

Well, good morning, everyone. Now, listen, I know there's a few people in the room that are here for the very first time, and I just want to do an upfront apology because we're starting what everyone thinks the church always talks about. We're starting a series. Can anyone guess what we're going to talk about for the next four weeks? Money.

And everyone thinks. This is what we always talk about. I promise you, we don't. Can anyone else say, really, he's telling the truth? We don't really talk about money all the time.

Anyone say amen to that? Okay, good. Okay, kid, but. But before we talk about money, can I just talk about something that's so much cuter, so much more fun than money? Can we just.

Can we just take a look at this right here? Look at that. Look at that little guy right there. Look at him. Look at him.

Look at that. Look at that. I mean, do we. Oh, there he is. Look at that.

Can we just say a collective Aw. I'm telling you, he's just a sweet little bundle of demonic terror right now.

He's going on, I think, six months old. And so we're in the process of training. And when I say we're in the process, it means that we hit it every once in a while. We try, but we're not trying that hard, and it's just a little out of control. So I'm doing this thing where I'm walking with him, and every time I walk with him, I put him on the lead and we try to.

You know, they tell you if you're training a dog, I feel like I'm getting a lot of feedback right now. Bode. They tell you when you're walking a dog, you gotta keep them at your side or behind you so that you demonstrate that you are the alpha, you're the big dog. You can't let them take the lead, or they think they're the lead dog. They think they're the big dog.

So this dog, I'm telling you what, he is determined at six months old to be the alpha. I mean, he's just a little thing, and he's never gonna get big, but he thinks he's big and he thinks he's large and in charge. And so I've just. I'm walking the dog with him. And.

And I'm not going to tell you how this is working out, but the other day, Carrie Holmes, who just looks up the road, saw us. She goes, are you walking the dog or is the dog walking you? And I'm like, ha ha ha ha ha. But it's a fair question. So this puts me in mind of how we think about other things, specifically how I think about money.

I have lived with little and I have lived with adequate. And I have lived in a place where I'm like, what am I going to do with all this

money? No joking, I've never lived that. But I have lived with more than I currently live with. And I will tell you that taking the lead and telling your money who's boss isn't about how much money I have or how little money I have.

It's really about my attitude towards money. Like that little dog's attitude. Am I going to be large and in charge or is something else going to be large and in charge? Now, the attitude that Jesus wants me to strike, I'm a follower of Jesus. I try to live the way Jesus tells me to live in regards to everything.

But specifically today about my money is he's asked me to be a cheerful giver. He wants to be. He wants me to be cheerfully generous, whether I'm a financial big dog or a financial little dog. God says, regardless, it's all mine in the end. And so I want you to do with it what I'm telling you to do with it.

Jesus says, I am the alpha and omega. I'm the big dog. It all belongs to me. I trust you with it. I steward it well, do with it what I ask you to do with it.

So we say, okay, Jesus, you're the alpha. What do you want me to do with your money? Well, I want you to graciously and cheerfully invest it in what matters to me. You see, at the end of the day, generosity is more than just giving our money away. Generosity, a reflection of our heart, what we care about, our trust in God, and really how we place and where we place our hope in the future.

The question is asked, why did Jesus talk about money more than any other subject? That may surprise you, but he did. He talked about money a lot. And I think it's because he knew how deeply it shapes our lives and reveals where our loyalty truly lies. So we're starting this series Open Handed.

You're catching the very first week of it, and we're going to be talking about generosity and how it begins in our heart, but then it shapes sort of our financial health and it shapes our habits and it affects our hope in Christ. So we're going to discover that living like God owns everything can free us up from the leash that money can hold us to can tie us to as we learn to live open handed with the resources God has entrusted with us. So I'm going to pray and then we're going to dig in. Heavenly Father, as we open your word this morning, we pray that we are. We.

