

Our Heritage of Generous Giving

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When Chris, Bethany and I came to Faith 27 years ago now, one of the very first ministry assignments I was given as the new associates pastor under Bill Goode's leadership was to write a feasibility study on the subject of our church starting a Christian school. That's what I was asked to do. We had quite a few people who were serving in public schools, in fact, Rita Jamieson served in the public schools at that time and continued to. I had a lot of people who sent their kids to public schools. We wanted to try to strengthen them every way we could. We also, during those days, had a good number of people who were homeschooling and we wanted to serve them and help them as well. There were folks whose children attended various Christian schools in town. It was a very healthy mix but the congregation had already for years been talking about having a Christian school here, especially at the high school level. Well, the reason I was given that task when I first came was the previous three years of my life had been spent as a Christian school administrator along with working on my final degree at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia so I had fresh information: information about curriculum; information about staffing; information about budgets. So I just did what I was asked to do, to write a feasibility study, what would be involved in this church starting a Christian school.

In that study, we explained that there are many challenges to operating a private school that was both distinctively Christian but also committed to excellence at every level. Who would want Jesus' name on something that was not characterized by excellence? So it wasn't going to be easy but the bottom line of that study was this: a big part of the challenge was financial. We just could not get away from that fact. If you're going to start a private school, you are taking on a heavy financial responsibility and here's why: there's this perpetual oncoming four way train wreck, in other words, competing priorities and the trains were these: you want to have reasonably priced tuition. We weren't trying to be a country club Christian school. You want it to be reasonably priced. You want to have some sort of a tuition assistance program even for those who can't afford to send their children even if it is reasonably priced. You want anybody who wants to be able to send their children to do so so you've got that. Then on the other hand, you want everything to be done with excellence so you want an excellent curriculum, you want excellent extra curricular activities so there are two fighting priorities for sure. Then you want to pay your staff as generously as you possibly can so that you can hear the whistle of that oncoming train. Then you want to have some kind of a facility that is excellent and well maintained as well.

So the point of the feasibility study was having the kind of ministry that this church had been talking about for a long, long time. It was going to require a significant financial commitment for sure and that was that. Well then, eight years later, Pastor Goode asked our church to consider a leadership transition where on one night we would actually take two votes, one would be to make me the senior pastor of the church after being here for eight years as the associate and the second vote was actually to place him on my staff which would then allow him to concentrate more on the biblical counseling organization that he was the executive director of. So at Pastor Goode's initiative, he was asking our church to approve he and me basically switching places. Now, we're congregationally governed and what that means among other things is that regardless of what Pastor Goode might have thought about that or anybody else, it was a congregational decision. So I think they very wisely decided that I was going to have to go through an interview process just like I was brand-new even though I had been here for eight years at the time and part of that interview process was to have a night where we could just do an open Q & A where people from the congregation could ask me any question that they wanted. Well, one of the questions that came up was: if you become the new senior pastor of the church, will you lead us to start a Christian school? This was before I learned how to be so sweet about things and so the next part of this story will undoubtedly surprise many of you. What I said that night and some of you here remember that, what I said was that either we're going to start one or we're going to stop talking about it. Again, I realize that could have been sprinkled with a whole lot more grace than it got on that night but I think the point was accurate, I really do. It's not healthy for any person or group of persons to get in the habit of being satisfied just talking about things. The old saying is true: often when it's said and done, there is a whole lot more said than done. And that is not healthy for a follower of Christ to talk about doing something and never getting at it and it's certainly not healthy for any organization to get into that habit as well.

