

“Four-Corners Giving” // Leviticus 19:9–10; Luke 11:34–36 //

November 2023¹

Announcement

Well, it's almost Thanksgiving ... I hope you have some good time with family or friends planned ahead. And you officially have my permission to eat something other than turkey this year, or at least something in addition to turkey. This has become one of my more unpopular hot takes—but I maintain that no true meat-loving male thinks of turkey as his go-to meat of choice; I don't know a single guy who says, “Yeah, for my birthday, I'm getting some guys together and we're going out to eat some TURKEY.” I contend that if you were putting together a meal to display the abundance and generosity of God, you would throw some ribeyes and prime rib on that grill in addition to that turkey. So, you have my official pastoral blessing on that, for whatever that is worth. And a handful of God's people said...

On a more serious note ... I wanted us to take a moment and pray for the ongoing situation in Israel. Like most of you, I've been following with concern and heartbreak the unfolding war between Israel and Hamas. I want to offer four words to guide you as you pray:

1. **Lament:** We lament not only the innocent Israeli lives that were lost in this horrific attack (which is exactly what it was), but all those, particularly civilians, now suffering as casualties and refugees in this conflict. Every life lost is a tragedy as they are people made in God's image.
2. **Peace:** We pray for an end to the violence, and we also pray for justice.
3. **Mostly, #3, Witness:** we pray that God will strengthen the witness of the church there to testify to the Prince of Peace. I love the prophecy that says that through events like these, one day Israel will look with hope on the one whom previously they had pierced. Which leads me to one final word I would associate with this conflict:
4. **Anticipation:** I've had a lot of you ask me what all these events mean in terms of prophecy, and in response I always say two things: **1. It's hard to deny that since the re-formation of the state of Israel in 1948** that something significant is happening on the world stage, something that aligns rather strikingly with how Ezekiel and Daniel and Revelation present the political landscape of the last days. It's almost like we are about to watch a stage play, and all the actors have come out and taken their places on stage and now we're just waiting for the curtain to go up and the play to commence. And it really feels like it could be any day. **But that leads to the second thing I always say:** Jesus said we wouldn't know the day or the hour of his return, and it's unwise to get too deep into the details to try and figure things out. I say that because every 10 years or so something happens and a lot of

¹ Works Consulted: John Mark Comer, “Generosity as a Spiritual Practice,” preached at the Celebration of Generosity Conference, April 2023; Bryan Loritts, sermon on Boaz, delivered at The Summit Church men’s conference, 2022; Eric Mason, “A Supernatural Response to Tragedy,” preached at Epiphany Fellowship, September 10, 2017; Joby Martin, “The Sovereignty of God in Our Provision,” preached at The Church of Eleven22, July 23, 2017; Andrew Wilson, “Why Do You Notice Me, a Foreigner?”, preached at King’s Church London, July 3, 2016; John Rinehart, “The Purpose of Wealth,” preached at the NCF: Impact Conference, October 2019. And others as noted throughout.

people say, “This is it!” and they start overinterpreting events and publishing books. I’ve heard people say recently, “Yeah, well, this one is different.” OK, but they said the same thing in 1967 with the 6-Day War, and then 1988 (*88 Reasons Why Jesus is Coming Back in 1988*, followed up by the sequel, *89 Reasons Why Jesus is Coming Back in 1989*), and 1991 with the Persian Gulf War, and so on. I have all these books in my library. So, yes, watch these events with interest and your Bibles open, but I’d encourage you not to avoid the temptation to overinterpret—and most of all, I admonish you to mind the last thing Jesus said before he left, *“It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put under his own authority. But you will receive power, after the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth.”* That, Church, THAT … not speculation on the end times, is our main job right now. You see, **I may not be sure the exact day or the hour of his return, but I am 100 percent sure that he is coming—and our job is to make sure everyone has a chance to hear and believe before he does.** Amen?

