“The Rule of First” // Matthew 6:25–34 // Sermon on the Mount # 6[1]

Generosity Video

Generosity Highlights

Hey, before we jump into the message today, I wanna take about 10 minutes to give you a little glimpse of what God has been doing in our church, and also then a quick glimpse into some of the places I believe he's leading us to next.

You see, sometimes when you give, I know it can be easy to wonder where all that money goes, and I want you to see that you're not just giving to a church budget, you're actually investing in changed lives and the spread of the gospel around the world.

For about 25 years now, Ephesians 3:20–21 has served as a defining passage for this church--those verses say that God is willing and able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we could have asked or imagined, and that’s been true again this year, and I want to celebrate that for a moment--and tell you that I don’t think the Spirit of God is done--as much as I’m thankful for what we’ve seen, I believe our most fruitful days are still ahead of us…But as I’ve told you before: **VISION needs PROVISION**, so I want to spend a few minutes painting a picture of how has God used the ***PROVISION*** of his people to fulfill the VISION he’s given to his church, and then we’ll pray, and then we’ll get into the message.

**Let’s start with a quick glimpse at…

What God’s Done

- **Bible Translation**
  - I showed you this a couple of weeks ago. We worked with an organization called Illuminations to finalize the first NT translation for a Muslim unreached people group that had never had the copy of a Bible in their language, and I told you that through that translation there are more than 300 people in that people group who have professed faith in Christ--where previously there have been none.
  - We currently are in the middle of completing the OT translation--and ***our commitment is to make the Bible accessible in every language*** where we have a missionary living in an UPG.
- **Wake Correctional**

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[1] Sources consulted: Tyler Staten, “Jesus on Anxiety”, August 30, 2020, Oaks Church Brooklyn; Jen Wilkin, “Where Your Treasure Is”, Session 7 of Sermon on the Mount Bible Study, January 24, 2024; Tim Mackie and Jon Collins, “Jesus’ Perspective on Wealth in Six Minutes”, September 2, 2024, Bible Project; Tim Mackie and Jon Collins, “What Does Jesus Say about Anxiety?”, July 22, 2024, Bible Project; David Jeremiah, “Cure for Worry: 5 Biblical Truths to Overcome Anxiety”, July 26, 2024, Shadow Mountain Church; Erwin Lutzer, “Trusting God’s Knowledge”, March 10, 2002, Moody Church. And others as noted throughout.

- There hasn't been a single baptism at Wake Correctional in over 10 years, and this year our team working there saw 19.

- **We're celebrating… 9 New Churches Planted in the U.S. (**through our **Summit Collaborative)**
  - *I'll come back to that one in a bit, but let me move on to an exciting one…*
- **Kingdom Refugee Care**
  - This is a really, really important one because one of our Summit Church members, just an ordinary guy, put his and his family's 'yes' on the table a few years ago—God sent them to KL, where they partnered with Garden City, the church our former campus pastor Peter Park now leads
  - Well, when this family got there--again, they just moved there trying to get a job and figure out how to be a part of what was going on there--and they recognized a massive need for education for refugee children, so he launched KRC out of Garden City serving refugees from countries completely closed to missionaries. I've been there to visit, it will bring tears to your eyes
  - This past year they hosted the largest Vacation Bible School *in the world* for refugee children[2]
- **Next Generation: Students/Kids**
  - We put on 6 student camps this year--we used to do 1.
    - 2 HS
    - 1 MS
    - 3 Kids Camps
  - In our kids' ministry, we had 8 VBS Locations this year with more than 1800 kids involved

So, that's what God has done. Now, let's talk about some of the things…

What God Is Doing

Through this church. First, In the Triangle

- **(NC Prison System)**
  - This year we put our messages and Bible study content on tablets in every single prison in NC in both English and Spanish, which means that they can access Summit messages in English and Spanish and also participate in Bible studies. So where we cannot always go, they have access to the Word of God because of your generosity.
  - This year we've seen 175 men, women, and juveniles come to faith in the NC prison system this year.
  - We've invested significantly in transition homes for prisoners that are coming out of prison.

[2] 497 vols, 250 kids at this refugee camp

- We've also helped renovate some of the visitor centers at these prisons for when their family and friends visit as a way of saying "we see you and you are loved."