So that's what I said. Then somebody wisely said, "Well, how would we swing that financially? I mean, how in the world could we possibly make that work?" Remember, the feasibility study? Well, the recommendation on that night was to save money to build a two-story education addition because at that time, the end of our building on our State Road 26 campus was the gymnasium. We didn't have any education space at that time to speak of and so the plan was, what was said that night, we would have to save money and build a building and then in order to provide tuition assistance for families that otherwise couldn't afford to send their children, we discussed that night at that interview the recommendation of actually establishing an endowment for the school where the interest from that endowment could be used for tuition assistance. Then a woman actually pushed me on that point and she said, "Well, how much money are you talking about?" Good question, huh? I thought I was interviewing, it was certainly time to speak honestly, to speak specifically for sure. Some of you were there that night and there was a palpable gasp in the auditorium when I answered that part of the question because you remember what I said: it would require an endowment of at least \$2 million. That was stated on our East side platform nearly 19 years ago.

Now, with that in mind, I want to invite you to do something really hard, are you ready for this? I want to ask you turn to three different passages of Scripture. No kidding. Last week we were just kind of warming up when I asked you to do two, now were on to three but Thanksgiving is coming, you need a little cardiovascular exercise so here you go. Get it right here at the church house. Malachi 3 in the Old Testament and then 2 Corinthians 8 and 1 Thessalonians 1 in the New Testament. Have you got all that? I heard that "no" from over at Faith West. Malachi chapter 3, 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and 1 Thessalonians chapter 1. If you need the Bible under the chair in front of you, that's page 678 in the front section in the Old Testament and then pages 143 and 159 in the back section. So Malachi 3, 2 Corinthians 8 and 1 Thessalonians 1. Isn't it great to hear the pages of those Bibles turning? That's a good thing, huh? Work the word of God, my dear friends. Absolutely.

We're landing the plane today on this series we've called "The Stewardship of Our Heritage." We did that because we've got two themes converging right now. One is that it's November, of course, and at Faith, that means it's Stewardship Month, the time we set aside every year to consider all that God has entrusted to us and whether or not we've been faithful to the trust the last 12 months and whether or not we need to make some alterations to be more faithful in the coming months. It's also our church's 50th anniversary so we've just been rejoicing at how God led the leaders at Kossuth Street Baptist Church to plant a new congregation at what was that time the new south side of Laffayette, just south of Teal Road on S. 18th St. We've been studying some of the early documents, some of their Dedication Service programs and some of the minutes from their business meetings and what we've determined is this: we've been given a marvelous heritage. There is no question, it's a great story. The faithfulness of those who have gone before us has just been outstanding and the way God has chosen to bless their efforts has been unusually abundant. So our goal this month has been to consider that trust and in part just to thank the warhorses and the warhorsettes around here, men and women who have been faithfully part of this church family for 30 years, for 40 years, for some nearly 50 years. Then also to consider what it means for people like you and me to be faithful stewards of that trust. You realize, few churches have been given the trust of the story that has been given to us. That is a trust from God for which we will some day give an account.

So far we've focused on our heritage of the Gospel and then our heritage of spiritual growth and then last week, our heritage of service. Well, to tell the story completely, we also need to thank and praise the Lord for our heritage of generous giving because the facts are very clear, the average long-time member of this church has given very quietly, very generously, to support the ministries of our church and as a result, God has chosen to bless us with many additional ways to accomplish the mission that he has given us in this place and around the world. Faithful people have gone before us. You might say, "Why was that? Why is it?" Honestly, Rita and Jerry gave you some hints of that even in their testimony this morning but it also goes back to one of the very first principles that our forebears publicly committed themselves to at the dedication of our first permanent building back in 1967. When the pastor stood up before them, you could smell the newness of the building at that time and the joy of the accomplishment in their hearts

when they said this, but the pastor said, "To the purpose of maintaining worship in accordance with our beliefs in a verbally inspired and hence, infallible Bible," and then everybody there said, "We dedicate this church." Friends, this church family has historically wanted every aspect of our Christian lives whether we're talking privately, whether we're talking publicly, to be in growing allegiance to the inspired word of God.