Amen? So, let’s pray …

Introduction

OK—open your Bibles to Leviticus 19—when is the last time you heard a message from LEVITICUS? You’re going to hear one today. So, find it (it’s the third book in the Old Testament) and put your finger there, and then also find Luke 11 (Luke is the third book in the New Testament). We’ll be in both today.

I had three weeks before Thanksgiving, and I wanted to use two of them to share some things on my heart about spiritual warfare. Today I want to introduce something I’m going to call “Four-Corners Giving,” something I hope we’ll return to again and again in our future.

Now, when I say the words “**four corners**,” some of you basketball fans who are my age or up will think about an offensive strategy that **UNC’s legendary coach, Dean Smith**, perfected back before the invention of the shot clock. Basically, UNC would get a lead of two points, then play keep-away for the rest of the game. The downside was that it was pretty boring to watch; the upside was that UNC won a lot of their games with scores like 14–8. UNC fans are still pretty proud of it, and Duke fans bitter.

If you said “four corners” to an ancient Israelite, however, they wouldn’t think about basketball; they would think about instructions God gave them in Leviticus 19 about how they were to harvest their crops.

9 “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge… 10 And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.²

Every Israelite family, except for the Levites, had been assigned a small farm when they took possession of the Promised Land. Almost all of these farms were rectangular, and most grew crops on that

² Cf Deut 24:19–22, “When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20 When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. 21 When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. 22 You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this.”

farm. (SCREEN: THIS IS NOT AN ACTUAL FIELD... AI. And this is the only time AI was used in the writing of this message. At least that's what it told me to say right here.) The command here in Leviticus was twofold: When they were harvesting the crops on their farm, they were not to "glean all the way up to the edges," and second, anything they dropped while harvesting they should leave for the poor to pick up. These corners, these edges, these crops scattered on the ground, God said, were to be left for the poor. In Deuteronomy, where God repeated this command, he went so far as to say these corners BELONGED to the poor.

The concept was as simple as it was profound: Israelites were to share from their abundance with others around them in need, all the while not depriving the poor of the dignity of providing for themselves. (This wasn't a handout; the poor still had to harvest the grain left for them.)

This wasn't, of course, the only way ancient Israelites were commanded to be generous. Israelite generosity was shaped by a NUMBER of laws.

- There was the law of the tithe, the firstfruits—that is, the first tenth of everything Israelites received went directly back to God, usually given to the Temple.
- There were other offerings they gave on top of that; as a nation-state, many of these offerings would be similar to what we now call income tax.
- Then there were specially called offerings for various things; and, on top of that, there was this four-corners bit.

And here was the catch: The law didn't say *how much* of an edge each Israelite was to leave. All it said was, "Don't reap right up to the edge of that corner." So in ancient Israel, you could tell how generous someone was by how large they allowed the corners of their field to be. Some left literally a foot or two. Others left closer to half of their entire field.

This concept shows up most famously in the story of Ruth, where we learn how righteous and good a man Boaz was by the fact that he commanded his harvesters to leave extra large corners in his field and to intentionally leave extra crops scattered on the ground for immigrants and refugees.

Four-Corners Generosity. I want to use this **simple concept** to teach us four things about generosity. This first one is going to surprise you a bit:

1. Traditionally speaking, generosity is public

Think about it: You could literally measure someone's generosity in feet and yards. Everybody could see the size of your corners. People in Israel, like Boaz, got reputations for being generous by having big corners.

Again, I know this is different from what some of you have heard, but throughout our Bibles, we are often encouraged toward public acts of generosity as a way of glorifying God and declaring our solidarity with his mission.

You say, "Yeah, didn't Jesus tell us to do our good works in private?" Yes. In Matthew 6:1, for example, Jesus said: "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." He's telling us that we should not seek the praise and commendation of others in our good works.

BUT, Jesus also said, right before this, **Matthew 5:16**, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

And in Luke 11, specifically talking about generosity, Jesus says, **Luke**

11:33, “No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a closet or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light.”

