is the seven marks of a next generation Christian. So we've already spent some time talking about the first one, prayer. And the second one, legacy. And this morning, we get the opportunity to talk about the third one which is generosity.

So, what is generosity? It's when we give good things with the right heart and with the right urgency. It's when we see needs and we meet them by what God provides for us so that we can join Him in His mission. And look, I know what some of y'all are thinking. As soon as the preacher starts talking about giving in the middle of a giving initiative, your antennas go up. The walls in your heart go up. And maybe some of you are in church for the first time or back here for the first time in years and you go, "Here they go again. They're always talking about money." Well, Jesus talked a lot about money. Did you know that? He spoke about money more than heaven and hell combined. As a matter of fact, the reason He talks so much about money is not

because it's the most important thing in our life but because it's the most revealing thing about our hearts. It shows us whether or not He is truly Lord of every aspect of our life. And so if you find yourself, as soon as the word generosity comes up, finding those walls, those defenses go up. I just want to ask you to consider something this morning. Could that be like a check engine light going off in your heart? Where God is prompting you this morning that maybe you're responding to Him with clenched fists rather than open hands. And as we turn our attention to the text, what we're going to find this morning is in 2 Corinthians 9, beginning in verse 6, we find the Corinthian church in a very similar situation to what ours is today. And so let's follow along starting in verse 6. We'll read down to verse 11.

⁶The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. ⁹As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." ¹⁰He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

So, here we see Paul. He's speaking to the Corinthians and teaching them about generosity and we see a pattern here that shows up repeatedly in the New Testament that when we see the mission of God advancing, there is teaching that follows it about investing in that mission. And so Paul is writing to the Corinthians in this moment and he is challenging them to make ready and to gather a gift that they're going to give over and above their normal giving to their church in order to meet a particular need. You see, there were Christians in another region who were struggling deeply. There was famine and drought. They were experiencing deep hardship and Paul challenges the Corinthian church to give over and beyond what they normally give to fuel the mission there in Corinth for the sake of their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. A challenge to make ready an over and above gift. Doesn't that sound familiar, Central family? Right here as we step into this NEXT Initiative season where we're challenging our church to step up to give \$5 million over and above our normal giving to fuel the mission God has right here in the Brazos Valley and beyond. And what we know is that when we come to God's word, it can change our hearts. And what we want to see this morning in 2 Corinthians 9 is that if we embrace God's design for generosity, it changes the type of giver we are. He calls us to give in a way that is different from the way the world gives. And we'll see that starting in verse one where it calls us first a cheerful giver. We'll see that in verse 6 and 7. You know, I think about the Corinthians in this moment. And if anyone had a reason to be reluctant to give in this time, it would have been a church like theirs. I mean, think about it. When we read 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, the picture that Paul paints of this church is that they're a mess. They've got all sorts of problems from within. Hardships. In fact, Paul's been coming down on them and challenging them to change the way they practice their life as a church. They might be defensive about him invading into their activity in their local congregation or they might have been reluctant because this call to give was for believers they didn't know. For needs that they would never see. For outcomes they would never get to experience. And yet what we find is that rather than put the wall of defensiveness up. They take it down. Paul calls them to open their hearts and to respond as cheerful givers. And what he shows us in verse 6 and 7 is a cheerful giver, you can tell if someone is a cheerful giver because two

things are true in their life. In the first one is a cheerful givers have a generous heart. A generous heart. So, let's see that generosity in verse 6. He says,

