

Give Extravagantly: The Joy of Financial Power Encounters

In December 2008 at the onething conference, I gave a call for what I call the Sacred Charge. Most of you are familiar with it, but for those who are new with us: 5,000 young adults came forward and made a seven-fold commitment for the next several years of their life. I am working through each one of those seven commitments and giving a message on each one. Tonight, it is the sixth one, called “Giving Extravagantly.” This was one of the commitments that was made: that they would give extravagantly. They would experience the joy of what I call financial power encounters.

THE CALL TO EXTRAVAGANCE

What I mean by a power encounter is that when we give financially, the Lord answers our giving in a way that corresponds to the very number that we gave, and it excites our spirit. It wows us. It woos us and it really touches us. I am going to share a few stories from my life, particularly in my late teens and early twenties, because most of you are that age. Back in my twenties, I was struggling to sow small amounts of money into the kingdom, and then, I was able to watch how the Lord returned it again with a corresponding number. I would give a specific number, and God would give back the exact same number. I would look up to heaven and say, “Wow! You are looking at me. You care. You notice.” It was so exciting that I wanted to do it more and more.

Giving extravagantly and experiencing His blessings is what I call financial power encounters; these encounters really stimulate and motivate us to go forward with a vibrant spirituality. I mean, you take the realm of money out of the equation, and you lose a lot of the motivation in your spiritual life. A lot of folks think of loving Jesus as just reading the Bible and witnessing to people.

But there is a realm in finances that dynamically affects our spirituality, our spiritual growth—even our motivation and encouragement. Malachi 3:10: “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.” I am just going to spend a moment on this. This is the main verse in the Scripture on tithing.

Because when I talk about giving extravagantly, I am talking about going above and beyond tithing; however, I understand that there are a number of folks who do not even understand the foundations about tithing. Although there are a few of you who might not understand tithing, I will just take two minutes on this.

WE CANNOT AFFORD NOT TO TITHE

Tithing is Christianity 101. Tithing is giving 10 percent of your income; this is where we begin as new believers. That is not the ceiling. That is the beginning place, and that is because a new believer does not quite know what to do in the realm of money.

The Lord says, “I will give you a launching pad and a beginning place. You give me 10 percent of your money, and I will bless you in a way that will excite you. You will find out that by giving 10 percent of it away to Me, that only leaves you with 90 percent—nine out of ten equals nine tenths left. You keep 90 percent, and you give 10 percent to Me. You will find out that you will have more buying power with the 90 percent. Watch and see how you will have more when you give Me the 10 percent than when you have the whole 100 percent and did not give it to Me. It is really true. You will have more buying power with 90 percent with the blessing of God

because the Lord will add to it. You will have more ability in your money in terms of buying power than 100 percent without the blessing of the Lord.

Let's look at the verse: the foundational verse, in Malachi 3:10. It says to bring the entire tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in God's house. It is as if the Lord says, "Test Me, try Me." This is the only place in the Bible where we are commanded to test the Lord. I mean we are actually told not to test the Lord except in this one area. So that is exciting because we can push the envelope, and see what God will do. The Lord says to test Him and see if He will not open up the windows of heaven. Financially, He is talking about pouring out financial blessing so that you will not have room to receive it all.

GOD GIVES YOU 100 PERCENT OF YOUR MONEY, AND YOU GIVE HIM 10 PERCENT BACK

It was in my early days in the Lord when I said, "I want to do this. I want to push this. I want to see where You are going in this." Now, I like what Billy Humphrey says, I just got this quote today from him: "God gives you 100 percent of your money. God gives you the hundred dollars you have, and you give Him the 10 percent, which is ten dollars back to Him." I mean He gave you the hundred dollars anyway. It is all His. It is as if God said, "Here is what tithing is: I give you the 100 percent, you give 10 percent back, and we will call it even."

If you do not give the 10 percent back, God will still keep giving money to you anyway. However, if you give the 10 percent back, God will multiply the money that we give. I mean it is His anyway. It is not a problem.

CAUSE AND EFFECT DYNAMIC IN GIVING FINANCIALLY

There is a cause and effect dynamic in giving. It is as if the Lord says, "Test Me. Try Me, and see if I will not answer you specifically." What I mean by a cause and effect relationship: we give a certain amount, and the Lord then returns it in a way where we could make the connection that He is watching us. When the Lord returns money back to us, the exciting part is not just that we received some money from God. I mean that is neat, but the exciting part is that His eyes are on us. He is watching. He cares. He loves us. He wants to be involved with us. That is the exciting part.

HUDSON TAYLOR: MISSIONARY TO CHINA WHO GAVE EXTRAVAGANTLY

Now, I remember my early beginning; I was about eighteen years old, and I had read three biographies on my first Christian hero, who was Hudson Taylor. It is about in the 1850s. He was a medical doctor in England, and he went to China, and invested many decades of his life in China. I was so enthralled by the biography of Hudson Taylor that I read all three of them. I remember how I used to tell all of my friends about Hudson Taylor; I wanted to be Hudson Taylor.

One of the things that Hudson Taylor did is that he would give money. He would live in simplicity, and he would give. He could have made a lot of money if he just stayed in England as a physician. So I remember when I was eighteen years old, I said, "I am going to be like J. Hudson Taylor. I am going to have the kind of faith and dedication this man had." I want to encourage you to read biographies. Read biographies of men and women who have had unusual dedication and who had a reach in their spirit for a close walk with God.