- By the way, this was the New Testament version of humor. When Jesus said that, people in the crowd would have chuckled and said, “Light a candle and put it in a closet. Good one, Jesus.” You see, in those days, fuel was really expensive, so nobody would light a candle and waste all that fuel. Israelite fathers were always walking through the house saying, “Who left the lamp burning in this room?” What is it about my kids and not being able to turn out a bathroom light, I swear...? If there’s a gene for turning out lights and flushing the toilet, my kids didn’t get it.
- It would be like saying today, when gas is \$4/ gallon, “Nobody buys a diesel engine truck, cranks it up and just leaves it running in the backyard.”
- No, if you’re going to light a candle, Jesus said, you put it out to bring light. And that’s what your generosity is like.

In several places throughout the Bible, we see public displays of generosity.

- Moses and the leaders gave publicly, first, in front of everybody, as a way of inspiring and instructing the people.
- Jesus did many of his most generous works publicly, and he publicly pointed to the woman who gave the two mites, which was basically all she had, as an example of generosity for everyone.
- He praised the woman who broke the alabaster flask of perfume over his feet publicly.
- In the book of Acts, early Christians brought their offerings publicly and laid them down at the feet of the Apostles.

In none of these situations were these people doing this to draw attention to themselves or to compel you to praise them. No, they were putting the worthiness of God and their solidarity with Jesus’ mission on display.

So, you see, we have a **biblical tension**. On the one hand, Jesus said, Don’t display your good works as a way of getting attention for yourself. On the other hand, do your good works as a way of putting the glory and generosity of Jesus on display. We have to live in the tension of both. I should always check my heart motives—am I trying to draw attention to myself or gain praise for myself? God hates that. But I should realize that public displays of generosity are a big way that God motivates other people to give., too.

I’ve shared with you how I learned generosity from observing my mom and dad be generous. Dad was very open with our family about what we gave—or rather, I should say, how he gave on our behalf. I had no say in the matter. I actually had other plans for the money he was giving away.

Over the years, I’ve tried to tell you about our own family’s habits of generosity—not as a way of getting you to admire me (contrary to what I said last week), but hopefully to serve as a model for you. When my wife and I were just getting started, both of us living on one teacher’s salary, plus \$18K I earned working part time here, we gave 10 percent—what the Bible calls a “tithe”—off the gross. It was hard sometimes. But God always blessed us, and over the years as God increased our income, we’ve raised that percentage, and gotten up close to 20 percent during most years. There are books I’ve written of which we’ve given 100 percent of what we made on it back to the ministry; others we’ve given up to 20 and 30 percent. Again, I don’t tell you that so you will admire me (contrary to what I said last week); I tell you that because I do want to be an example to you that life is about leveraging what you have for Jesus. Investing in his mission.

As a church, we want to be public about how big our corners are. Here at The Summit Church:

- **We give an automatic 17.3 percent** of all we bring in to missions outside the church, so it’s not paying for ministries or facilities for

things that benefit us. This year, that 17.3% will amount to more than \$6M going directly into missions.³ That's a percentage we have increased incrementally over the years, and hope to increase more in years to come.

- Over a million of those dollars is sent to domestic church planters and partners (such as our Summit Collaborative churches).
- More than half a million goes directly to the community, both to individuals in need and our partners who are ministering directly in the community, among the homeless, the orphan, the prisoner, the unwed mother and the high school drop-outs.
- \$825,000 was sent directly to international partners—our international church plants and missionaries and missions organizations like the IMB.
- In addition to that, we give about \$900,000 to what we call the Cooperative Program, which funds disaster relief, the IMB, the NAMB, and theological education all over the world.

We want to be public about that as a way of saying we are committed to Jesus' mission all over the world!

Traditionally speaking, generosity is public. In those days, you could literally measure a person's generosity in feet and yards. It's not that easy to do this today, so I want you to do a thought experiment with me, OK?