⁶The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

So, Paul uses this farming metaphor to give this picture of the generosity that he has called them to. And, but it starts with the phrase right there at the beginning verse 6. Do you see it? The point is this. You see, he's been talking to them about this gift all the way since the start of chapter 8 and he's building and building and building. And what he says is right here, that his primary concern is not about the size of their gift, but the shape of their heart. That it should be generous in nature. He draws out this farming illustration to describe it. And just a few weeks ago, when we were getting ready to launch the , we were sharing in this room with our life groups about all the things that were coming, and for the very first time, we started talking about our goal over the next two years to grow 10,000 pounds of food right here on our campus through a community garden. And our Special Needs adult class was gathered in their room in our Special Needs wing watching that as we were receiving that information in here. And one of our teachers was walking down the hallway when we began to talk about that and she heard loud noises coming from the room. And when she walked in, she wasn't sure what she was going to find. And when she walked in, do you know what she heard? She heard our special needs adults cheering and celebrating about that community garden because they knew as soon as they heard that, that's something they could jump into. That's something they could get involved in. There's something for everybody in this initiative. And here's what you and I know. When we plant that garden in the coming months and we begin to grow that food and we can take one or two paths. Which one is going to go better? Is it going to go better if we sow the seeds sparingly? Just put a little bit into the ground and hope for the best. Or is it going to be better and more bountiful if we sow the seed bountifully, if we plant it in abundance and provide and care for it. Is it better to sow sparingly or bountifully? Bountifully. And that's the picture that Paul is giving here. It was true for a farm 2,000 years ago. It's true for a community garden today. And what he's saying is that's true in our own hearts when it comes to giving. That we are called to have a generous heart. Not one that asks, what can I spare but what will it take. How can I lean in to the opportunities that God has provided for me. See, what happens is our hearts reflect our view of God. If we see that He's been generous to us in His Son, then it can help but overflow in generosity toward others. So, Paul says, you can know if you're a cheerful giver, if you have a generous heart.

But then the second thing we see in verse 7 is that you'll know if you're a cheerful giver, if you have a joyful heart. So, notice how he talks about it there.

⁷Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

And if you like marking up your Bible, circle that word cheerful. It comes from a word in the original language, *hilaros*, that we get our word hilarious from. It's this overwhelming joy. This excitement in participating in this act of generosity. See, what happens is when God captures our heart with the joy of salvation, one of the ways we express that is through the joy of our generosity. That we take deep pleasure in pushing forward God's good gifts to us into the lives of others. You see, when it comes to generosity, the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. Our hearts

often feel like what Paul says here in verse 7, under compulsion or obligation or expectation. And if you hear in any way throughout this time that we're talking about the NEXT Initiative that we're trying to lean on you to give for those reasons you've missed it. We're calling our church to give not out of compulsion or obligation but opportunity. There's an entire generation to come that needs to find and follow Jesus and God is inviting us into that story.

Yeah, I'm sure over the last few weeks that you have seen the images coming out of Maui, Hawaii after those devastating wildfires. And if you haven't, I think we may have one up on the screen right now that we can show you. In Lahaina, these wildfires raged and Avi and Shelly Ronen were barely able to flee in time to escape those fires. I want you to look at that devastation. Flattened. Nothing left behind. And they were away from their home for days waiting for the moment they could go back and figure out just how bad it was. They'd seen the pictures. They had heard the reports and they assumed that they might find nothing left. But there was one glimmer of hope that they had as they returned. You see, they had a safe in their house. And in that safe, they had been keeping \$50,000. And they hoped that even if everything burned down around it, perhaps that safe had protected their funds and they would have something to rebuild from the rubble. And when they made it back to their house, they quickly find that there was no house to come back to. And as they searched through the rubble, Avi located that safe and it was burned but it was still intact and his heart filled with hope. He hunted for the key but he couldn't find it. So, he picked up that safe and he began bashing it over and over again on a rock until finally that brittle metal gave way. And then his hopes were dashed because when he looked inside that safe that he thought might protect their last earthly possessions, all that cash had become ash. Destroyed. Left with nothing. Forced to start all over again. Here's what I want you to think about when we hear a story like that, as Avi and Shelly Ronen experienced a moment like that in this life but the Bible shows us that all of us, whether at our death or at Christ's return, are facing a similar type of moment. The fire is not of a raging wildfire around us but the fires of judgement will come upon us. And unless we have put our hope in Christ, we will not be able to stand. But here's I know. When God takes us from this world, we won't be able to take anything with us. All those possessions will be destroyed. Moth and rust will lead them to decay. All that cash that we're storing in the safes of our hearts, in the safes of our bank accounts will become ash. They'll be of no value. So, the question we need to wrestle with is this, as long as God is giving us breath on this earth, what if we use the possessions that we can't take with us? And invested in them in a way that God could use for eternity. They would have an eternal impact. That's what it looks like to be a cheerful giver, to be filled with joy. But I want you to notice back in verse 7, there's a little phrase there you might have overlooked at the beginning of the verse. It says there, each one must give as he has decided in his heart. Circle that word, decided. Because what Paul is confronting us with is the fact that none of us eases our way into generosity. You don't just drift in that direction. It comes from a decision of the heart. That's one of the reasons why I want you to look in the seat back right in front of you. There's a card that looks just like this. I want you to grab one, pass one out to the other down your row, you take one, your spouse take one, a roommate take one. We have these giving cards, these giving exercise cards, that I'm going to take you through at the very end of the message to help you do exactly what Paul is calling us to here. To help you start the process of deciding in your heart what God is calling you to give in this season. And just to give you a sense of it, question one, what could I reasonably give? You're thinking about, if you just look at your discretionary funds, how much could you use to invest in this initiative? Question number two is not the question, what can I give, but what can I give up? What are those things you might be able to reprioritize and use those dollars? And you'll notice below