It will inspire you, and it will stir up your holy imagination to where you can go in your relationship with God. Now one thing that J. Hudson Taylor did was he would give money, and he would not tell anybody that he gave the money. He would have a need, and he would keep it quiet. I think it is OK to tell people your needs, but

sometimes if you do not tell people your needs, it is even more dynamic when the Lord answers because you know how nobody else knew.

When I was eighteen years old, we were leading a bunch of people to the Lord, and we realized that none of them had Bibles. I decided to give a couple hundred Bibles—little New Testament paperbacks; I was going to give them to everyone we led to the Lord. We were leading many people to the Lord. So, I was excited. I ordered a couple hundred Bibles, and the price for the Bibles was just a little bit more than \$301. I remember vividly. At that time, I was making about \$30 dollars a week, so that \$300 was a lot of money to me. It was ten times more than my weekly income. I had never stepped out on something like this because I was just giving \$300 to the kingdom.

I did not have it, but I said, “Lord, I am going to go get it.” So, I ordered the Bibles, and I was all excited. I started telling all these new believers that I had a Bible coming for them. They were all excited. Well, the fateful day came. It was a Saturday. The Bibles were due. They came in at noon. I had zero money. I had never received money from the Lord in a way like this. This was the first time ever. Well, I remember reading my Hudson Taylor stories, and he would not tell people his needs. Again, I do not think it is wrong to tell people your needs.

I would say, “OK. I am going to be like him.” I was really sweating it out because it was only an hour or two. It was about 11 o’clock and getting onto the last hour before I was supposed to pick these Bibles up. I still had no money, but then a check was handed to me.

The check that was given to me, and I was absolutely blown away, was \$301.25 dollars. I owed \$301.24. I mean it was exactly \$301.25! How could anybody have guessed that number? Well, I drove down to get the Bibles. I was so excited at this point because now I had avoided the embarrassment of not having any money. I was glad to avoid that. So I drove down saying, “God, Your eyes are on Me. You are watching Me. You care. Wow.” Where will this thing go? Now, in the next couple of years that sort of thing happened—maybe ten or twenty more times. It is not like I have put them all on a list, but it happened a bunch of times. So much so that my confidence that God was watching me in the realm of money began to grow, and it was exciting. I mean if I had never experienced that season of my life—gone where I was challenged and encouraged in the realm of money—a significant part of my spiritual life would be gone.

THERE IS GREAT JOY IN AWARENESS THAT GOD’S EYES ARE ON US WITH PLEASURE

The reason I say that is because many believers who love Jesus do not venture out, and they do not obey Him in this area. I am saying that they are missing a huge part of the drama, and the excitement of that part of their journey with God.

Some months later after that summer with the Bibles, it was the winter, and I was still about eighteen years old. I was going to take a youth group ski trip to Colorado. There were a few junior high girls who said that they wanted to go, but did not have money. I said, “OK. That Bible thing worked with \$300,” so I committed to paying for them. It ended up that I committed to \$500 to pay for several of them. I mean to pay their bill. I did not have \$500. I was making only \$30 a week, and I thought, “Hey! The Bible thing worked. Let’s see. Let’s see how this thing goes.” So I got there. We were going to drive all night on a Thursday night. Thursday morning, I had no money.

THE FIVE UNTIL TWELVE DIMENSION

It is this five until twelve dimension that God loves. He loves to wait until five until twelve, and then God shows up. So I had been waiting for a month or two after I had made the commitment, and now it was Thursday morning on the day when we were to be leaving that night. The van went to get all packed to go, and I received a check in the mail—a stunning check—\$250. I had never ever received \$250 in that kind of way.

Wow. Well I got the \$301, but that was a little different situation. But, then I received \$250 just completely out of the blue. No thought of anybody to give it to me. I got it in the mail. I said, “Wow! I am halfway there.” So it was about seven o’clock at night. We were packing up the van at my house. I was still \$250 short.

Remember that I was eighteen years old. I made \$30 a week. That \$250 was a huge amount of money. I mean, that was a couple months’ worth of income. We were about to get into the van. These young junior high girls had no idea that I had no money. We were going to get there soon, and I thought that maybe in order to pay for the trip, I might have to do dishes at the ski lodge. I did not know what I was going to do, but I was getting ready to leave, when a guy came over to our house, a friend of the family, and he was me with a van full of junior high kids.

He said, “Hey.” He said, “That is interesting. That is good that you are doing this youth work.” He was not even a believer. He said, “Let me help you.” He pulled out money and gave me \$250. I mean the exact amount. I was driving all night saying, “I love You, God. You love me. I love You. You know me. I know You. Oh where is this thing going to go?” The girls never even knew that I just dodged a bullet.

TESTIMONIES OF FINANCIAL BREAKTHROUGH WITH DIANE

A few years—I am just telling you some personal stories with small amounts of money because those amounts were huge at that time due to my age. I am telling it because most of you in the room are in your late teens and early twenties, and you can relate to those amounts of money. I mean those numbers are real, and the Lord takes us wherever we are at that amount. He will work with us. Now, a few years go by. Now, I am twenty-two years old. I get married to this really wonderful young woman named Diane.

That was thirty-two years ago. Now I am six years old in the Lord, I am like really a patriarch to her. She is only six months old in the Lord. So she does not know all the Bible stories. So, I am telling her ten or twenty of my stories, and she is excited saying, “Wow. You mean you really received this amount and that amount?”

I said, “Yes, it was amazing! I told nobody, and God gave me the exact amount.” It was like a kiss from heaven. Each time I looked up, I had the realization that God was looking at me and watching me. The Lord said it right here in Malachi 3:10: “Test Me. Try Me. See if I will not meet you.”