What if everyone could see, right now, the level of your generosity measured like that? How would that make you feel? If there was a chart up here with your name and your generosity percentage attached; or you walked around with a little name tag that had your generosity percentage under it. Would you probably be more generous?

³ Exact figures to the estimates in this bullet point and those below: (\$6,072,878; \$1,052,000; \$515,000; \$895,000)

To be clear, I'm not instituting this in our church. You're not going to come in next week and find a name tag with how much you gave. But I think it's a good thought experiment for you. How would you feel if people could see your generosity the way that people in those days could see it with their neighbors?

And let me give you a challenge to that end—we're not going to put up anybody's percentage publicly, but what if you made yourself accountable to someone outside of your family in regards to your generosity? Listen, that is gutsy ... but I have a handful of friends who know exactly how much I give every year compared to how much I make. They see it all every year, and they can see if I am getting materialistic or stingy. It's not many people, but it's a few. I would challenge you to do the same.

And if you're sitting there thinking, "I would NEVER do that!" maybe you should ask yourself why that is.

2. God wanted his people to live with an *abundance* mentality

The whole premise of this command is that God provided his people with more than enough.

Biblically, there are two ways to look at the world: **You can look at it through the lens of scarcity.** That is, there's not enough to go around; life is a zero-sum—whatever you get, I can't have, so I need to get all I can before you get it and sit on it because there's only a fixed amount in the world.

The other way to look at the world is through the lens of abundance: That is, God has blessed our world with multiplying abundance, and there's more than enough to go around, and when you give things away, God actually multiplies it.

The Bible frequently contrasts these 2 ways of looking at the world, and commands the abundance mentality. **For example:** (I love this verse): **Proverbs 11:24–25:** “One gives freely, yet grows all the richer (abundance mentality!); another withholds what he should give (scarcity), and only suffers want. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.”

Or, again, **look at Luke 11 there**, Jesus said, vs [34]: Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness.

- **John Mark Comer** says to our modern ear, this verse sounds really cryptic, but it's not cryptic at all; a healthy eye was a figure of speech in Jesus' day; it just meant the lens through which you saw the world.
- The Greek word for “healthy” here implies generous; the Greek word for “unhealthy” here implies stingy.
- You could almost read Jesus's words as **When your eye is generous, your whole body is full of light, but when it is stingy, your body is full of darkness.**

Again, an “abundance mentality” or “scarcity mentality.”

- If you live with an **abundance mentality**, you see God as a generous host—there's enough for everyone, and all of life as a gift. As a result, you live with gratitude toward God and generosity toward your neighbor.
- **But if you have a scarcity mentality**, all you see is a world of lack; the world is overpopulated, there's not enough to go around, it's a zero-sum game. As a result, you are blind to those around you in need because your vision is focused on all that you don't have and all that you still want.

Jesus says that whichever of these two viewpoints you have will shape your whole life! [35] Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. [36] If then your whole body is full of light, having no part

dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light.”

- A generous eye will fill your whole light with life, and joy. A stingy eye will fill your whole life with darkness and unhappiness.
- We often talk about Jesus bringing an upside-down kingdom, and one of the most upside-down things Jesus said was in relation to money. **He said**, “It is more blessed to give than receive.” The word “blessed” in Greek is “makarios,” and it literally means happy. Literally: “There is more happiness in giving than in receiving.” We think it is happier to buy and possess than to give away and lose.
- **But, ALL SORTS of social science research now has shown that—shocker—Jesus was RIGHT.** In their book *The Paradox of Generosity*, sociologists Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson write, “People rightly say that money cannot buy happiness. But money and happiness are still related in a curious way. Happiness can be the result, not of spending more money on oneself, but rather of giving money away to others … that data examined here show this to be not simply a nice idea, but a social-scientific fact.”

Neuroscientists tell us that when we give, it stimulates the same dopamine release in the brain as when you win a game, eat a really good meal, listen to a favorite song, have sex, or win an award—generosity causes your body to well up with feelings of happiness.