it a chart there just to spark some ideas of ways that you might be able to make conscious decisions to say, no to other things so you can say yes to God's mission. And then the third question is, what could I give if I deeply believe that God can and will provide for all my needs. So, if that first number at the top is a walk-by-site number, I can see how I get there. That third question is a walk-by-faith number. If I deeply believe that God could provide for my needs, what would I want to see Him give through me during this season. And I just want to ask you all as we're working through the rest of the text to be mulling this exercise over. You're going to fill this out. You're going to take it home. You're going to have a conversation in your household about it over the coming weeks so that you can see where God might be taking you to live out this calling to be a cheerful giver.

But let's keep going in the text now. We'll pick up in verses 8 and 9 and there's a second type of giver that we're all called to be. Not just a cheerful giver, but we're called to be a courageous giver. A courageous giver. And if there's anything we know, nothing can spark anxiety in our lives as deeply or as quickly as financial matters. That that student loan debt that you're taking on, that credit card that never seems like you can get paid down, that uncertainty in your job situation, that newborn that's coming along the way, that wedding or that that student that you're going to pay for college in the future coming just a few years from now. We feel that burden. And that's part of what can fuel our defensiveness when it comes to talking about money. When it comes to addressing what our lives should look like when it comes to generosity. You see, Paul is saying to us here that we're not just called to be cheerful givers but courageous givers. The ones who truly believe that God is the God of the universe. Who created all things, who provide for the cattle on a thousand hills, who gives us all we need for life and godliness and calls us to trust Him to provide for us even in the midst of our anxiety, even in the midst of our uncertainty. And if you feel that type of uncertainty today, this passage has good news for you because it gives us two reasons why we can be courageous givers. You'll see the first one there is that we should be courageous givers because God will give us all we need. So, look back at verse 8, and if you're marking up your Bible, I want you to circle every time the word all or every is used in verse 8 as I read it. Are you ready?

⁸God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things and at all times, you may abound in every good work.

How many times did it show up? Five. What do you think Paul is trying to communicate to us here? He's trying to remind us that God will give us all we need. That our lives that are so often spent looking to our own sufficiency should instead be depending on God's sufficiency. That He's the one who provides. He's the one who cares for us. Why? Look back at the end of verse 8. So, you may abound in every good work. He gives us what we need so that we can live out the calling that He has placed on our lives through our time, our talent, and our treasure.

But there's another reason we can be courageous. We see it in verse 9. We should be courageous givers because God has already given us all we have. Look at verse 9. He quotes from Psalm 112 and he says,

⁹As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

You see, Paul points back to Psalm 112 to remind the Corinthians and us that God has been faithful in meeting the needs of His people for ages and ages. And if He's done it before, we can trust Him to do it again. That's why my heart is always stirred when I come across Malachi chapter 3, in verse 10. When it comes to generosity. I want you to see it on the screen. Look at the challenge that the Lord gives us. He says,

¹⁰Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open up the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