- **UNC Ministry House -** This is something I've told you about before, but it is a location right there on campus that we, through your generosity, have been able to get into and to establish a ministry hub there, so that we have team meetings and a lot of ministry gets organized out of there.
- A few years ago we helped start this thing called the… **NeighborHealth Center,** which is a Christian nonprofit clinic that uses a mixture of volunteers and paid staff to provide accessible healthcare to the underserved in our area
  - They have served literally 1000's of ppl, and they are about to expand into a second location. It's the kind of thing that when you see it, you're like, "I can't believe that that just came out of TSC." It's something that got birthed out and there are a lot of people that volunteer and are just ministering to people's physical, medical needs in Jesus' name.
- Finally, in this category I'd put… **Refugee Hope Partners**
  - Which is an effort that serves international refugees in the Triangle--and I mean official, State Department recognized refugees. Refugee Hope Partners helps them resettle and provides academic support, medical help, language learning for them while they share the gospel with them!

*And of course, your generosity helps provide all the things we do here…*At the Summit

- **Let me categorize 3 different types of ministries:** Reach, Disciple and Send. Let me highlight a few things in them.
- **REACH: Alpha**
  - Alpha groups are basically these investigating-Christianity discussion groups where people of various backgrounds and beliefs gather over dinner and discuss the big questions of life, faith and Jesus with Summit volunteers
    - In our FIRST year of Alpha, we've had just over 100 people in 6 different Alpha groups meeting all over the Triangle
    - I've told you several stories of people coming to faith in Christ over the last few weeks. And that is just turning out to be one of our most fruitful ministries.
    - Our goal is to have 12 more locations by next fall
- **DISCIPLE: Bible Studies**
  - Couple of highlights here: We currently have 1645 women in our women's Bible studies across the church
  - We have just over 1000 men in Bible studies. Which is awesome, but guys--get it together!
  - But all told: tThis is around 25% of our adult weekend attendance--and that's not even counting our normal, mixed-gender small group attendance
- **SEND: 12 New Church Plants**

- Our **Summit Collaborative** is planting 12 new churches this year--that's right. Summit, did you ever think we'd be at a day where we planted 12 new churches out of our church during a year?
- And many of these are near targeting colleges and universities like ECU and Winston-Salem State. We've got over 4000 students nationwide in our A18 program, and they continue to lead the way in carrying the gospel to the nations
- In fact, (Muslim student story)

Now, I want you to… Imagine What God Could Do

- **Kingdom Leaders**:
  - The Summit Institute**… ministry training arm.** This is important because I've told you that the #1 predictor of the future of any Christian movement in history is not how big they are, how much money they have, how good their preachers are, how many baptisms they have; the #1 predictor of the future of any Christian movement in history is the number of young men and women they're raising up for ministry. Right now we have about 60 and our goal is to increase that to 200 within the next 2 to 3 years… that takes investment. We need to buy a place to house them.
  - We are working on two year TSI full scholarship proposal for its most qualified residents—which provides a seminary scholarship, two short term mission trips, and a housing for them
- **Foster Care**
  - We've been working with the county to provide for them transitional housing for kids in crisis
  - Provide resources to places like NeighborHealth to provide healthcare for foster kids. We want to be the greatest blessing to foster kids in our area of any single group that is out there because we serve a God who is the Father to the fatherless
    - And, really important, investing in a program that provides employment opportunities and transitional housing for those who "age out" of the system. Because one of the big gaps we have learned is when kids get out of the system, there's really not a lot of places for them to go and they don't have the advantage of coming out of families that are able to support them, so we want to step in as the family of God to be a part of that.
    - We're also trying to reduce the amount of fundraising families have to do to adopt to make that a much more accessible thing for families that God puts that on their heart.
- **Room for ONE MORE**: I want you to never overlook how what we spend here to enlarge or upgrade facilities in our church helps us reach more people. I was talking with a couple of guys the other day and one said, "I just don't like to give to a big pot like a church budget, I only like to give to specific ministries." He was just being honest with me, and I appreciated it! But the other guy, who was a new Christian, said, "Well yeah, but I remember when I stumbled into the Apex campus a few years ago because someone invited me--I was only half-sure I wanted to be there. But the volunteer took me to a seat with two empty ones beside it so I didn't feel weird and cramped… if it had been

full, I would have used that as my excuse to leave, so I'm glad to give to a budget that helps us expand capacity so we can reach other people like me."