It's like **Ronald Rolheiser** says: “When you act like God, you get to feel like God.”

So, the Western formula of “more money = more happiness” is simply not true. Rather, the Jesus formula of “more generosity = more happiness” is the true pathway to joy. Maybe, by the way, that's why Jesus taught so much about money. Scholars estimate that 25 percent of Jesus' teachings have to do with money on some level. Imagine if every fourth teaching at our church was on generosity. You would likely find another church very fast.

But what if the reason Jesus taught on it so much was not because he needed it (in fact, that we know of, he never took up an offering or raised a salary); what if the reason he taught on it so much was he knew it was the gateway to joy in your life? What if it was true that generosity was not something that Jesus so much wanted from you, but something he wanted for you? What if you see the world through the eye of "When you act like God, you get to feel like God," and God wants that FOR YOU?

My point is this: Jesus said, "You don't need to just change your generosity habits; you need to change how you look at the world." Sometimes we get so focused on changing our behavior and our habits that we fail to address the viewpoint behind them that drives those habits. If you look at the world through the lens of generosity and abundance, Jesus says, you'll naturally become generous. You wouldn't need a series on generosity to become generous; it would be as natural as giving your kids a smile in the morning. And, on the flip side, if you are not naturally generous now, if it's hard for you (and it is for most of us), you have an "eye" problem that is filling your whole life with darkness.

I almost called this message, "**Generous eye for the stingy guy.**" But our production team shot it down.

"One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered."

The third observation is a familiar one for us at The Summit Church...

3. God gives more to some for the purpose of sharing with those who have less

The Israelites were never supposed to look at what God gave them as belonging entirely to them. **Some of it—a significant part of it, one of each of the four corners—belonged to the poor.** A significant part of that field—portions of all four corners—were to be considered *the property* of the poor. In Deuteronomy, in fact, where this command is repeated, it literally says, "Do not pick the forgotten sheaf, the remaining olives and grapes, *they belong to the alien, orphan, and widow*" (Deuteronomy 24:20). To withhold it from them was theft.⁴

There is an assumption behind this principle, and it's one that is very countercultural for us—and that is that you are not the owner of your stuff, but what the Bible calls a "steward." When you're the owner of something, it's yours to do with what you want. But if you're the steward, then it belongs to someone else and you are responsible to execute their will regarding it. If you believe the Bible at all, then all of your money, not just 10 percent of it, belongs to God. You're just the steward of it. Which means you are responsible to ask him what he wants you to do with all of it.

I clarify this because, you see, when I was younger, and my parents were teaching me to tithe, I'd put my little 10 percent in a jar to take to church, and I used to think that after I gave that 10 percent, the 90 percent was mine, free and clear. I had paid my God tax and I could do whatever I wanted to with the rest. But later, when I learned the principle of the steward, I learned that all of it was God's. Sure, I gave a minimum of 10 percent off the top to the church, but really for all of it I was to say, "God, what do you want me to do with this?"

In reality, God owned the whole field. And when you keep what God intended for you to use to bless the poor, he considers it stealing.

Which is why the Bible often talks about generosity to the poor in terms of "justice," not generosity. Justice is giving someone what they deserve. Generosity, or grace, is giving them something they don't

⁴ Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 261.

deserve. For most of us in the West, we think that if I legally own something, I don't owe it to anyone else. And if I choose to give some of my money to them, that's generosity. It's grace. And legally, that's true. (The Bible doesn't teach political communism in any shape, form, or fashion.)

But, ah—in a more profound sense, if God is the real owner of all my money (and I'm just the steward), and he has declared that some of it belongs to the poor, and I fail to give it to them, **then now that has become a matter of justice between me and God.** In withholding my income from the poor, I have robbed them of what God intended for them.