When it came to the issue of finances in general and giving in particular, here is what our heritage is: men and women who didn't think about that subject from the perspective of what was easy or what was convenient or what they felt like, the sole question was, what does the word of God say? Just like for you this morning, if you are saying, "I'm not sure I'm going to like this sermon," what does that have to do with it? Just like, "Do I want to talk about this," what does that have to do with it? The sole question before the house is: what does the word of God say and how can we demonstrate our faith in the Gospel and our joyous submission to Jesus as our Lord in every aspect of our life? Our forebears said: including what we do with our money.

Well, if that's the question, praise God the answer is really clear in the Bible. Aren't you glad for a Bible that's clear? Absolutely. Malachi 3, beginning in verse 8, here's some clarity for you. "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me!" God says, "But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you!" Wow. "'Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,' says the LORD of hosts, 'if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes,' says the LORD of hosts. 'All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land,' says the LORD of hosts."

Well, I wonder if anyone ever took God up on a command like that? That's where 2 Corinthians 8 fits into this discussion so turn over there now, if you would. Here is what happens when you infuse grace into the commands of God. I'm in 2 Corinthians 8, beginning in verse 1. "Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia," which by the way, that would include Thessalonica, that's why we're going there next. He's telling the Corinthians about the Macedonians. "That in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy," remember that, "and their deep poverty," how could you have that together? "Overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well." You see, the Corinthians had been talking about participating in that love offering but they just hadn't quite gotten around to finishing it. Can you imagine that? "So he would also complete in you this gracious work as well. But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. I am not speaking this as

a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

Now, go to 1 Thessalonians 1. This is written to the same church about whom Paul had just been speaking; this is part of the churches of Macedonia. Just a couple of verses here but it makes an important point, I think. 1 Thessalonians 1:6 where Paul said, "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word," notice, that's all over this text, all these texts, "the word and having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example," that's what I want you to especially notes, "an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord," there's that again, "has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols," don't you love that way of describing salvation? "You turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God."

We're talking this morning about our heritage of generous giving. That's an important part of our story, friends. With the time remaining, let's think about three reasons our forebears gave. You say, "That must've been hard for them. I know it's hard for me. How in the world? Why in the world did they do that?" Well, here's the first reason from the book of Malachi: generous giving demonstrates your trust in God's faithfulness. Malachi was writing at a very sad time in the history of God's people but one of the evidences of God's grace is he continued to send his prophets to continue to give his rebellious, disobedient people the word. So what we just read in that sad text is essentially an indictment on the part of God of the children of Israel and no lack of clarity there, huh? "Will a man rob God? You're robbing me," God says. You say, "Well, how have we robbed you?" In tithes and offerings. The word "tithe" means "tenth" and the Lord had instructed his people to acknowledge their belief that all material blessings come from his good hand by giving firstfruits, a tenth of all that they had first in both order, not at the back end, both order and also quality, not the leftovers, quality back to him. Offerings, any special opportunities to show their love for him. And this text says that one of the ways God's people showed their lack of love for God was by refusing to handle their material blessings in obedience with his commands and because God often uses graphic terminology to just help us understand what's what and aren't you glad for that? I'm glad for a Bible that just gets at it, aren't you? I didn't wake up just to fuzz around this morning, did you? Absolutely not.

So God chose the image of a thief. Who likes a thief, huh? Who wants to be a thief? And the Lord says, "Not only are you robbing someone but you are actually robbing me." Now, you might say, "God could have raised all sorts of areas of life that would have illustrated their hypocrisy but why did he talk about money? Why did he do that?" Well, I think there's two answers to that question and you may not like either one of them but I do think they are the two answers to that question. One of them is the beauty and specificity of math. Don't you love math? Yeah, let me hear that from over at Faith West. You say, "Why should we love the beauty and specificity of math?" Here's why: a lot of

the Christian life can be kind of squishy, like if I said, "How is your prayer life going?" That's a squish. You can say, "Well, pretty good," how do you quantify that? There are so many areas of the Christian life and in areas where there is the potential for squish, many of us tend to squish up, don't we? Yup. Yup. Yup. But money is objective, isn't it? We can count it. You can pretty much do the math and know exactly where we stand.