We learn something valuable one, that we can trust you, but we can also, we can also find freedom and trusting you with our resources in ways that we can't when we don't. Teach us that through your word, in Jesus name, amen. So if you came in the front door and you walked down this long hallway there onto the right, there's a series of pictures and those are Sherwood Oaks values. I won't ask you to name all of

them, but one of them is a value that I've already mentioned and it's this. We live like God owns everything.

I know you cheated, you saw it up there, but that's true. We live like God owns everything. This is an aspirational value for us. I'm telling you. We, we don't always do that, but we aspire to live like God owns everything.

And it comes from this, this verse in the Psalms where the psalmist writes this, the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, everything, everything. That means my stuff means your stuff. And when I read this value, I get seriously convicted. Because honestly, this is a hard one. For I am teaching and preaching this morning, not from a place of perfection on this issue, but I'm just telling you, this is one of those areas where I really have to.

I really have to think about this because here's the sad truth. I like money.

Am I the only one this morning like money? Can we just say it? I like money.

I love what money seems to provide.

I'm telling you, I like my leaf blower. I like my leaf blower. I've got an affection for that little thing. I get hours of enjoyment. Well, actually 15 minutes.

The battery is really bad. I get 15 minutes enjoyment out of that thing. I like these shoes I'm wearing. They're comfortable, man. The dog loves them too.

He's chewing these things to pieces. Don't look too close with these shoes. I love driving a decent car. That's nice. I've not always driven a decent car.

I like driving a decent car. I like food. I like shelter. I like what money provides. I like having a little bit of money tucked away.

Gives you a little sense of security, doesn't it? When you got some money tucked away and you're like, oh, if worse comes to worse, at least we've got that. I've got enough to last me about 12 days. But it's there, it's there, whatever comes. I got a little bit to alleviate the pain.

It gives you a sense of comfort, security. I like money. I like money so much, I think about it a lot, think about if I have enough, do I have what it takes to do that? How do I get more money?

This is worrisome to me because getting the money stuff wrong can

seriously mess life up.

Paul writes to his Protege Timothy in First Timothy 6:10. And he says, timothy, listen to this. The love of money is a root of evil.

Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. Now, your translation may read, the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. But that's not in the original Greek. The original Greek is the love of money is the root of evil. All of it.

So our attitude, our heart towards money is so important. In Matthew, chapter six, Jesus preaches this amazing sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. We've all heard that. We did a study on that over the summer. And in chapter six, he starts talking very practically.

He says, listen, when you give alms, when you show charity, when you. Which God says is a righteous act, to be charitable, to give money to people who need it, to help them out, he says, when you do that, you need to do it secretly. Don't try to impress people with your charity. And then he says, when you pray, specifically when you're praying with other people, this is a righteous act. This is a good thing to pray.

But don't worry about impressing people with how well you pray. Just pray. He talks about fasting, says, this is a righteous act. This is a good thing to do, to fast, but don't do it in such a way that everyone looks at you and goes, oh, my word, they're really spiritual. Look how they're fasting.

Don't do it that way. In each of those examples, he says, you need to live differently than the rest of the world. You need to think differently than the rest of the world. And then he gets into this topic of money. And he says in verse 19 of Matthew, chapter 6, he says, do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

But store up for yourself treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Big verse. If you wanna memorize a verse about money, Right there is the one to memorize. He goes on, he's not done.

He says, the eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness, you think? Now, what does that have to do with money?

Hold on. Verse 24. It says, no one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you'll be devoted to the one

and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

The Hebrew word for that is mammon. That's all it means, money.

Now, this is not Jesus telling us that it's bad to have stuff. This is not telling us. Jesus. Jesus telling us it's bad to have money. Many of Jesus followers were quite wealthy.

You think of Joseph of Arimathea, who donated a very expensive tomb for Jesus to use temporarily. Lazarus, Mary and Martha. These were people who had the resources and funds to support Jesus ministry. They were well off people. Even Peter, that fisherman.

Peter was not just a random guy with a boat. He had a fishing company. He had a home. And even though he left and left that and followed Jesus, after the resurrection of Jesus, when the disciples were sort of just in this weird place where they didn't know what was going to happen next, Peter goes back to his fishing business. He goes back to his home.