- We are looking at doing this particularly at CHC, FVC, KDC, Apex, BCC

(Animation) *It Starts with One Church*

- One church: 13 Triangle locations - We only put campuses in the Triangle; anything we do outside of the Triangle, we plant an autonomous, independent church.
- 1000 churches in a generation: 799
  - Int'l: 679 churches
  - Domestic: 120
    - New church plants: 12
    - Mercy Hill Collab: 4
  - CP work is the best ROI in every way: 1 sent ⟶ 40 new worshipers. Each of those 40 is now giving, too!
- Sent to the Nations: In the last 20 years, we've sent 795 all time; 295 current
- Investing deeply in 5 Gospel Hubs (places like KL, Capetown, Dubai)

So, that's what's ahead for us. Can we celebrate what God has done and is doing?

That's what your giving goes toward. It's like I always say, Summit, you don't give *TO* this church as much you give *THROUGH* this church to this kind of work.

Now, if you would, at all of our campuses, would you stand so we can pray over this and commit it to the Lord?

PRAYER

Now, if you will, grab your Bibles and remain standing for the reading of the Word: Matthew 6…

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more

value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

34 "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Pastor: *This is the Word of God for the people of God.*
Congregation**:** *Thanks be to God.*

You may be seated.

"The Rule of First"

Sometimes when I read this passage I'm not quite sure whether it's primarily about money or primarily about anxiety. I mean, it comes right on the heels of Jesus's big statement in vs 24 that you can't serve God and money, but the most repeated word in this passage is anxiety.

So, what do you think? Let's do a little audience participation--How many think the main subject of these verses is 'money'? How many think it's 'anxiety'?

My best answer is that Jesus is showing us how anxiety and money are connected. Notice the first word of the passage **(vs 25)**: ***"Therefore."*** That connects what he's about to say on anxiety with what he just said in vs 24, namely that **"You cannot serve God and money."** And the reason he did that is because the primary reason most people struggle to obey God with their finances is fear, or anxiety, about what happens if you don't have enough money.

Write this down: ***For most of us, what keeps us from financial obedience is not stinginess, it's anxiety.***

So what Jesus does in these next few verses is show us how we can not be anxious about money (or anything, for that matter). First, he says, "Trust your Father's Care" that's (vv 25–32). The second is to "Seek first your Father's kingdom" (vs 33); the third is to "Leave the future in your Father's hands" (vs 34). So, that's our outline for today.

I. Trust Your Father's Care (vv 25–32)

Jesus starts with a simple question, vs 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

IOW, what does anxiety *actually* accomplish? This is not even a spiritual question; you don't have to be a Christian to follow his logic here; it's patently obvious. Is being anxious about a problem **helping to solve it**? No… **It doesn't change anything; if anything, all it does is harm *you.***

Doctors point out, for example, that 75% of all doctor visits are anxiety (or stress) related. Dr. Charles Mayo of the famed "Mayo Clinic" wrote, "Anxiety affects the circulation, the heart, the glands and whole nervous system. Though I have never known a man who died of overwork, I have known a whole lot who died of anxiety."

As **Charles Spurgeon** says it: "Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, only today of its strength."

So, first, Jesus says, anxiety doesn't do anything except harm you, and furthermore, he says, you don't need to worry, because you have a Heavenly Father who loves you. Think about **the birds, he says:** "(The birds) don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them." Birds don't stress out about how much they have saved, yet God takes care of them.

Then, in **vs. 28**, he says, consider the wildflowers in the field: "...they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Flowers don't worry about how pretty they look, yet they are beautiful because God adorns their lives.

I've spent a lot of time thinking about how this comparison with the birds and the flowers speaks to our worry--and I think what Jesus has done in this passage is identify two different personality types who both feel anxiety about money, but in different ways. Some people look to money, you see, for significance. They believe that what makes life good is nice cars, nice houses, nice clothes, nice watches, and etc. And so these people tend to be spenders--they spend a lot of money on things and experiences, because they believe money's greatest value is adding enjoyment today. They may save some, but money for them is primarily about adding pleasure today. If they get an extra $1,000 bonus, they are thinking about the new drapes they need or that new crossbow.

Other people, by contrast, **look to money for security**. Having a bunch of money in the bank means you can face tomorrow confidently. Money provides security for them, or flexibility for the future, so they tend to be savers. They limit consumption--they're often really frugal--and they focus

on building wealth over time. And so, if they get an extra $1,000 bonus in their paycheck, they're not buying drapes or a crossbow, they are thinking about putting it into a savings account or real estate.