You say, "I still don't get that." OK, say you were the CEO of Feed the Children, and someone gave you a \$1 million gift to "feed the children." But instead, you kept it in your bank account and sat on it—used it to upgrade your house or your offices. Someone could rightfully say to you, "You are stealing from the children. That is unjust." And if you say, "How so?", they could say, "You're taking something intended for the children and holding onto it yourself." People leading these organizations are stewards. They're responsible for using that money in very specific ways. The same is true for us as God's stewards.

Look—let me say something very serious. Some of us are going to stand before God one day, having never broken a single American law in regards to money. We came by all of it legally and ethically, we paid all our taxes, and God will say to us, "You are an unfaithful servant; you robbed my people." And we will say, "How did we rob you?" And he will say, "By failing to direct the resources I gave you to the people for whom I gave them to you. You harvested your field to the margins and kept all of it for yourself, and in so doing stole from the poor."

4. Some days you distribute generosity, other days you need it

If you ever fly over Israel (*and maybe some of you will do that one day—by the way, I know a few of you may be wondering, "What's the deal with that trip next June?" We're working with the agency and they have counseled that it's wisest that we wait until the end of January to make the call. Could you hold on until then? We will update you as soon as we can.*)—but, as I said earlier, if you fly over certain parts of Israel, you can look down at dozens and dozens of square fields, all side by side; individual farms owned by different families.

A friend of mine was with the biblical scholar Ray Vander Laan, and he pointed out that from the air you could see that different fields, sometimes side by side, give different yields. One field one year might be rich and full, while the one right next to it is sparse and barren; and the next year it could be reversed.

Now, in some belief systems, they'd interpret that as God's cursing. "God's mad at you this year!" But that's not how God taught Israel to think. He wanted them to realize that in his sovereignty, he sometimes blesses me with a lot of something that you need; and sometimes he blesses you with a lot of something I need.

God's goal for his people was for them to be interdependent on each other—because interdependence on each other is really a way of being dependent on him. God didn't want anybody to be totally independent. **It's like Psalm 72 says,** "*Lean on me when you're not strong. And I'll be your friend, I'll help you carry on. For it won't be long till I'm gonna need somebody to lean on.*" Just kidding. That's not a psalm. It's a 1980s Bill Withers song. And a great movie.

Here's the thing, though: As an American, you hate that. You might love the song, but you hate the concept—at least you hate living it. Our whole goal, especially in regards to finance, is independence. Some of you have spent your whole life trying to get yourself into a place where you don't need anything from anybody.

(And certainly it can be wise to structure your savings so that you are not a burden on anybody. But that whole posture—I don't need anything from anybody—that's not a Christlike posture. If anything, it's more of a demonic one.)

And here's the deal: Even if you get your savings locked away so you never need anybody else financially, at some point you're going to have a need; it could be a spiritual need, an emotional need, whatever. But you're going to need generosity.

- I can't tell you **how many wealthy people** I've sat with whose marriages or families are falling apart. And they are desperate for help and all their money can't fix anything. And God's promise is: To those who are generous, I will be generous.

Again, **Proverbs 11:25:** "Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered." That's not just talking about money! You might need to be watered with something besides money. If you have a generous spirit with whatever God gave you, he'll be generous with you.

Here's a similar promise: **Proverbs 21:13** "Whoever shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will call and not be answered."

In Romans 15, Paul told the Romans: "You had a spiritual need and these Jewish believers over here gave to you out of their abundance; so now that they have a physical need, you should share with them."

The point is: We all end up needy at some point. And if you've given yourself to water others, you will yourself *be watered*.... . . . *but if you've shut your ear to the cry of the poor, you will call and not be answered.*

For the Christian, of course, there is another important dimension with this. You see, if you are a Christian, it's because you came to a point where you realized there was nothing you could do to save

yourself; all your righteousness before God was like a filthy, putrid, diseased rag, and you had to throw yourselves entirely on God's grace and plead his mercy and receive Jesus' extravagantly generous offer to save you. Our Christian life started through an act of extravagant generosity, and that should reshape everything about our lives going forward.