Now, here's the second reason why I think God in this text used their giving as an illustration of their hypocrisy: it's because what we do with our money is a marvelous window to our hearts, right? It's a very low wrung on the Christian ladder, it really is, meaning that if we're not pleasing God here, we're probably fudging in all sorts of other areas as well and God just loves to point that out to help us. To help us. Now, please notice this, don't say, "Well, that's a negative text." Wait, wait. Even in a sad point in the history of God's people, this isn't just condemnation, the Lord actually issues a challenge, doesn't he? He says, "You can turn this around. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house and test me. Test me in that," God says, "if I will not open for you the window of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows, then I will rebuke the devourer for you so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground nor will your vine in the fields cast its grapes, says the Lord. All the nations will call you blessed." You know, the blessing of God upon you will be so obvious that everyone will notice it, "for you shall be a delightful land, says the Lord of hosts."

Now, the good news is that the verses that we read in the New Testament, they demonstrate that subsequent followers of Jesus Christ allowed the Lord to help them take that challenge and what happened then as a result is that God was more than happy to fulfill the promise that he made to them. That's been a delightful part of our church's heritage as well. Not people who are flashy, not people who wanted their names on the side of a building but on the other hand, not people who just talked about giving or some other area of life and never got around to actually doing it. We're talking about a heritage of quiet, sacrificial, faithful giving in ways that God in turn chose to reward with overflowing blessing just like he said he would. In a document called "A brief history of Faith Baptist Church," the writers said this, "By June, 1964 the original 16 members had grown to 70. The time was obviously right and the need was great. Encouraged by this early success, the members purchased lots in the Tecumseh 3 addition on S. 18th St." Originally it was thought that four residential building lots would be enough but they stretched their faith and they bought two more. They bought six, even this great exercise of faith proved to be much too small in later years. Can you imagine that small group of people and this is the beauty of this and the power of grace, can you imagine this small group of people living the polar opposite of the individuals of Malachi's day? You see, they brought their tithes and offerings into the storehouse as an evidence of their faith that God would keep his word to them.

If I'm reading the documents correctly, those two extra lots cost an additional \$6,950 total but they stretched themselves and they did it. It's also interesting to compare that fact with some of the items they included in their "Do you remember?" section of the Dedication booklet of their 1967 first auditorium. They said, "Do you remember the first letter we received with a check for \$1,000?" That would've been big money in 1967, you

know? It would be big money today, huh? Can you imagine them stepping out and doing what they did and God honoring his word in that case right away. "Do you remember," they said, "our decision to buy land? Do you remember the first church to help us with support?" By the way, they never even named the church, they didn't need to, but God kept his part of the equation. "Do you remember the second church to help us with support?" Then an interesting detail, they said, "Do you remember the way God provided through two school teachers the rest of the money to pay for the land?" The school teachers are never named. By the way, it's just so delightful, this is exactly what that little memory book said next, "The school teachers had only been in the service once at Faith Baptist Church and we welcome them again." I guess so. "Y'all come back any time you want." But do you see the point? I'm talking about our heritage. I'm talking to you about our heritage of generous giving and more importantly, do you see the Lord blessing a group of people who chose to take God at his word? It's interesting too in that memory book that they had zero interest in taking any credit for themselves. Here was the last "Do you remember?" in 1967, "Do you remember how faithful our God has been to us and how unfaithful we have been to him in so many ways?" Said by the people who planted a church and were in their first permanent structure in the course of three years and their focus was still on the faithfulness of God.