Diane says, “Well, I am going to tell you something that I have not told you yet.” We had a short engagement, so she did not really have time to tell me. She said, “I have \$5,000 saved up from when I was fifteen years old to twenty-one years old— \$5,000.”

I do not think I had ever seen \$5,000 at that time. I mean, that was mine and in my hand. I said, “Really?”

She said, “Yes.”

I said, “OK. Here is what I would like to do with your \$5,000 dollars. We are going to get married in a couple weeks. I would like to start off our marriage by sowing the whole \$5,000 to missions.”

She said, “Ha ha! That’s neat.”

I said, “No.” I remember the look in her face! She was saying yes. I mean it is a big reach from \$500 in the ski trip to \$5,000. I have never had \$5,000. But I felt this inspiration about her money. But she said, “Yes. Let’s do it.” You know, it took her a minute to think about it, and then she said, “Let’s do it.”

WE SOWED \$5,000 AND REAPED \$55,000

I wanted to have my own stories. Diane said, “The only thing I ask you to do is do not tell my dad until after we are married.” Well, we gave the \$5,000 away. I am just a young pastor at twenty-two years old. Two and a half years later, I we had no money for a down payment on a house. We end up buying in a house, and this house that we bought went from residential to commercial. The zoning of that area changed, and a commercial business came to me and said, I want to buy your house. I need it.” We made \$55,000 profit.

So I said to Diane, “The \$5,000 that you gave two and a half years ago, look what God did: here is \$55,000 from God! He gave it back to you.” Again, the fact that the numbers were corresponding was so touching, though they do not have to correspond. I would have taken \$60,000 instead in a heartbeat. The numbers do not have to correspond with us, but often they do. Those \$301 dollars that the Lord wanted me to have made me say, “Wow. There is not a chance this could be an accident!” The \$500 dollars came exactly at five until twelve.

WE SOWED THE \$55,000

We gave part of the \$55,000 to my brother Pat, who has now gone to be with the Lord. But then, Diane and I decided to give it all away again.

I said, “Let’s do it. Let’s throw the ball back in God’s court because God keeps throwing it back to us with a bigger number.”

I said, “Let’s see how big this number can get over the next couple of decades.”

Every time that the Lord would bless us, we would give it right back to Him, and the Lord would say something to this affect: “Well, if you are going to be that way about it, I am going to put a zero on it.”

The Lord did not say it exactly that way, but there are power encounters that mark our spirit. Now, I have individual ones like all of us have individual ones; but being in leadership in the ministry for over thirty years, I have many corporate ones as well, where we gave an unusual amount above our ability to give, and the Lord gives us a number. He would answer in such a clear way that it is just remarkable. I would not have time to tell all the stories. There are many stories.

I remember one story right after I had just moved to Kansas City. I was twenty-seven years old. Again, I am telling you my journey because really what I am talking about is your journey. I am talking to you about you. I want you to visualize you doing this. That is why I am telling you this story and just to be truthful, there are a number of times it did not work. Just to be honest: there were many times I believed God for money, and the money did not come in. I am going to give \$10,000, but it did not come. Well, there you have it. It did not make

the testimony tape, but there are some of those too. I just want to be honest about it and straightforward. It is not like if you tithe everything, everything you touch will turn to gold, but over the years, particularly as one year leads to ten, a decade leads to two and to three, you look back over it, and there are those times where God highlights and gives you these experiences that stick out. They become an inspiration when you look back over the years.

EACH ONE OF US IS DEVELOPING OUR OWN SECRET HISTORY IN GOD

Each one of us is developing our personal secret history in God. Every one of you has a secret history in God. What I mean by a secret history: you and God have a dialogue, or a conversation. You are going on a journey in your heart with Him that no one else fully understands. Maybe a few people understand a little bit of it, but it is your heart responding to God, and His heart responds to you.

He writes that history in His book, and you are developing a history in God in your prayer life. You are developing a history in God in your secret obedience. I mean the painful decisions that you are making to obey God, nobody really understands. That is your history in God. But, your history in God also includes finances. The Lord keeps His accounting books in heaven up to date. He knows every single time you have ever given because you trusted Him. You obeyed Him; again, when you begin to commit yourself to give extravagantly—not just the tithe. That is Christianity 101. I am talking about above and beyond. As you commit yourself to that, it does not mean all your financial problems will go away. However, when you look back ten or twenty years, you will see those punctuation moments, and those exclamation points from heaven where the Lord broke in and helped you.

You will see the water level when it is all said and done. Your economic water level will be significantly different and better because you obeyed the Lord over the decades. As forerunners, we want to pray daily, or read the Scripture, serve diligently, and to live holy in all the seven commitments.

DEVELOPING A HISTORY IN GOD IN ALL ARENAS OF OUR LIFE

We want a history in God in the realm of money and other areas beyond money. Well, anyway, it was in Kansas City; it was our first year here or so. I talked to a lady on the phone, and she needed \$550. She had an urgent need. Our salary at that time was probably about \$500 a week. So it is like a week's salary, a little bit more than that. I talk to my wife, and she says, "OK, let's do it."

I say, "I want to give it to this lady. Let's help her—because it was a special situation. We did not have it to give, because after many years we found that at the end of each month over several decades, we would have \$50 left, not \$50 or \$5,000. We would just pay our bills and say, "Thank You, Lord." We committed to live simply although I do believe in savings. I did not save, although I do believe in it. It is biblical to save, but we were in that place where we just kept letting go of our money, though I do believe in the biblical principle of saving.

