

“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 cook something other than turkey this year, or 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.” So, I maintain that if you're putting together a meal to display the abundance and generosity of God, you should 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 several of God's people said...

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.

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 heartbreak the unfolding war between Israel and Hamas. I want to offer three words for us before we pray:

1. **Lament.** We lament not only the innocent Israeli lives that were lost in this horrific attack, but the continuing innocent people now on both sides that inevitably get swept up as casualties in a war like this.
2. **Peace:** We pray for an end to the violence, and that God will strengthen the witness of the church to point people there to the Prince of Peace. I love the prophecy that says that through events like these, one day Israel will look in hope on the one whom previously they had pierced. Which leads me to the third word:
3. **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 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 people say, “This is it!” and they start publishing books and overinterpreting events. I've heard people say recently, “Yeah, well, this one is different.” Well, yeah, but they said the same thing in 1967, 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, we watch these events with interest, but I'd encourage you not to overinterpret these things—and most of all 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, not speculation on the end times, is our main job right now. I may not be sure the exact day or the hour he is coming, 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? Put your finger there, and also find Luke 11. 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, and 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 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 would think of something different. They would think about something from Leviticus 19 that went back to divine instructions about how you were to harvest your 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

So, here's the deal. In ancient Israel, every family (except for the tribe of Levi) was allotted a plot of land, most of which were rectangular, and most would plant and harvest crops on that tract of land. The command that God gave his people was twofold: First, they were not to "glean right up to the edges," and second, anything they dropped while harvesting they should leave. Those corners were to be left for the poor.

The concept was as simple as it was profound: Those who had abundance were to share with those who had fallen on hard times, all the while not depriving them of the dignity of providing for

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."

themselves—they still had to work, to harvest the grain left for them. It wasn't a handout.

And here was the catch: The law didn't say *how much* of an edge they were 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 wasn't the only way ancient Israelites were supposed to be generous. In the Old Testament, Israelite giving was shaped by a series of laws. There was the law of the tithe, the firstfruits—that is, the first tenth of everything they received went directly to God, given to the temple. There were other offerings they gave on top of that; because they were a nation, some of those would be similar to what we'd call income tax. But there were also special offerings for the temple or for buildings or for the poor. This four-corners bit was on top of all of that.

I want to use this **simple concept** to teach us four things about generosity:

1. Traditionally speaking, generosity is public

Again, you could **see** the corners of someone's field. This is one of the more interesting elements of this gleaning principle. In an agrarian society, people get reputations for being generous by having big corners.

This is going to be slightly different than what some of you have heard taught about generosity: Throughout our Bibles, we are often encouraged toward public acts of generosity as a way of glorifying God and declaring our solidarity with Jesus' mission.

That has to be balanced, of course, with Jesus' teaching that we should never give as a way of drawing attention to ourselves or to gain praise for ourselves. After all, Jesus said, "Be careful not to practice your righteousness (this includes your generosity, of course) in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven" (**Matthew 6:1**).

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

And in Luke 11, specifically talking about generosity, Jesus says, **Luke 11:33**, "No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light."

- In those days, fuel was really expensive, so nobody would light a candle and put it under a basket or in a closet. That 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 light a candle, Jesus said, you put it out to bring light.
- It should glorify God and put Jesus' generosity on display.

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 have to balance this. **It's a biblical tension.** You have to check your heart motives—am I wanting people to admire and praise me? And, at the same time, you want to put the glory and generosity of Jesus on display in your giving!

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, how he gave on our behalf. I had no say in the matter. I actually had other plans for the money he was giving to missions.

I've tried over the years 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 be 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 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 (I make \$19K now), 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; 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 percent 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. So, I want you to do a thought experiment with me, OK? What if your giving were suddenly made known to everyone? How would you feel? In those days, because everyone had these little farms, you could literally measure a person's generosity in feet and yards. What if people could see your generosity like that?

To be clear, I'm not instituting this in our church. You're not going to come in next week and find your picture up on the wall with a little number beside your name indicating how much you give. 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 theirs?

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

And let me give you a challenge to that end: 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's people should live with an *abundance* mentality

The whole premise of this command is that God provides 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 do 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, we live in a world God has blessed with multiplying abundance, and when you give things away, God actually multiplies it.

The Bible frequently contrasts these two ways of looking at the world, and commends 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, **Luke 11**, Jesus said, now in 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, he says, implies generous; the Greek word for "unhealthy" here implies stingy.
 - You could almost read Jesus' 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 is 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 life with light and joy. And a stingy eye will fill your whole life with darkness and unhappiness.

We often talk about Jesus bringing an upside-down kingdom, and nowhere is the upside-downness of what he taught more dramatic than 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*, the 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.

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 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, he never took an offering or raised a salary), but that 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? It’s like **Ronald Rolheiser** says, “When you act like God, you get to feel like God.”

My point in all of this is: You don’t need to just change your generosity habits; you need to change how you look at the world. God

wanted his people to look at the world through the lens of abundance.

Sometimes we get so focused on changing our behavior and our habits that we fail to address the viewpoint behind them that drive those habits. Jesus said that your generosity habits are ultimately determined by the “eye” we look at the world through, and until we change the perspective of that eye, any behavior change will be short-lived. In other words, if you are not *naturally* generous (and most of us aren’t), 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.

But if you change that perspective, the behavior will naturally change. A bright eye means a perspective change that will naturally produce a behavior change. And that perspective change, that heart change, is an abundance mentality coupled with a trust in God that when you do things his way, he’ll always bless you so that you have more than enough.

Again, if you really believed this, generosity would not be a problem for you at all. It would be as natural as giving your kids a smile in the morning. “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 to 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 as 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 the law of the four corners meant that he intended some of what he gave you to be used to bless the poor. And when we don’t, he considers it stealing.

Which is why the Bible often talks about generosity to the poor in terms of “justice,” not grace. Justice is giving someone what they deserve. Grace is giving them something they don’t 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 to use that money in very specific ways. The same is true for us as God’s stewards.

God talks about our giving to the poor in terms of justice.

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 give generosity, other days you need it

⁴ Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 261.

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.

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, as an American, you might love the song and the movie, but you hate the concept. You definitely don’t want to live 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. And 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.”

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.*

We all end up needy at some point. And the law is: *“Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered... .. but whoever shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will call and not be answered.”*

And maybe the most important thing to remember here is that we're not just to be generous so that God will be generous to us, but because he already has.

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 yourself 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. Remember, the gospel always reverses the order: 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. To be generous not because God threatens to punish you if you don't, but because you have a generous heart like his.

Or to change the metaphor, here's a story I haven't shared 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 said, "Daddy, what's wrong with these balloons? They won't float." (And she picked up one and dropped it). 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 sacrificed the whole thing. He 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 live by the Platinum Rule: Do unto others as Jesus has done to you.

Conclusion

So, we've been building up to this big question: How big are your corners?

In the New Testament, all these giving laws, as laws (the tithing laws and four-corners laws), go away—but the principles all still 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 are seeking to grow.**

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.

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; donate an asset).

- 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.