When Pastor Goode came here in 1975, the church had been through a period of rapid growth numerically, especially with their bus ministry but then they went through some rocky times; a series of rather difficult problems. In fact, the warhorse and warhorsettes could tell some pretty interesting stories from that particular time in our history including the pastor that he preceded Pastor Goode who lasted here a grand total of five months. So there were some pretty rough times and part of it was when Pastor Goode took the call, he and Mrs. Goode came down here to Lafayette and discovered pretty quickly the church was actually behind on its bills. That's why David Jeremiah from out in California quipped once, "There's always two churches involved in a candidating process, the church that is there when you candidate, the church that's there when you get there," and so that's one of the first challenges that Bill Goode had to face was the congregation was actually behind on its bills and he surmised pretty quickly that there was some Malachi 3 living going on. The math, oh, I love math, don't you? I love the beauty and specificity of math. And he figured out pretty quickly this math could not be adding up.

Well, it goes back to what we've been studying the last three weeks. Pastor Goode believed in solving problems because he wanted to help. It wasn't about money, it was about dealing with that particular area of life as a window to the heart so that everybody involved in the church family could grow up spiritually and part of the problem was that people had not been taught biblical principles of financial stewardship. The Bible speaks a lot more about money than it does about heaven, did you know that? A lot and so Pastor Goode faithfully began teaching what God's word says about earning money; having a biblical work ethic; what God's word says about saving money; what God's word says about spending money instead of falling into the trap of a consumptive lifestyle; and like the passages I read this morning, what God's word says about giving money. Friends, here is our heritage: you show someone around here a principle from God's Word and they're on it and that's what happened. So Pastor Goode talked about capping off our

lifestyle so that as our income grows, we're able to better obey these passages of Scripture. Some of you who were here during this time, you remember Pastor Goode saying over and over and over that the average American family spends 110% of their income year after year after year and doesn't even know it and so what he taught was principles from the word of God that if followed would help deliver us from that unreasonable financial pressure that would be upon us and our families because of overspending and what happened was Stewardship Month after Stewardship Month after Stewardship Month, the people of this church took God at his word and went home and talked together as a husband and wife and actually worked out their budgets and learned how to communicate about money and then they had a written commitment to God about what they believed they should do in terms of their giving in the coming year. That resulted in a church family who were delightfully generous.

One example is Jack Viel. Jack Viel was our second oldest member. Dear Annetta W. is still our oldest member, by the way, and you may want to pray. In fact, I would encourage you to pray for Annetta. She's on what appears to be the final days of her life. A sweet, sweet part of our heritage as well. But Jack Viel passed away a couple of months ago after celebrating his 100th birthday so now I can tell you a few more things about Jack without him fussing at me about it. Unless there is fussing in heaven, I'm not sure so I'm kind of waging my bets here but he wouldn't have wanted me to say this but I'm now going to. Jack Viel was an incredibly frugal man. In fact, if you met Jack Viel, you would assume he did not have two nickels to rub together. He kept his heat set in his national home at 55 degrees during his entire life including last winter. Jack Viel believed heating your house above 55 degrees was an abject waste of time when you had sweaters and so you would go to his house and he would look like this snowman of sweaters. Also, he gifted his house to our church and so as far as we can tell, he never turned on his dishwasher or his air conditioning condenser because he would have seen that as a gross waste of needless energy.

At his funeral, because he lived through the depression, he believed in saving stuff. Now, there are probably some other words we could use to describe that but let's just go with saving. At his funeral, we could have distributed dozens of sugar packets to every person in attendance. He just saved them. Those little twisty ties that you get off the loaves of bread, he had bags of them. You never know when you might need a couple of hundred twisty ties and he was ready. But what you probably would have never known was that Jack Viel was an incredibly generous man. Arvid Olson was asked by Jack to be the executor of his estate and so has been going through some of his paperwork and he told me he found stacks of thank you letters from people that Jack had helped over the years and what was interesting was many of the thank you notes were not addressed to Jack because the people never knew who gave the money. So the people wrote anonymous thank you letters and then presented them to whoever the third-party was and then Jack just kept them.