You see what God says there? Put me to the test. This is only times in the entire Bible that God causes people to test Him and what does He call us to test Him in? His provision for us. He says, give and test me if I'll show up in your life. Be generous and see how I will respond to provide for you in the same way that verses 8 and 9 is speaking of here. I mean, you probably heard it said before. You can't out give God. You ever heard that one? But the question that Paul is confronting us with here when he speaks about our need to be courageous givers, is have you ever tried to out give God in your life? What would that look like? See, Paul points to Psalm 112 to show the faithfulness of God's provision amongst His people in the past. And I know in the 98 years of our church, He has shown up again and again and provided for us our needs in significant moments. I mean, just think about it. We started in 1925 and just four years later, the Great Depression hits. God provides for our needs and sustains us. Back in the 1940s, when we were outgrowing our space and we were seeking to buy eight acres on Coulter Drive, the pastor then WJ McDaniel told the people, we need to raise money in order for God to provide. And what he did is he just brought a giant wash tub and he placed it right in front of the pulpit and asked people to bring their gifts each Sunday. What do you think? Maybe we should try it out. Or I think about other moments like later on, a few year, decades later, when there was a need in the church. One of our deacons, Judge Barron, stood up and he challenged those in a business meeting to give generously and he said, "Our family is committed to give this." And one of our other deacons, Woody Thompson's dad, Durwood Thompson, stood up in the moment and said, we'll give \$1,000. And then when he sat down, his wife leaned over to him quietly and said, "Where are we going to get the money from?" And God showed up. He provided for the Thompsons. He provided for the church. Or I even think about moments like this. When we started this series a few weeks ago and invited you into the NEXT Initiative. Do you know what the first gift that came in that Sunday was? There was a young child in our kid's ministry who got so excited about what God is going to do for the next generation that they gave \$2.25 to this church to get things started. That's what it's all about. God providing for His people to fuel His mission. And what Paul is showing us here, when he speaks about how he makes all that we need abound to us so that we can abound in good works as He's calling us to be courageous givers. And I wanted you to see exactly what that could look like in your life. So what I know about any church just like ours is that there's four types of people when it comes to giving in the life of our church. The first is that group that I would call potential givers. And when we did a church wide survey just a few months ago, we found 18% of you fit this category. There, your people in the life of our church that either because of your commitment level or your circumstances, you're not currently giving anything. And as a result of that, you have a potential to step into this but you haven't yet stepped in. And I hope as you look around this church and you see the way that God's at work, you can notice, look at how much we're doing without you jumping in. Imagine what might be possible if more of us jumped in. But then we go up another step in the generosity ladder. We move from being a potential giver to what I'd call

an occasional giver. Where our giving is marked not so much by intentionality but infrequency and inconsistently. We give when we're inspired or encouraged. But there's nothing particularly regular or proactive about it. I mean this is where I found myself as a college student right here at Central over 20 years ago. In fact, when I applied for the job to be our College Ministry Associate back then, one of my fears is if they looked up my giving records in the church, they probably wouldn't hire me because I wasn't tithing. And so that's the second step there. This step of being an occasional giver. But the third step up the generosity ladder is what we would call faithful giving. Faithful giving. Those who are regular, proactive, intentional, following God's design of giving at least a tithe to the church. We see that model in the Old Testament and we never see an example in the New Testament where people are giving less than 10% of what God has provided for them. And the Lord stretched my family and me towards this faithful giving while I was here at Central on staff 20 years ago. Once I was fearful, would they hire me or not? I made the commitment that once I got a job, I would begin to tithe. So, that first job that I had here at Central as a newlywed, finishing my graduate degree at A&M paid me a whopping \$12,000 a year. A \$1,000 a month. And from that point forward 20 years ago, we started writing \$100 checks every month to this church. And we have done everything we could to be faithful givers just like so many of you. We talked about 18% at the potential level. We, in the survey, we had 28% that were at the occasional level. 38% right here at the faithful level. And I know your story. That in the highs and lows of your life, you've continued to walk in trust as a courageous giver. Whenever the 2008 financial crisis hit and you lost your job. Whenever inflation started to wreck your budget, you've still been faithful. Over and over again, giving your first fruits to God. And then at the top of this giving ladder, the last step in the process is what we would call the sacrificial giver. This is a person that of which there's about 16% of our church who doesn't just give God's expectation of one tenth of their provision, but gives sacrificially beyond that. The kind of giving that when you and your family make that decision, you look at one another and say, "Okay, if we do this, we're going to have to make some changes in our life and in our budget in order to make it happen." So, here's the question I want to ask you this morning is, where do you find yourself on this giving ladder, before you and God. If you had to look yourself and put yourself somewhere, are you a potential giver? Who either because of your circumstances or commitment hasn't yet given. Are you an occasional giver who does it from time to time but without that intentionality? Are you a faithful giver who gives of your first and best according to God's design? Are you a sacrificial giver who goes above and beyond that to invest in the mission of God? And wherever you find yourself here, the challenge this text is giving us to be courageous givers is to take the next step. To move up that ladder, one more spot from where the Lord finds you, finds you now. And here's what I know. Sometimes, when you look at this, it can almost feel overwhelming. Uh before the service started, I was out in our check-in area for the kids and I saw toddlers running in with their parents, running free, little bit of controlled chaos in there on a Sunday morning. But what I know is if we brought one of those toddlers up right now who was just learning to walk and we wanted to get them to climb these steps. They would look at those steps and then they would look down and they would look up again and they wouldn't be able to do it. They feel overwhelmed, inadequate to do it on their own. But what they might do if they're at their best and they really want to get those steps is they would reach for a loving father. And they would take him by the hand. And that loving father would use the strength that he provides to help them take the next step. To help them keep climbing. To help them move towards where they're designed to go. And in the same way, the Bible is calling us to grab a hold of our heavenly Father. The One who provides for our needs, the One who is faithful even when we're faithless, and to respond