We must be led. I believe in saving, and I believe in giving your savings away. It is whatever the Holy Spirit leads you in that hour. It is not unbiblical to save. It actually is biblical, but for several decades at the end of the month, we rarely had \$100 dollars extra. So \$500 dollars this is big.

GIVING \$550 AWAY, RECEIVING \$550; THEN GIVING IT AWAY AGAIN, AND RECEIVING IT

So Diane says, "Let's do it!" I always only wanted to give in agreement with her, if she would agree. She had a number that she initiated herself, and that she would come and ask me to agree. So I gave this lady \$550, and

again, it does not seem like that big of an amount today—when I look back at it; it was like, “Wow! We are not going to pay our rent this month.” A couple of weeks go by, and I am at the church service, our midweek service on a Tuesday night. I am in the worship and nobody knows I had committed this money to this lady. A guy comes up to me during the worship and he whispers, “The Lord told me to give you \$550.”

I said, “That is awesome. I take it.” He has got it rolled up, and put it in my pocket. I am so excited because I gave the money, and the Lord gives it back exactly.

So then I go up into the prayer time at the end and pray for some person. This person says, “Hey, I am in a crisis.” He is really under stress. It is a man and woman. I say, “OK. What is the situation?”

He says, “I need \$550 dollars, like tonight!”

So I pull it out of my pocket; it is all nicely packaged together. I hand it to him, and I imagine that he is thinking, “Do you always carry around \$550 ready to go?” His eyes are big, and he says, “Thank You God, thank You God! This is a miracle, a miracle!”

Well, I am back to even, but it was fun. The journey was fun. So, I am leaving the church. The building is empty. A couple of people are in the children’s ministry, and I am the last guy out there. We are locking the door. He said, “I am glad I saw you.”

He says, “This is a little bit embarrassing, but the Lord told me to give you \$550. I know that is weird.”

I said, “That is not weird; trust me. That is not weird.” He hands me \$550. I gave \$550; then, that night it came back. I gave it again; then, it came back. It was not \$560. It was not \$700. It was not \$400. It was exactly the amount I needed; the Lord was saying, “Mike, I am watching. I am involved, and I really like you. I want you to understand how much I care about you.” So, I appreciated breaking even in the whole deal.

But what really excited me is that I was sure that God was watching me. I remember at that time talking to a lady on the phone. I was talking people into giving. I mean this is one of my exciting things to do: talk people into giving because it is really talking them into interacting with God.

I love to speak on giving because I know the dynamic that will happen in people’s lives. So I am talking to this lady, and she has a \$2,000 need. She is really stressed out. She says, “I have to have this \$2,000 dollars by 5 o’clock tonight.”

I said, “Do you tithe?”

She is a new believer she said, “No. What do you mean tithe?”

“Do you give ten percent of your money away?”

She said, “Oh! I cannot afford it.”

I said, “You cannot afford not to. Honestly, you cannot.”

She said, “Wow! That just puts burden on top of burden.”

I say, “No it does not, it gets God involved in your finances.” So I talk to her and share the Word. Tell her a few stories.

She agrees and says, “OK. I will start.”

I said, “I am committed to you right now today in this \$2,000 need. I do not have the answer, but I am committed to you.” In my privacy, I was going to do whatever I had to do personally to get her that \$2,000 dollars because I knew the Lord would help. I did not know. I thought He might. So she commits and says, “OK, I am starting to tithe.”

I said, “Is that an absolute commitment?”

She said, “No matter what that it costs me, I am just beginning.”

I say, “Now, you do not want to end at tithing. You want to begin at tithing.” So I told her several of these stories I have told you. Again, there was maybe about ten or twenty stories—probably closer to twenty than ten where just the Lord was just answering me so specifically. So I hang the phone up and a few minutes later, I am in my office. I am pastoring.

A MAN IS HEALED AND PROVIDES FOR A LADY AT CHURCH

A guy walks in, a young couple, and I did not know them, but I had met them once because it was a new church plant we have here in Kansas City. We just came from St. Louis, and this young couple comes in. This man says, “I am having nightmares. I have oppression. I am really in trouble. I hear that you guys believe in praying for the sick and stuff like that. Our church does not do that. I visited here a few times, would you pray for me?”

I lay hands on this guy and pray a simple little, “Lord, help him” prayer. It was not some great prayer that you would notice. It was just, “Lord, just help him.” All of the sudden, a demon starts manifesting in this guy. He starts coughing and choking, and the demon comes out of him. His wife’s eyes get really big. She asks, “What is happening to my husband?”

He says, “I feel better.” It is phenomenal. He says, “Wow. What was that? Our church does not do that.”

I answered, “Our church does.” He was leaving, and he stops. He turns around. He says, “Wait. Give me a second.”

He says, “Here is something that I want to give just to say thank you. Here is a check for \$2,000. You can put your name in it, anyone’s name you want, \$2,000. Give it to anybody you want. You can keep it.” Then, he left.

So I call the lady back on the phone, and I just talked to her an hour ago. So, I call her back and say, “Hey, how you doing?”

She says, “Oh! It is getting close to 5 o’clock. It is doomsday.”

I say, “Are you committed to tithing?”

She says, “Yes. I called my husband. We are going to do it. Oh God, help me.”

I said, “I think He will. He will.” I told her the story. I said I have \$2,000 check waiting for you right now. She said “No!”

I said, “This is real. It does not mean it will always work this way. The Lord wants your attention.” Again, it was not \$3,000; it was not \$1,000, and it was not a month later. It was that very day. The Lord is watching my conversation with this lady.