Savers and spenders. And I've told you, in God's sense of humor, these two kinds of people always get married to each other. If you're married at one of our campuses, point to the spender in your family. Now, point to the saver.

Our friend Joby Martin says this distinction is not true of his marriage. He says, "Gretchen and I are both SPENDERS, he says, if I get an extra $1,000 in my paycheck, it's a race to the store to see who can spend it first." For how many of you would that describe your marriage—you're both spenders?

Here's the thing: BOTH the SAVER and the SPENDER think the other one has a problem with money. The saver thinks the spender is too irresponsible; the spender thinks the saver is too uptight. ***Jesus, however, is showing them that they can have the same root problem, just in different directions:*** both are devoted to money as necessary for some aspect of the good life.

So, to both of them he says, **vs 25**, "Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing?"

Think about how these illustrations speak to each of them. To the spender, Jesus says, look at the wildflowers. They don't spend any money on clothes, and yet they are gorgeous. And to the saver he says, "Look at the birds. They don't have a savings account, and yet your Father feeds them abundantly."

For all of you who are anxious about money, in whatever way--what you're looking for money to give you Jesus invites you to find in your Father.

Make God, not money, your significance. What makes me special is not the value of the clothes on my body or the square footage of my house. What gives me value is that I am loved by an Almighty God who has made me his treasure, who has given me his love and acceptance as a gift, who promises never to leave me or forsake me, to provide all that I need, and who is sovereignly at work in every detail of my life directing it all for my good and his glory. My joy is not in the car I drive or the vacations I get to go on, but in the promises of a holy God whose presence with me and promises to me are worth more than all the treasures of the world.

And in the same way, Make God, not money, your security. My security is not in how much I have in the bank account, but in God's promises toward me. Sure, saving is wise. But when it's all said and done, it's not my retirement account but my God who is my security. And if the day comes when my retirement account evaporates—if our economy tanks, or I lose my job and have to burn through my savings—he's still with me and promises to take care of me.

Now, some of you more practically minded are saying, "Are you trying to tell me we don't need money, all we need is God and spiritual vibes?"

No. Jesus is just saying you don't have to worry about those things because you have a God who knows what you need. He created you with those needs. See **vs. 32:** "For the Gentiles (or, people who don't know God) seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all."

I was talking with a graduating high school student one time who was really worried about having friends at college. She asked, "Well, what if I can't find friends at college? What if people don't like me or think I'm fun or funny?"

And I showed her this passage, and she said, "Wait… Is Jesus saying to me, 'Don't worry if you don't have friends; I'll be your friend'?" And she said, "Please know I'm grateful for that, and I know he's the best friend I could ever have—but is that all he's promising? That Jesus will be my friend at college? I kind of want someone with 'skin on them.'"

And I told her, "No, that's not all Jesus means here. God created you with a need for friendship 👆🏼👆🏼--***your heavenly Father knows that you need it***--and you can trust him with that need. If he takes care of the birds and clothes the flowers, you can trust him to provide for you--because you are so much more valuable to him than the birds and flowers!"

I even showed her what Jesus said in **vs. 33:** "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

And I told her, "Notice, Jesus said, 'All these things will be added unto you,' not 'all these things will become irrelevant to you.'"

The same Father knows you need guidance in your job, help in your parenting, and wisdom for your marriage. You can bring those needs to him and trust him to provide!

Do you see what Jesus is getting at? Your Father's love gives you the significance and security you crave from money. If God even provides it for the birds and the flowers, he says, **vs 30,** of course he'll provide it for you! "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

This is an argument from the lesser to the greater. If God cares for the birds and the grass, which are not made in his image and he didn't die for, don't you think he'll take care of you, who is made in his image and whom he did die for! If he provides for the lesser, surely he'll provide for the greater.

Here's what always comes to mind when I'm thinking about this principle Jesus was teaching: When my kids were a lot younger and we went to Disneyworld, we'd have this schedule meticulously planned out so we could take advantage of all the fast passes and do the character sightings and I remember one time we got like 30 minutes behind schedule and were late for lunch, and one of my kids was like, "Dad, are we EVER gonna eat? Are we just going to starve?" And I was like, "Kid, do you have any idea how much this trip cost me? And do you think I'm standing in a 2-hour line to ride Dumbo in the hottest and most miserable place on earth because this is what your mom and I wanted to do with $5000 this summer? Just

BEING here should be proof of my commitment to you. If I care enough to bring you all the way down here, I think you can trust me to provide lunch."