He still had those investments. And Jesus didn't say anything about Peter, you got to get rid of your house, you got to get rid of your fish. No, no Jesus ever said that. Jesus has plenty of parables about people who owned farms, who owned real estate. There's nothing wrong with having money.

There's nothing wrong with being wealthy. There's nothing shameful about not being wealthy. You guys remember Fiddler on the Roof? Anyone see that movie? Tevye has this line in there.

He goes, there's no great shame in being poor, but there's no great honor in it either. And I'm like, amen, Tevye, Amen. What matters, though, whether you're rich or poor is not whether you have much or whether you have little. It's how you use what God has entrusted to you. And that's really the point.

What has God given me to use? How do I use it? And Jesus says three things. He says, you need to invest in the right location. He says, put your treasure in heaven.

He says, you got to focus in the right direction because your eyes need to be filled with light. And he says, you need to serve the right master, God. So we're going to take those in backwards order, and we're just going to unpack a little bit about what that looks like. So he says, serve the right master. The book of Ephesians is a beautiful letter that Paul writes to an early church.

And he begins it by just telling about the letters, about God's glorious purpose for them. But he begins this letter with. With an acknowledgement of how much their. Their love and faith of that

congregation has overflowed with gratitude and generosity. That's an amazing.

An amazing tribute to this church in Ephesus. But by the time John writes later the book of Revelation, in chapter two, he references this same church and he says, listen, you have forsaken the love that you had at the first. Now, what happened from a church that was filled with generosity and gratitude to a place where Paul. Where John says, you're not there anymore. What happened?

Well, I believe they got distracted by other masters. Something else took the place of God as their focus.

Buddy, my dog has to know who is ultimately in charge in our house. He can cuddle and play with the boys all day long, but at the end of the day, who feeds him? Me. Who takes him for long walks? Me.

He knows where his loyalty lies, or he should. If Robert gives him an order and I give him a different one, you can see him going, who do I. Who's going to be more fun? Well, Robert's going to be more fun, but I'm the one that feeds you, so you need to listen to me. Jesus says this.

If you've got two masters trying to give you two different orders, it is confusing. Gentlemen, if you have a wife and a mother and you don't know where your first loyalty lies, you're going to have some trouble at some point. Jesus says, you're going to be required to be disloyal to one in order to serve the other. And he says this. It doesn't work if you've got two masters.

So when we say our value is that we live like God owns everything, this is more than a slogan. This is a way to keep ourselves from being controlled and manipulated by the wrong master. Serve the right master, Jesus says. Then he says, focus in the right direction. Says, pull your eyes away from the temporary and renew your focus on eternity.

I'm embarrassed to admit this to you, but I embarrass myself by admitting stuff all the time. There is not a day that goes by that I don't look around my life and find something to either mentally verbally complain about.

The house I bought, the previous owners put white carpet in. Does anyone here think white carpeting is a good idea ever?

Okay, this little guy over here, he loves the white carpeting. I'm telling you, buddy, you get a dog and three kids, and white carpeting is like, the worst decision you can make with your life. Oh. Every time I walk in the house, it just looks filthy. It's not mostly, but it looks that way.

It's like, I hate this carpet. And sometimes I say it out loud. I walk in the backyard, I've got this chain link fence. It's rusty. There's trees and random stuff growing.

Weeds that became trees. You know what those are? Weeds that become trees. You're like, do I put a swing in it or do I chop it down? I don't know what to do with this thing.

And the metal's rusting. I'm like, oh, this is a janky fence. This is depleting the property values of the entire neighborhood. My fence is horrible. Get in the car and it's cold.

And you're like, this car's so old, it doesn't even have heated steering wheels.

I don't really complain about that. I just threw that in because I do have a car now with a heated steering wheel. And I used to think it was only for wusses. And I'm like, oh, heated steering wheel, good thing. And I know it's standard feature now in most cars.