A SINGLE MOTHER’S BREAKTHROUGH WITH A CAR

I remember a few months after that I am talking to a single mom who does not have a car, so everything is going bad financially. I mean everything is broken. I asked her if she was tithing. She says, “I cannot tithe. You know, I make \$150 a week.”

I said, “\$15. You have to. I do not mean that it is a rule. I mean it is a God is beckoning your heart in a relational way. He really wants to show you He knows your name. He will be involved with you, if you want to be involved with Him. But it has to be on His terms, not on yours.”

These are His terms—His terms are: we let go of money and say, “God, oh God, are You watching? I love You. Please be watching.” Then, He answers. That is His terms. It excites our spirits. So I pray with her. It is about noon. She says, “I need a car.”

I say, “OK. Start giving this week—\$15.”

She said, “I cannot afford it. I cannot afford it.”

I said, “You have to. You really want to start.” So she makes the commitment. A few hours later I talk to her, she says, “Yes. I am committed.” I go to church that night, our midweek service, a guy comes up to me, and he says, “This is odd. The Lord told me to hand this to you.” It is a title deed of a car. He said, “Put anybody’s name in it that you want.” He hands it to me that night. I go and talk to the lady. She did not go to the service that night. I got home and called her and said, “Hey! Are you still into this \$15 dollar a week thing?”

She says, “I thought about it all day. I am committed to that no matter what.”

I said, “Here is your car and the title.” She filled in her name and had her car. Again, it does not mean everything is going to work in her life economically smoothly. But the Lord, He cares about the idea that we know that He is watching. He really does care about this. I am talking about financial power encounters. I am talking about far more than tithing. Again, I could give you a lot of stories and a number of you could tell your own stories. You want to tell your stories because your journey will help another person’s journey. Not only is it a power encounter on us when we see that God’s eyes are on us, but it is a power encounter in the life of the person you are giving the money to.

That lady with the car, the lady with the \$2,000, and the lady with the \$550 were greatly touched. When that money was given to them, they were blown away that God met their needs within that specific timeframe with the specific amount. They concluded, “God is watching me, and the Lord is saying to me (and also to you), ‘I want to use you in a lot of these things, if you want to be a part of My story. Do you want to go on this journey with Me?’”

I answered, “Yes, Lord I do.”

The Lord answers, “Then, when I give you impressions, give to people. Do not hold it back. My eyes are on you.” 2 Corinthians 9:12: “For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God,” the others who receive the money give many thanks to God.

The people who are receiving it, they say, “Thank You. Thank You, God. Oh, I love You. I love You. You are looking at Me.” So you get to be part of the story of people responding to God that way. Then, when the Lord gives the money back to you, you get to say to God, “Oh God! You are watching me.” This is so exciting. This is such a dynamic part of my spiritual life. Many people would say the same. To give extravagantly actually makes our spiritual life vibrant. It really does. There is a dynamic that is released in the financial realm and in our personal walk with God.

It is fantastic. Well, I am going to give you a little bit of my journey because a lot of you are in your early twenties. I want to stir you to make the same commitments. That is why I am telling you my story. I am not telling you my story because I need to tell my story. I am aiming at your heart right now.

SPIRIT OF GENEROSITY AND NOT A SPIRIT OF POVERTY

I am just going to say what I have already said to you. I was eighteen years old. I made a commitment while reading these biographies of Hudson Taylor. Again, you do not have to read his biographies, but I said, “OK. I am going to do it. I made a commitment. I am going to live a simple lifestyle the rest of my life. I am going to be like J. Hudson Taylor. I am going to take less to give more.” I am not into poverty. I am not at all into poverty.

I have had people ask me over the years, “So, what is it like having a poverty vow?”

I say, “No. I am not a poverty guy at all. Poverty is a curse. I am into generosity, not poverty. I am into giving, not lacking. I take less, so that I can give more because I love the dynamic of what happens in my heart. I love the dynamic of what happens in their heart when people say, ‘Oh God, You are watching. I love You. I love You. I love You.’” I love that dynamic. So I made a commitment. I was eighteen years old. Hudson Taylor was a medical doctor. At that time, I was focused on going to medical school. I got accepted to medical school actually, and in the last minute, I turned it down because the Lord intervened in a dramatic way and told me not to.

I had dreamed of being Hudson Taylor; I was going to be a doctor. I was going to go to China. I was going to do everything he did. I ended up doing nothing he did, but that is OK. I got accepted to medical school, and the Lord said, “Do not do it. I want you to be a preacher.” I had not a thought in my mind of being a preacher at that

time. I was thinking of China, then I switched it over to Mexico, and then I was going to go there. So, I was thanking Him. I was going to become a doctor, pray for people, and preach. I will put it all together.

The Lord said “No. I have got something a little bit different for you.” Of course, the Lord knew about IHOP–KC; I did not know anything about IHOP–KC. At that time, I hated praying. If He would have told me about IHOP–KC, I might have quit right on the spot.

If He had said “24/7 prayer,” I would have responded, “That would be more bitter than death.” I meant it. I really loved God when I was eighteen years old, but I did not want to do long prayer meetings. No way. I mean He must have been smiling, thinking, “Hey, little guy, you are going to get the surprise of your life in a few years.”

Well, I did not really know that I would eventually like praying. I never knew that. I did not think it was possible. Prayer was so boring, so oppressive, and the Bible was so confusing. That is another subject for another day. Well then at age twenty-two, I am just giving you a little of my journey, we get married and right from the day one, I remember our salary at the church was \$11,700 a year. So we are married. We give the \$5,000 away. We have no back up system.