If I take care of the greater, I'll take care of the lesser.
Charles Spurgeon puts it this way: *"Listen to the voice of the Lord speak: 'I will help you. It is a small thing for me, your God, to help you. Consider what I have already done. What? Not help you! I bought you with my blood. What? not help you! I died for you. Since I have done the greater, will I not do the lesser things for you?'"*

Anxiety shows you have forgotten the most basic premise of faith: You have a Father who loves you, knows what you need, and never stops thinking about you. And he's already shown you how far he'll go to take care of you.

The birds only have a creator; you've got a Father who sent his Son to die for you! If he did ***THAT*** for you, you can trust him with what you're facing today.

II. Seek First Your Father's Kingdom (vs 33)

"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

If my Father knows what I need, providing for myself no longer has to be the primary, organizing purpose of my life. Thus, **I'm free to ask a different, primary question with my money, and that is:** *What would most honor God and most advance his kingdom?*

👆That's what it means to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. Your first question with your money is not, "How much can I spend?" or "How much should I save?" but "*What are God's purposes with the money he's entrusted to me*?"

Now, does that mean a spiritual person doesn't ever spend money on themselves, or that they don't save, because they believe God will magically supply all the money they need in retirement? No--just that their primary driver is not "How am I going to take care of myself" but "What is faithful to God?"

The question is what comes *first*. What gets first priority?

Around TSC, we have a really simple way of expressing this. We say: **Matthew 6:33 living means that you…**

- Live ***sufficiently***; give extravagantly. You see, if you're a Christian, you're probably doing both of these--one you'll do sufficiently and the other you'll do extravagantly. Which is which for you?

- You could say the same thing about saving: Save ***sufficiently*** and give extravagantly. *Which one do you do sufficiently and which one do you extravagantly?*

Again, *What's first in your life?* Now, it's easy to nod our heads at all this, and say, "God is first," so let me give you a little quiz that a couple of Harvard financial analysts who became Christians came up with to try and help you be honest with yourself. Or, at least, I'll give you one similar to the one they came up with, adapted for us.

I'm going to give you 7 quick questions; each one will have a possible "a," "b," or "c" answer. And just be honest--I'm not taking this up for a grade. Just answer with literally your first impulse.

(If you have a pen, jot down the letter of your answer for each. And if you didn't bring a pen, keep a mental tally. It will be easy.)

1. The thought of which of these excites you most?
   a. A four-star vacation across Europe.
   b. Maxing out your retirement accounts for the year. (Some of you felt your blood pressure drop we me just saying that, OR)
   c. Dinner with your pastor, who expresses heartfelt thanks for your sacrificial support of a new ministry and hearing stories of people saved and lives changed through it (Be honest…) (Now, some of you are like, "Well, hearing stories of lives changed, that's pretty awesome. But having to have dinner with you, not so much." BTW, one of my favorite Summit stories from years ago…***Illus.*** woman who paid my check)
2. You hear about a man who by frugal living and extreme savings managed his middle-class income so that he left his family an estate worth $8 million. Your ***first*** thought is:
   a. What a waste! Spending it would have been more fun!
   b. Wow, he really did well. I hope I can do that, too.
   c. He might have missed some key opportunities to experience the joy of generosity.
3. Success looks like:
   a. Owning your own home, living comfortably, and experiencing great food and travel.
   b. Retiring at 50.
   c. Extending payoff of your mortgage and forgoing some luxuries in order to sponsor a missionary family.
4. Your annual bonus is twice as much as you thought it would be. What is your *first* thought?
   a. I'm headed out shopping! (You're like, 'I've got 37 things sitting in my Amazon cart just waiting for this moment!') Or,
   b. I'm applying this to the mortgage!
   c. Thank God for this provision! What ministry initiative can we sponsor this year?
5. The *spending* in my life is:
   a. Effortless—I love spending money! (It soothes me) #retailtherapy
   b. Troubling—I wish I could spend less.
   c. Controlled—I feel good about the way it's managed.

6. The *saving* in my life is:
    a. Drudgery—i.e. an inconvenience that gets in the way of having fun.
    b. Effortless—I love building wealth. Compound interest is my love language!
    c. Purposeful—I have healthy and reasonable goals toward which I'm carefully working. Beyond that, I plan to give the excess away.
7. The *giving* in my life is:
    a. Obligatory.
    b. Formulaic.
    c. Effortless and exciting.