There's nothing to brag about a heated steering wheel anymore, but I do love that heated steering wheel. But Jesus says in all of that, listen, Tim, you're focused on all the wrong things.

Remember how Jesus talks about healthy eyes? He wasn't just giving, like, this first century weird ophthalmology exam. That's not what he's saying. He's saying, listen, your focus should be on light, not on dark, because what you focus on impacts your spiritual life. Paul writes this letter to the Corinthians, and he says this in chapter four, verse 18.

He goes, here's what we need to do. We need to fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. Since what is seen is temporary. Fence, carpet, temporary. What is unseen, eternal.

That's what lasts. There's nothing wrong with spending money on a new fence or new flooring, but those things really are temporary issues. They're not eternal. Spending so much time focused on temporary can lead you down this dark and unhelpful and even destructive path. Of ingratitude.

It almost always centers your focus on yourself and, and your comfort and your desires. And it pulls you away from looking at what God wants, his plan and his purposes for you and for those around you. So living with the understanding that God owns everything keeps our focus in the right direction. And then finally he says this. You need to invest in the right direction.

He says, do not lay up for yourselves treasures on Earth now. Why? Why

not? That's where I live. That's where my treasure should be.

And Jesus says, because Earth is a terrible storehouse for the things that you value most. Earthly treasures, like everything else on this planet, decay and disappear. Your investments. Can I. Can we just be honest about my personal retirement fund?

It's been a bad couple years from my retirement. If that's where my hope and my trust is in, I'm in pretty bad shape right now. Earthly treasures, like everything else on this planet, decay and disappear. When I was a kid, I was one of those nerdy kids. I love to read.

I love to read. I would get my money, my basic income. Dad provided me called allowance from doing chores and I would go to the bookstore. Other kids were buying comic books. Other kids were buying race cars.

Other kids were buying baseball cards. I was buying Dell books. I wish I had a picture of them, the Newbery Award winning books. And Dell put out this whole list of these books, children's adolescent reading that won awards. And I won.

I wanted to collect all of them and I just love to read. So I had this whole big collection of books and I would do that thing where you put them all in like gradient color and then I would switch them up and organize them by author and IBN number, all that stuff. I'm a weird person, but I was even weirder when I was young. But about 10 years ago, well, about 20 years ago, dad and mom are moving. They're in the basement.

And they're like, tim, we have all those books. You're using us as cheap storage. But we're moving. We got to do something with these. What do you want to do?

Do you want to give them away? Your nieces and nephews are starting to read. Would you like them to have these books? What do you want to do with them? And I said, ah, I don't know.

They're little kids. They may not appreciate them as much as I, I want them to. They may damage them and they rip the pages.

I want to take care of them.

Where are those books today? Mildewed, moldy, tossed out. Jesus says, do not lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where earth just eats away at it and destroys it. He says, don't give your heart to earthly things. They can be gone almost instantly in the worst case scenarios and then over time just degrade to the point of like, why did we bother with that?

But secondly, don't store them up for yourself. Did you notice that?

Don't store up for yourself these treasures. Philippians says this in Philippians chapter 2, verse 6. He says, in your relationship with each other, when you're in that interpersonal dynamic stuff, you need to be thinking the same way that Jesus thinks.

And here's how Jesus thinks. Verse 6. Jesus being in very nature, God did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. We're familiar with this verse. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking on the very nature of a servant.

Being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death and even death on a cross. There's a lot there that's the entire Gospel summed up right there. But I love this idea that he considered himself nothing and he took on the idea of being a servant. And in Hebrews 2, the writer there says that this attitude of selfless sacrificial generosity brings many sons and daughters to glory. You and I are here because Jesus sacrificially gave generously.

We're enfolded into this plan. So what do we do with this? Well, again, I'm a follower of Jesus, so I want to live like Jesus. I want to have the same mind of Christ. So that means that I too need to be sacrificially generous.

Can we go back to Paul in his letter to his little protege Tim? He said, tim, you need to do good and be rich in good deeds and be generous and be willing to share. So as we are generous, others experience the generosity of God flowing through us. I wish. I wish I had given those books to my nieces and nephew.