to that through a courageous giving that trusts Him to provide even in the midst of the uncertainties of our life.

Which brings us to the last thing I want you to notice in this passage back in verse 10. We need to be cheerful givers and courageous givers. But the third thing Paul calls us to is to be committed givers. To be a committed giver. So, Paul is not just calling the Corinthians to a moment of generosity but a lifestyle of generosity. Where their hearts and their lives are marked by a commitment to providing for the mission. And he shows us here two reasons why we should be committed givers. You'll see the first one in verse 10. We should be committed givers because it multiplies our impact. It multiplies our impact. Look at verse 10.

¹⁰He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

You see, Paul comes back to this farming analogy. Why? We'll look back at the verse. Circle the word multiply and the word increase. You see, what he is showing us here is that when we're committed to generosity, God will multiply our spiritual impact. He will increase the harvest of righteousness in us and through us when we commit ourselves to giving in the way that he intends. But there's a second reason here, not just because it multiplies our impact, but also, we should be committed givers because it multiplies our gratitude. Notice how verse eleven ends the passage. It says,

¹¹You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

You see, there's a danger for all of us gathered in here when it comes to God's provision in our lives. It's easy to fall into a trap where we say, "Yes, I believe that God provides my job." But then to shift our focus and believe our job provides for us. And what happens is we begin to be disconnected from the fact that God is the giver through our job of the means that He's providing us to live our lives, to meet our needs, and to invest in the next generation. And Paul doesn't want us to lose sight of that. He says, when we're committed to giving, it multiplies our gratitude. We're filled with joy and thanksgiving that wells up in our lives because of what God is doing through us. So, maybe some of you families saw last week that we sent your kids home in the preschool and kids ministry with one of these piggy banks. Anybody seen one of those in their house floating around? And so, my guess is, for some of your children, we're encouraging all ages to get involved in this effort to give to the next century, to give to the next generation. And my my, I imagine that for some children, they'll take of their own resources that they've earned through an allowance or birthday gifts and they'll put some of that money to invest here. But for others, what will happen is that a loving parent will come alongside one whose resources are limited and provide funds to them that they can then place in here and to invest in the mission that God is calling us to. And what I want you to see in a piggy bank just like this is God's way of working in our lives is just the same. That we don't have the resources on our own. We can't meet our own needs much less fuel the mission apart from God's work. But in the same way a loving father walks alongside a child and provides what they don't have so that they can give what the mission needs He is doing the same thing for us. And we can walk in commitment to that truth because we know how committed God is to us. If you want to know if you truly understand the nature of the Gospel, all you have to do is look at your own heart when it comes to generosity. And why do I say that? It's because our

generosity reflects His generosity. I mean, think about the generosity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that John 3:16 tells us that God so loved the world that He did what? He gave His only Son. The ultimate gift, the greatest of generosity, His one and only Son sent to this Earth on a mission to live a perfect life, to push back the darkness, to die in our place, to pay the penalty we deserve, to take on the wrath of God, to raise Himself from the dead, so that you and I can be recipients of the gift of the generosity of God's grace. And what God has done for us, He's inviting us to do for others in a way that echoes back with thanksgiving to the God who provided from the beginning.