DOUBLE TITHE

Then, I tell Diane, “I would like us to double tithe.” I explained it to her, showed her the Bible verses, told her a few testimonies, and she was just instantly responsive.

She says, “Let’s do it.”

I said, “We are going to make a commitment not only to live simply all of our lives; we are going to double tithe, but it is more than that. We are never going backwards; we are going to try to go from 20 percent to 30 percent to 40 percent, and we are never going backwards.” We will not decrease our percentage. We will decrease our lifestyle before we decrease our percentage of giving. So at twenty-two years old, we committed to that. I said, “Lord, if I get in a jam, I will have a smaller house before I give a smaller percentage away to the kingdom.” She agreed.

I said, “Diane, we are going to live simply all the days of our lives.” I do not buy into the American dream that I take more, and I live in the problem of giving less. The American dream: take more, all that you can have, and give less.

DOUBLE TITHING INSTEAD OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

Many believers think it is very normal to increase their lifestyle and decrease their giving. I know many believers like that. I just do not want to be one. So we committed that we will decrease the size of our house, our car, our vacations, and everything before we decrease our giving. I told her, and she agreed. I said, “We do not back off now, or we will never recover an extravagant giving spirit later in our lives.”

We will never get back to it if we even get off the path a little bit in our twenties. Now, most of you in this room are single. You are twenty to twenty-two, and you are thinking, “Hmm.” Some of you have the American dream. “I want bigger, better, and nicer.”

That is cool. Have it bigger, better, and nicer, but only if you can give more while you are getting it. Do not give less while you are taking more for yourself. Others of you, you are just excited. You are saying, “This is my story. This is what I am going to do.” Of course, that is why I am telling this testimony.

BE CONTENT

1 Timothy 6:8: “And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.” The Lord gave me this verse very strongly when we were age twenty-two at the very beginning of our marriage. He instructed us to be content with food and clothing. We would be content with a simple lifestyle.

Paul told Timothy that having food and clothing—you are warm, cool—and I throw in air conditioner and coffee. Food, clothing, air conditioner, coffee, and at IHOP—KC, ear plugs. I shared this verse with Diane, and I said, “We will be content with a simple life all of our days knowing that our ability to give will increase; the percentage will grow dramatically all of our days. We will never go for less. We will always grow; if we get to 30 percent, we will push it to 40 percent, and then we will aim for 50 percent. We will keep pushing, and we will never go back.”

She says, “Yes.”

“We will have so many miracles in thirty years.” We have been married thirty-two years. We have so many personal stories and so many ministry stories. I mean, multitudes of stories. I could fill a book with them where God met our needs so dramatically on the right day with the exact amount that—it was so fun.

CAIRO, EGYPT 1982

I am twenty-seven years old. Now I am in Cairo, Egypt; I have that experience when the Lord tells me that He is going to change the understanding and expression of Christianity in the whole world in one generation. He is going to use millions of people and multitudes of ministry.

Christianity, as we know it, will dramatically change. The Lord spoke to me for the first time. I hear this from the Lord: “I am going to give you the wealth of the nations, but you cannot take it. You cannot use it for your personal life. I am going to give you the wealth of the nations.”

He has given this promise to many, many people, because God has all the money; so He can give millions here and billions there and not run out of any money. So many people have this promise from many ministries. He said, “I will give you the wealth of the nations, if you will not take it personally into your private lifestyle.”

I committed to the Lord. I said, “Yes.” The verse that He gave me in that hour was 2 Corinthians 8:14: “But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality.”

The saints in America should not take all the money that God gives them because we live in a prosperous nation. If we would not take and keep it, but if we would remember our brothers and sisters who are preaching the same gospel with the same mandate to disciple the nations that we have, the needs of the missionaries’ children like food and clothing—just like our needs.

Their children have the same needs that our children do. If we would not take all the money in America that God gives us, but live simply and give the rest to them by way of equality, we could be a supplier to other laborers in the kingdom in the Body of Christ. I was not to look at the amount of money God gave me as an American. Well, I have less; I am taking less than other Americans. The Lord says, “Do not look at it that way. Look at brothers and sisters who love Me as much as you do in third world countries. They are preachers of the gospel. Their children are as dear to them as yours are to you. You give to them, so there is some kind of equality between the two of you, by what I give you.”

I am not claiming to live in equality at the same level that all the leaders in the third world nations do. That is not what I am saying, but what I am saying is that we have committed to live a simple lifestyle. I am sure that the Lord is going to release billions in our midst.

My desire is that none of us would increase our personal lifestyle without bearing the responsibility for the gospel in third world countries. The Lord is saying, “If you are going to go that way, I will go with you. If you will make that commitment, I will give you a lot of zeros behind the money I give you.”

I think the eyes of the Lord are going across the surfaces of the earth right now. He is looking for young people and old people as well. He is looking for young people who will set their heart to give extravagantly before they have any money. I have seen a lot of people commit to give when they have nothing, but then when God begins to prosper them, they do not give. Their percentage goes down.

Maybe they are giving \$1,000 in a certain amount of time; however years later, they still give that \$1,000 dollars, and it is not difficult to them. They are still giving the \$1,000, but it is only a fraction of the percent of what it was of their income years earlier. I want my percentage to go up and not just my net amount.