Those books I loved could have been loved by them too. And we could sit around at Thanksgiving and Christmas and talk about, oh, Henry Higgins and the mystery of the. I don't know, it's just these fun little island of the Blue Dolphin. Anyone remember that one? Great stories that I could be sharing with people I love.

But instead I said, no, no, no, that's my treasure. I want to keep it for myself. I cannot bring those books back. I can't bring that moment back. But I can live today differently.

I can live understanding that God has a claim to everything I have. And he wants what I have to be invested in work and relationships that last into eternity. Remember this, he says, your heart follows wherever your treasure goes. And so I want my treasure to be heading in a direction that I feel really good about, my heart going, yeah, money is like a cute little puppy, so much fun. But if we don't control it, it will control us.

And if we don't get it under control, it will destroy our house.

I want to manage my money. I don't want my money to manage me. And the key to unwinding that leash that we get pulled around with by money is to practice cheerful generosity. I think you may be like me, you maybe think about money a lot too. And I think that's why Jesus talked about it a lot, because we think about it a lot.

And so I'm trying to practice like some heart checks on this. And so there's some. There's three questions. And I sort of ask myself this on a semi consistent basis. I'm going to ask you guys to ask the same thing.

And if you're really brave, ask your spouse or your friend, someone who knows you well, ask them to answer those questions for you. Am I generally grateful or ungrateful? Am I thankful for what I have? Or do I always look at what I've got and go, eh, that's the first question.

The second question is sort of like it, but it's a little bit different. Am I content? In other words, do I believe that God has given me what I need for my needs today? Am I content? And then the big one, do I share well with others?

I mean, we want our toddlers to play well with others. We want our toddlers to learn to share. Do. Do we share well? And behind this question is this attitude.

Do I trust God to provide for me? If I share what he's given me with others, is he gonna continue to provide for me? And the way we answer these questions can tell us a lot about whether we're walking the dog or the dog is walking us. Now we're gonna enter into a time of communion. Now just reiterate.

God wants us to live like he owns everything. Why? Because he loves us and he wants us to live well. He wants us to live free, unleashed from the stuff that can so easily imprison us and lead us down a dark and selfish path, making us people that we don't want to be. I am not perfect at it.

And that's why community is an important moment for me. Because when I look around I see people who are probably not perfect at it either. Young people, old people, wobbly people, you know who you are. Strong people, cranky people, you know who you are.

Lively, joyful people, addicted people, struggling people, people celebrating good things and people mourning sad things in their life. And we can look at our lives and go, I'm just not good at this following Jesus thing. I have all this stuff going on. And Jesus says, you're not great, you're not perfect at it, but I'm with you and I'm walking with you through it. He doesn't disregard us, he doesn't discard us.

He says, come along, we can do this because we're all raggedy, we're all needy, we're all sometimes grumpy. We all deal with anxiety. We all are a little bit selfish. We all are sometimes grateful. That's a good season.

But we are also always beloved of God. Ephesians says, we are loved with a lavish and generous love. And this is what Paul prays for this church. There he goes. I'm praying, you grateful and generous people, that you will be rooted and established in love, that you may have power together with all the Lord's holy people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

I want you to know how much God loves you and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure. You may have all that you need when it comes to the fullness of God. That's our prayer here, too. We want to live. We want to live in this place of trust.

We want to live knowing that God can take care of us and so we can live like he owns everything. Because he does. Heavenly Father, as we share in this time of communion, where we meditate on your deep and wide love, we are reminded of how you have already provided for us through Jesus. Not just our daily bread, but you have provided Jesus, who through his sacrificial and generous sacrifice on the cross, made provision so that we could be called your children. So here in this moment, as we take the bread and the cup, we rest in the all sufficiency of your provision for us.

We are grateful, we are content. And at least in this moment, we are focused on eternal good things. Help us to live this way 24 7. Help us to love others like you do, with our resources. In Jesus name.

Amen.

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