Here's an example of one from a family whose husband had been laid off and they were concerned for how they were going to pay for their children's tuition at a Christian school and I reviewed this card this week. It said, "We never imagined that God would provide

in the way he did." By the way, this was not addressed to Jack, in fact, it was signed so I knew who wrote the card. I called the family this week to be sure it was okay for me to use this illustration and they said "We never knew who gave that money. We just wrote an anonymous thank you from the perspective of anonymous to who it was being written to." "We never imagined that God would provide in the way he did. Through your very generous gift to our family, this has been a a wonderful lesson to us and to our children that God is faithful and Philippians 4:19 is a reality. Thank you for being God's instrument of provision in this situation." What happened is Brother Viel found out about that need and he quietly walked into the front door of that Christian school, paid the tuition bill for the entire family for the upcoming school year and never said a word about it. In fact, the family wouldn't have known except the school contacted the family and explained that their bill had been paid in full. Friends, what I'm saying to you this morning is people like that are an essential aspect of this church's heritage and as we think about the way that we're living today and as we think about the stewardship commitments that we're making in the days ahead, part of that is how are we going to steward that incredible heritage?

Now, when you turn the pages to the New Testament, you learn that generous giving proves the sincerity of your love. I realize you may not be familiar with the book of 2 Corinthians but the context is there was actually a famine that was occurring localized near the city of Jerusalem and as a result of that, the other Gentile churches were taking up a love offering for their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ. It was a marvelous way for God to bring about unity between the Jews and the Gentiles in the early church and so what's happening is that many churches have taken Paul up on that challenge but notice what the text said because of the effect of the Gospel. You see, this is all about grace giving now in the New Testament. The Gospel, the good news that God has made salvation available through the free gift of the blood of his Son. By the way, if you've not yet trusted Christ, please don't think about money this morning, think about accepting the free gift of salvation through trusting Christ. But the point of the text I read was that because of the Gospel, the appeal for financial giving is based on the transforming power of God's grace. "Now brethren," Paul said, "we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given to the other churches in Macedonia," those would be the churches of Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea and what Paul is saying is, because they have given already so sacrificially to this love offering, Paul can use them as an example to the Corinthians, the immature Corinthians and essentially say, "It's time for you guys to get with it too. You've been talking and talking and talking, now it's time for you to complete what you said you were going to do."

He goes on to say, "Grace giving makes generous giving possible even when it's hard." He said that in great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. You see, I realize you might be having an argument with the Holy Spirit of God right now. Welcome to "you're going to lose." It wasn't one of these, "I'll start obeying God after my ship comes in," because there's no trust in that. They gave out of their deep poverty because they believed God would provide. One of our longtime deacons liked to say, "I believe we can get along as a

family better on 90% of our income with God's blessing than on 100% of our income without it." That's right.

Shortly after we made the leadership transition, we did begin the process of starting our school. In fact, we tasked Dan Wickard and Dale Davidson and then eventually Bob L. into helping us sort all of that out. Part of that meant we were going to have to build a building and since we were in a period of uncertainty, we're going in to starting a new ministry, we wanted to build that building debt-free and so some of you remember this particular object that we all put on our kitchen tables and it was called "Building with Integrity" and we were saving money to build that building together and the motto of it was "Not equal giving but equal sacrifice." I still keep this on my credenza even though it's nearly 20 years old now. We did that but it also meant we were going to be supplementing the school budget through our church giving. When we decided we were going to start a school, we also decided at that time that we were going to give an additional \$100,000 a year along with at that time, covering the utilities, covering the building maintenance. That meant for us as a church that we were deciding on tithes and offerings, giving additionally in order to supply and to supplement and to support some of these additional ministries God was giving us.