Of all the stories I've come across over our nearly 100 years of history, one of them that's captured my heart the most is something that almost nobody in this church would even know about. Many of you know one of our amazing legacy adults in the church Anne Villines. And she grew up in a family of seven. They didn't have much money. And back 70 years ago in the 1950s when she was a child growing up, our church was doing a camp for students and she really wanted to go on that. But she, her family just didn't have the funds. They didn't have what it takes in order for her to go financially. And one of our deacons heard about that need. And quietly without anybody knowing it back in the 1950s, he paid Anne's way to go to that student camp and guess what happened? Through his generosity, God changed her life forever. You see, that was the camp where she came to know Jesus. And she's walked faithfully as a follower of Him for more than 70 years since that time. You think that's a good return on the investment? And what I want you to understand as we step into this season, is we have an opportunity through this NEXT Initiative to see that same type of return on investment spiritually in the next century. That we may not know, we may not see all the lives that will be changed. We may not know or see all the ways that God will multiply our impact. But we know He's calling us to be faithful. He's calling us to be cheerful. He's calling us to be courageous and committed so that we can walk in the design that He's called us to for the sake of taking the Gospel to the next generation.

Now, here's how we're going to finish up our time. I want you to take this giving exercise card that I gave to you. There's pens in the seat backs in front of you. And I'm going to invite Ben and the team to come up here and they're just in a second, they're going to play instrumentally underneath us in order to create some space. And you're going to fill this out. You're going to take it home. I want you to talk about it with your family, your spouse, your roommates, as you're processing through this. But let me tell you why we're doing this. We're doing this because of what verse 7 said. That we need to decide in our hearts what God is calling us to do. So, let me just remind you of these questions before we create some space. The first question, what can I reasonably give? When you look at your resources, what are the things that in your discretionary funds that you know we could put that towards this effort? Or maybe you don't yet have those funds but the Lord is stirring in you a way that He might expand your opportunities to get those funds. I saw a woman on social media in our church this week that said she wants to raise money for NEXT by baking loaves of bread and she's going to sell those in order for all those proceeds to go there. What could I reasonably give? What's that walk by sight number that God can meet me in? And then that second question, what could I reprioritize and be able to give? That's why we gave you that chart. Are there things that you cannot just give but give up? So, for example, I've had a church member say to me that they learned that the Texas Legislature has just passed a new law that's going to reduce property tax cost by an average of \$1,300 a year. Now, I'll believe it when I see it in the Brazos Valley because property taxes are insane here. But what they know is for years, they've been writing a check to the government that they're no longer going after write that same check. And what they were giving to the government, they want to now give to God.

Or I've come across a family that says, we were about to buy a new car but we're going to delay that so that we can prioritize and invest here. What could you reprioritize? And then that third question, what can I give if I deeply believe that God can and will provide for all my needs? And I just want you to take your eyes off this card for a minute and put them on me. Central family, we believe the Bible is true, right? We believe that God can provide for all our needs, right? And so the question that we are wrestling with here is if God could show up, if He could do anything, what would that courageous heart in you want to see Him give through you in this time? And what I know is you and your spouse or roommate may not land at the exact same spot here and that will spark some good conversation over the weeks to come. But as we're doing what verse 7 says and deciding in our hearts for most people what's going to happen is you will land investing in this NEXT Initiative somewhere between your answer to question one and your answer to question three. And your responsibility, my big ask of you, is that over the next two weeks as we move towards our Commitment Sunday, that you will discern from the Lord where He would lead you in that range. And you would pray for a heart of courage to walk out this call to faithful giving that He's laying on your heart. So, as they play quietly now, I just want you to take some time in your own seat, take a moment to fill this out, just between you and God. Then, just a moment after that, I'll pray for us and we'll have our normal response time and singing at that point. Let's a minute now to fill these cards out together.

Let's take a minute to pray now over this moment.

Father, we come to You. Lord, and I know it's not easy to have conversations about money. We find our hearts are hard, they're resistant at times, and Lord, I pray for us as a church that You would help us to have soft hearts towards Your call. That You would help us to be of one heart and one mind. Lord, we thank You for the ways You provided for us over the decades in this church, and You provided for us as individual members of this faith community, of this congregation, of this people living on mission. And Lord, I'm asking in this time that You would show us our next step. Would You help us see where we fit on that generosity ladder and give us the courage and the commitment to take that next step, to take You by the hand, God, and follow You wherever You lead us. Lord, more than anything, as we ready our hearts to respond to You, we're praying in this season for an eternal impact to be multiplied through the faithfulness of Your people. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.