GOD IS GOING TO SHAKE EVERYTHING THAT CAN BE SHAKEN (HAGGAI 2:7-8)

In Haggai 2:7-8, God is going to shake the nations and the silver and gold. He is going to transfer the silver and gold when He shakes the nations. All the gold in the world belongs to Jesus. A bunch of ungodly guys think it is theirs. Well, Jesus is about to flex His muscles on a global level. He is going to shake the nations, and the money is going to be manifest as His. He is going to give it to people who will do His Kingdom work. They will build His temple. They will build His house. They will not build their own house, but they will instead build His house with that increase. They will be content with food and covering. They will be content with a simple lifestyle.

FINANCING THE END-TIME HARVEST

Some people are content with food and covering, but they have a poverty spirit and a poverty mentality. I am talking about a poverty mentality. I am not talking about a beggarly spirit. I am talking about believing for supernatural prosperity, but completely embracing a spirit of generosity with a vision for the gospel in the nations.

BLESSED TO MAKE THE FAME OF HIS NAME KNOWN

The psalmist prayed in Psalm 67:1-2: “God will be merciful to us and bless you, and cause His face to shine upon us that Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations.” Basically, the psalmist is saying, “Lord, bless me, and I will make Your name known in the earth.” A lot of people pray, “Lord bless me,

and I want my comfort level to go up.” It is OK for your comfort level to go up. There is nothing wrong with that, but first we have seen to it that the name of the Lord is going forth.

We want millions, but why? We want more stuff. No. We want more people in full-time ministry in intercession, worship, preaching, and doing the works of justice. We want more people doing that in large numbers. We do not want more stuff and bigger things. We want more people in labor and more laborers in the harvest.

God says that He has the power to give us wealth, but He wants to give us wealth in order to establish the covenant. God has power to give you wealth. I mean, you talk to King David when he is fifteen years old. Before he was a king, he was a shepherd in a little town of Bethlehem. It is a little out of the way village—a poor little village. Go interview him at age fifteen and ask, “Hey David, how much money do you think you will have when you are 70?”

David might have answered, “I do not know. I am hoping that I will have twice as many sheep as my father has.” David has no idea that by the time he is seventy years old, he will be one of the wealthiest men on the planet. He has no idea about this when he is fifteen years old, I am assuming.

DAVID AND THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

My point is this: you say I have no chance to make a lot of money. You do not look at your circumstances, your database, and your networking. David did not have a chance to make any money. When he was seventy years old—and one of my favorite verses about David is in 1 Chronicles 22:14. David gave \$100 billion to the house of prayer—\$100 billion. When you read 1 Chronicles 22:14, it says 100,000 talents of gold: “Indeed I have taken much trouble to prepare for the house of the LORD one hundred thousand talents of gold and one million talents of silver, and bronze and iron beyond measure, for it is so abundant. I have prepared timber and stone also, and you may add to them.”

A talent was seventy-five pounds, or 1,200 ounces. A talent was worth \$1,000,000 in today’s market at \$800 an ounce. Gold is more than that today, but just to make the numbers easy, a talent was worth \$1,000,000. He gave 100,000 talents of his own money. That is \$100,000,000. If you would have asked him when he was fifteen years old, “David, do you think you will give \$1,000,000 to the kingdom?”

David might have answered, “I do not know. We have a lot of sheep. We do not have that many.”

“How about \$100,000,000? How about \$1,000,000,000? How about \$100,000,000,000?”

“I do not think so.”

Well, he did anyway. He gave it. You do not know who you are at twenty-one years old. You do not have a clue what God might do with you in the next decade or two, but you set your heart.

HOW WE GIVE MONEY IS ONE OF THE MOST PRACTICAL MEASUREMENTS OF LOVE

You set your heart before the Lord. There is a new paradigm shift that God is giving people today. The paradigm shift is this: when you see money, you see souls. When you see money, you do not see yachts and extra vacation houses, you see souls. When you see money, you see full-time intercessors in the houses of

prayer here and abroad. You see houses of prayer being filled up. When the chance comes that you will make \$1,000,000, you see the works of justice going forth, and you do not see more stuff.

You live simply; but you see the kingdom exploding. That is a new paradigm shift in money. In a moment—we are going to close here in a moment. I am going to have you pray, “Ask the Lord about this and about this new paradigm shift.”

MONEY IS SEED TO SOW INTO THE KINGDOM OR BREAD TO EAT

It is a very important verse here in 2 Corinthians 9:10: “Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,” Paul talks about two categories of money: He says that God will supply you with seed. He will supply seed to the sower and bread for food. When God gives you money, whether it is your paycheck, your support—somebody just gives you a random gift—all the money you receive; it is either seed, or it is bread.

It is one or the other. What you want to do is you want to ask the Lord when He gives you financial blessing and increase, or just even your routine money. You say, “I do not have much money, whether it is \$10, or \$10,000,000; part of it is seed and part of it is bread. He supplies both.” Now bread is what you use on your personal life.

It is what you eat. You eat bread. Bread is what you and your family use with the money God gives you. That is biblical and godly, and that is right for you to use part of it. Seed is what you sow into the ground. You let go of it. You give it away, and it multiplies. You read the rest of the verse. God says, “If you will sow it, it will multiply.” If you will eat the seed, it will not multiply. So whether God gave you \$10, or \$10,000,000, your question is this: how much of that is seed? How much should I give away?

I am meant to give it away, but it will multiply and come back to me. What part of it is bread? That is the part for your living expenses in your daily life. Many believers see all of their money (their seed) as their bread. That is why they do not have a harvest. They eat all of their seed. A lot of believers say, “OK, I am not going to increase my life every time I get increase, but I will save it.” They put all their seed in their pocket, and they never sow it.