- If your answers were (mostly "A"), you are a **SPENDER**
- If (mostly "B"), you're a **SAVER**
- If mostly "C", you're a **Matthew 6:33 STEWARD.**

Hear me: There's *nothing wrong with enjoying a vacation* or *getting excited about your retirement account*. The question is whether generosity gets you excited, too.

Jesus seeks 👆🏽👆🏽 STEWARDS who seek first God's kingdom; ***who spend and save sufficiently but give extravagantly because they have a heart like their Father's heart.***

III. Leave the Future in Your Father's Hands (vs 34)

vs. 34 is one of my favorite statements of Jesus's: Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because… each day will have trouble of its own. And you're like, "Well, **that's exactly what I was worried** about, about tomorrow… that it would have ***trouble***." Ah, yes, b**ut guess what else tomorrow** will have? An ever present-Father. And the Father who takes care of you today will surely take care of you tomorrow.

LOOK AT ME: **Tomorrow will have troubles**. (Everybody look at your neighbor and say, *"Something's gonna go wrong next week."*)
But there is a way to face the uncertainty of tomorrow without anxiety today. And it's the knowledge that Jesus lives! That the God who watches over the birds and the flowers never slumbers nor sleeps, has promised you that nothing can ever separate you from his love, and who died and resurrected for you to bring you to himself. "*Because he lives!"* the old hymn says, "*I can face tomorrow! Because he lives, all fear is gone! Because I know he holds the future, my life is worth the living, just because HE LIVES!"*

The God who SAVED you yesterday and SUSTAINS you today surely will PROVIDE for you tomorrow. That's the good life.

Listen, giving is one of the most ultimate expressions of faith, because it declares that you know God will take care of you and that his Kingdom comes first in your life. We're used to thinking of worship with LIFTED hands, but we also worship him with OPEN hands. That's why we always say the giving moment is an important part of our worship service because it's this kind of worship—this is a declaration of trust!

We always talk about someone's baptism as this amazing moment where they let go and said, "God, I trust you!" And it is. But when God says, 'OK, if you trust me, give me the first and best of what I've given to you, you go from (hands open) to hands shut."

What does your giving say about whether you really trust God and are open to him? It's not what your mouth says or your baptism says or what your praise says that reveals whether you trust God, but what your GIVING says.

For some of you, an even bigger defining moment than that decision to get baptized is going to be the moment you say, "Yes, I trust you!" and open your hands!

Practically, for you, that means… (SLIDE)

- For some of you, beginning to tithe: Tithe literally means "10%." You need to make a choice to obey God with this first command about your finances, to give him your first 10%. And maybe you can't get there immediately--start with 5% and work your way there. As I told you last week, the path to trusting God starts with small steps! But you know what? I think you should just jump all the way in immediately and let him prove himself to you!
- For others, you need to set up a recurring tithe like I have. It's literally one of the first things to come out of my paycheck each month. And I do that because I want to show God I trust him FIRST. I want to give him my first and best and not my leftovers. And I've made it automatic so I don't forget or so that I'm not tempted to spend it on something else or get scared in a tight month and hold onto it in unbelief…
- For others, **God has blessed you in a way that you should give way beyond the tithe**. Maybe you've got some stored resource--some account, some amassed possessions, and you realize that better than laying up treasures here on earth is leveraging them to lay up treasures in heaven. I told you last week, "Don't die with a lot of money in your pocket. That's wasted."
- A guy at our church once told me, "I plan to bounce my last check. I want to leave some to my kids, of course, but I want to give all the rest away so that I die having invested all the riches God entrusted to me in heavenly treasures, and bounce my last check." This week, let me challenge you: Make a list of the most valuable things you own. That might be an investment, money you've saved for a rainy day or retirement, or a property or a vehicle. I want you to pray and ask God if he's calling you to release any of that to the kingdom of God, some of the stuff I told you about at the beginning. Maybe you're supposed to be a part of these things that we believe God's put in our heart, and maybe that is why God gave that to you, is because he wants you to put him first in this. My challenge to you, I'm not the HS, I'm not trying to make you feel guilty or manipulate you, is to ask the question, listen, and then respond.

What is he telling you to do? Let me give you a few moments to pray, and listen to the Holy Spirit, and then make that commitment right now. Here's the question I want to ask: ***What does it look like for you to put the kingdom of God first in your finances?***