Interestingly, in my study this week, I learned something about this four-corner offering I didn't know. Turns out, lots of Israel's pagan, Canaanite neighbors also practiced leaving the corners untended. But it was not for generosity to the poor. It was an offering to the gods to try and get their favor, to try and get him to bless them. When God gave Israel this instruction, he reversed all that. In fact, when he re-explained this command in Deuteronomy 24:22, he said, "You were a slave and I delivered you and now I have promised to bless you. So, in response, I want you to do this for the poor."

For people who don't know God, they give in order to get the blessing of God. For people who have experienced the gospel, they give because they are already sure of it. The gospel compels good works, but in a totally different way than other religions: We don't give to be accepted by God or in order to gain his favor; we give because we have been accepted by God and are already assured of his favor.

God's not just after obedience, you see; he's after a whole new kind of obedience. An obedience that comes from desire. He wants you to be generous not because you want something from God, or because God threatens to punish you if you don't, but because you have a generous heart like his. And he creates that new heart in you showing you the extravagant generosity of God toward you. You were a beggar—with no food, no provision, and Jesus gave not just the corners of his field, he gave the whole thing.

I haven't told this story in a while: When Kharis was really young, one of her favorite things was a balloon ... she'd get a balloon and she'd

just carry it around everywhere. She'd want to take it to bed. So for one of her birthdays I thought it would be cool to just cover the whole kitchen in balloons ... so I spent 1.5 hours blowing up balloons. The whole floor was covered. Kharis walked in (I was over in the corner, all excited to see how she'd react), and she picked up one of the balloons and dropped it and said, "Daddy, what's wrong with these balloons? They won't float." Now, I was scrambling. So, I said, "Well, these balloons are better for games, we can play, 'See who can keep the balloon afloat the longest by hitting it upward,'" and I started to smack one of the balloons up and chase it around. She was utterly unimpressed. But I want to use those two different types of balloons with you as a metaphor for two different ways we try to compel change in behaviors like generosity. First, there's the smacking method. You can keep a balloon filled with your breath afloat by smacking it continually.

And for many of you, this is how you are with generosity. I play the role of smacker. You come in here and once every few months I smack you on generosity, so you soar into the air; you throw your lunch money into the offering and make a few modest changes in your life—you stop supersizing your meal at McDonald's and leave out the pumps of salted caramel syrup in your Starbucks drink—but then that fades and you sink back down to your old, low, lack-of-generosity habits, until next year when I smack you again and you start giving ... and this is our relationship. No wonder when you see me in the grocery store you act like you didn't see me. Nobody wants to be around someone who smacks them all the time. I see you.

There's another way to get a balloon to float—fill it with helium and it will float naturally, all the time, no smacking required.

The gospel is the helium that fills our hearts so that we soar in generosity, no smacking required. I shouldn't need a series on generosity to motivate me to be generous. I should only have to remember the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ ... he gave me not just

the corners of his field, he offered the whole thing so that any time I needed to, I could come boldly into the fields of grace and find help in my time of need, for whatever I need. Jesus didn't just tithe his blood; he poured out all of it.

You've heard of the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Christians actually live by the Platinum Rule: "Do unto others as Jesus has done to you." Remember the grace ... and do the same for others.

So, we've been building up to this big question: How big are your corners? God never told them how big their corners had to be; he let them decide.

As I said at the beginning, in the Old Testament, their giving was shaped by a number of laws. The tithe law; this four corners law. **In the New Testament, all these giving laws go away as laws, but the principles remain.**

- We should give the firstfruits of what God gives to us back to him, and 1/10 is a great place to start with that.
- And beyond that, we ought to have corners of **generosity we should seek to grow in response to the generosity of Jesus.**

So, here's the question I want to leave you with: How big are your corners right now? How can you grow them next year?

Fill in this blank: "God is calling me right now to ____."