They have got more and more seed in the barn, in their pocket, or in the bank. The Bible says that you have to sow the seed before it multiplies. So whether you are eighteen years old, and you make \$10 a week, or whether you make \$10,000,000 a year, part of that is seed and part of that is bread. Ask the Lord which one it is. Whenever the Lord gives me an increase economically, He has many ways that He can give increase. I say, “Lord, is this to sow, or is this to eat?” If you ask that question, you will get answers from the Lord.

WE DETERMINE HOW FAR WE GO WITH GOD IN GIVING

You will go on a glorious journey with the Lord that is exciting. I mean, it will be a joy ride. It will be exciting. Every now and then, it gets a little intense, but the story ends well. In 2 Corinthians 9:6-7: “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”

God tells us that we determine part of the measure of how much this process goes on. It is as if God says, “If you sow a lot, I will give you a lot. If you eat all your seed, or you save all your seed, and you do not sow it, I

will not give you that much.” You read that passage. He says that if you sow a little bit sparingly, I will give you a little bit of a harvest. If you sow a whole lot bountifully, I will give you a big harvest, and it will excite your spirit.

GIVING IS BASED ON PERCENTAGE—NOT ON AMOUNT

Luke 6:38: “Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over . . . For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” Jesus is speaking when He says to give, and it will be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, with the measure that you use. That is the key. You have to use it. With the measure of money that you sow, the Lord says that is the measure that I will give back to you.

You as young singles and young married couples want to go on a journey with God. You are twenty-one to twenty-four; you want to make a commitment saying, “Lord, we are going to take less to give more. We are going to increase the percentage that we give. We are not going to decrease the percentage. We are going to get in this exciting joy ride with You. We are going to do this thing, and we are going to watch. We are going to watch You multiply the seed. We are going to multiply the fruit in our life.” Giving extravagantly is not the amount you give; it is the percentage you give. It is the percentage.

Jesus makes His point in Luke 21 with the poor widow. She put in two mites, two pennies, and you read the whole passage in context, the Pharisees were writing \$100,000 checks, but that \$100,000 did not cost them anything because they did not change their lifestyle at all. They could give the \$100,000, and it would not affect them one bit at all.

On the other hand, this lady was giving in her two pennies, her two mites, and it was really affecting her week, but she did it out of love. Jesus said, “I want to tell you from God’s point of view, the two pennies is more than the \$100,000 to God because she gave out of her need. You gave out of your abundance, meaning you did not even know that it was gone when you gave it.”

WE MUST GIVE AN OFFERING WHICH COSTS US

What if our giving does not affect us at all? We want to give in a way where it pulls our heartstrings, and in a way where we know when we are giving that it matters. It changes things in our life when we give because it costs us to give. If your giving is such that it does not affect anything in your life; then, you need to ask the Lord, “Should I increase my giving?”

More times than not, the answer is, “Absolutely. You need to, because I have a joyful journey to take you on, and you are the one not getting in the car by keeping the seed in your pocket.” You give that seed away; you get in that car, and you go on that joy ride with Jesus and that journey into the unknown where there is dynamic power encounters in finance.

Finally, to end with this: King David was going to buy a plot of land in 2 Samuel 24:24: “Then the king said to Araunah, ‘No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing.’” So David bought the threshing floor, and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. He is going to buy a plot of land to build an altar to God. The guy who David talked to said, “David, you are a great guy. I will give you the land. I mean you are David. You are cool. I love your music David. Here, you can have the land.”

David says, “No. I appreciate that. Because this land I am buying, I am going to make an offering to God.” I refuse to offer that which costs me nothing. This is not about you and me. This is about me and God.” Here is the point: God wants us to live in a way that costs us something, as we express our love to Jesus. We express our trust in His leadership, and we express our commitment to the harvest and to the works of justice.

MINISTRY TIME

Amen. Let’s stand. So I am going to ask you to close your eyes for a minute. Just talk to the Lord. I am not going to have anybody pray for anybody right now because I want everybody talking to the Lord and not being in a ministry mode. You and the Lord—just for a moment. Just close your eyes for a second. You are just gazing on the throne. You and Him.

The Lord wants to give some of you a new paradigm about money. He wants you to see money differently. He wants you to see souls when you see dollars. He wants you to see fulltime intercessors. He wants you to see human trafficking victims being rescued with your money. Others of you are saying, “I want the percentage to go up.”

“Lord, all I make is \$10 a week. I give a dollar.” Start giving two dollars then. Go from one dollar to ten dollars. Start now. Increase the percentage, but here is the deal: make a commitment that you will decrease your lifestyle before you decrease the percentage of your giving. Just close your eyes for a second. Just talk to the Lord. Would you make a commitment? I made this commitment when I was twenty-two years old, and I am so glad looking back thirty plus years later.

I said, “I will decrease my lifestyle before I decrease the amount of my giving.” That was one of the most important commitments I have ever made in my life.

I say today, “Thank you, Lord that you helped me do that. Thank you that I had a wife who was excited about that.” She was excited about that. Others of you: you are walking in the way the Lord wants, but it is time to renew your commitment. You are saying, “Lord, I feel comfortable with where I am at with You, but I want to renew my commitment to You right now.”

I am going to have the worship team just minister for a few moments. I just want everybody focused on the Lord. If you need to slip out, go ahead, and slip out. I want just five or seven minutes talking to the Lord directly. You are twenty years old now; so set your heart right now. Make some life commitments right now. Maybe you are fifty, or sixty, or even seventy years old. It is still time to make commitments. If you want to come up front just because you want some privacy and prayer, you can come up and kneel. Feel free to stand. Feel free to come up. I want everybody talking to the Lord about this. This will change your life.