All of you, think on this, and then I want you in a moment to covenant it to God. For some you may put in the blank:

- **Start giving:** Maybe you've never given in any significant way before ... I want to challenge you to start.
 - And I don't just mean throw your lunch money in the buckets today on your way out.

- No, make this a monthly habit. That's why my family does it as a recurring gift. We want the first and best to go to God at the first of the month. For several years now we have made it our largest monthly expense. That's easy to set up on our website, or through our app, or just by texting 33933.
- By the way, I always say this: If you feel manipulated, give somewhere else...
- Here's something else you may write down. God is calling me right now to... **Start a tithe**... commit to give the firstfruits, the first 10 percent, back to God
 - You say, "Pastor, I can't." Another pastor, Randy Alcorn, says that when people always say that to him, he responds with, "OK, listen, if for whatever reason your salary got reduced next year by 10 percent, would you die?" If not, then the reason is not that you can't, but you won't, and maybe it's because you don't trust God to keep his promise.
 - The Bible teaches over and over: Give to God your first and your best and watch him bless it! Those who give God their firstfruits have abundance!
 - So, that's my challenge. Start a tithe to your local church.
 - One of the things we do at this church is try to structure our budget so that it can be a one-stop giving option. You see, when you give to this church, you are supporting not only the blessing of your neighbors with the word of God, and toward ministry to kids and teens, and toward reaching college students, and toward global missions, you are also giving to child poverty relief work and local outreach and mercy ministry. Ministry to single moms and shut-ins and the homeless and to recovering prisoners. All those millions of dollars I went through at the beginning. We set aside money for benevolence funds to try and meet needs around us where we can. All that is built into our budget so that we can be, for many of you, a one-stop place for giving.
 - I'm not saying this church should be the only thing you give to. I think that first 10 percent of your income, at minimum,

should (I think that's the New Testament pattern), but beyond that, you should follow the Holy Spirit. My wife and I give to a few other things beyond our giving to this church. But my point is we have striven to set up our budget so it really could be, for some of you, a one-stop place for giving.

- So, if you are not yet giving a tithe, I challenge you to start there.
- Or here's what you might do now: **Grow my corner**: If you're already at that 10 percent mark, strive this year to go to 12 percent. Or 15 percent. Or 30 percent. Or 50 percent. Or 90 percent. I know some people whom God has blessed with abundance and now they strive to be what I've heard called "reverse tithers."
- **Create margin (so I can meet needs around me)**. One of the ways needs get met in our church is through our small groups. Members of a small group will find out about a need in the life of someone in that group, or in the life of someone that their group knows about, and they come together to meet that need. I hear stories about that in this church ALL. THE. TIME. My small group has done that several times.
 - To participate in that, though, you have to have margin in your finances. A portion of your income "unclaimed," so that you can give it to the poor whenever they need it.
 - Early on, when we were making next to nothing, Veronica built \$100 into our budget to respond to needs when we saw them. It was always fun talking about who we got to give it to.

Maybe it's an act of obedience ... fostering. Giving your life away to serve overseas on one of our mission teams.

Whatever it is, mentally put it in the blank and then ACT on it. Later on this week you'll get a reminder ... I want you right now, at all campuses to stand, and I want us to pray over this together.

Stand at all campuses ... What did God put in your heart in response to that question? (start giving; start a tithe; grow your corner; create margin).

- Will you now say, right now, with head bowed, "God, by your help, I'm going to do this"?
- Maybe you're not sure exactly yet what it should be, but you're going to look at your finances this week or talk about it with your spouse tonight.
- If so, right now, will you say to God, "God, I promise you that I'm going to look into this and talk about it later today. Will you lead me by your Spirit as I do that? And I covenant with you that when you reveal it to me, if you'll give me the strength and power, whatever you reveal to me, I'll obey." Will you say that? (God may tell some of you to donate your talents by going to live on the mission field!)

Prayer

Missional Blessing: Summit, you have been blessed to be a blessing. I commend you to go and bless as you have been blessed. You, Summit Church, are blessed, and you are SENT.