We also were trying, even when we started the school, we were trying to squirrel away money for that endowment fund and so we were working as hard as we could at getting \$40,000 into that endowment fund every year and it was hard. Those were challenging days but what our church family learned was: God can give you grace to do hard things even when it's challenging and what we also learned with this: it's fun while you do it. God's grace makes generous giving possible from a joyful heart. "You see, these Macedonians," Paul told the Corinthians, "they were begging us. You didn't have to cajole them, they were begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints and this not as we expected but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God." Can you imagine that? That's the point of what was said in the previous verse: they had an abundance of joy. That's why Paul would say in the next chapter, "God loves a cheerful giver." And what we've learned is that coming together as a family and obeying God in this way is fun. That's the bottom line. In fact, some of you remember the night that we dedicated that first educational building so that we could start our school. Do you remember what we did? We just like in the book of Nehemiah, in fact, we were studying the book of Nehemiah at the time, we got our orchestra and we had the orchestra lead us around that new building and we sang hymns to God just like the people of old and we celebrated what the Lord allowed us to do together. Joyful, joyful hearts.

The text also says this: God's grace makes generous giving possible even in abundance. In abundance. Not the leftovers but "just as you abound," Paul said, "in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in your giving in this gracious work also." You see, if there is any question in your mind about what God wants you to do in this matter, look no further than that verse. There is no question about what the Scripture says, no question about what the people of this church have historically done. There is only one question left?

What are you and I going to commit to do in the coming days together? And please tie that back to the promise in Malachi: what has God promised to do on our behalf if we are faithful at taking him at his word? We saved over the years toward the establishment of that endowment, received some large gifts over the years, some from Jack Viel. We recently hit \$1 million in that endowment for Faith Christian School held by our Faith Legacy Foundation. Well, as I said, Brother Viel recently died and the warhorses and warhorsettes know this too: Brother Viel had a special friend in his latter years, Dorothy Barnett. Dorothy Barnett was actually three years older than Jack. She was a retired schoolteacher. Jack liked to tell people that he was dating an older woman but especially, I think, because Dorothy was a retired schoolteacher, they had a very special interest in providing educational opportunities for children. While the estate is still being finalized, I'm happy to tell you this morning that Jack Viel has willed Faith Christian School and Faith Bible Seminary in excess of \$2 million. The first million is to establish the Dorothy Barnett Foundation which along with 1 million that we've already saved will generate interest to provide scholarships to families who would like their children to attend Faith Christian School which means we now have a \$2 million endowment for Faith Christian School. The additional million dollars will be split 60/40 between the school and our seminary. That's what Brother Viel asked to see happen to help them advance their mission in whatever way they deem best.

Friends, today's lesson is, you are sitting in a church that by God's grace is characterized by the heritage of generous giving and let us never forget this: God always keeps his promises. "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house and test me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not," what? From a guy who collected twisty ties, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows."

Now, where does the book of Thessalonians fit into this because there's one more point I really think we need to make here? Generous giving allows God to use you as an example to others. You see, that's what happened. Remember, Paul was talking about the Thessalonians as he was discussing this with the Corinthians, "So that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia for the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you." Friends, I don't have any human explanation for why God blesses us the way he does. I just don't. But I know this: our story has been and our story continues to be an encouragement and a challenge to other congregations around the world and I do not say that for a second to puff any of us up. But we also have to decide in the coming days if we want to steward that trust.

Now, I think that we ought to be amazed by the timing of all of this and let me connect a couple of dots. You may remember back eight, nine years ago when we were doing a capital campaign in order to build our first community center that as a foundation, we were giving sacrificially and what that meant, by the way, talk about crazy, we were asking and our church family was giving of their tithes to support the regular ministries of the church, additional offerings to support the bonus ministries of our church and then giving thirdly, in order to have a capital campaign to build that building. Wild grace giving during those days. A foundation comes to us and they said, "We think this town

needs a residential treatment program for at risk girls, girls ages 14 to 28 struggling with unplanned pregnancies and drug abuse and alcohol abuse and self harm. We would love it to be based on the Scriptures. This town needs that." We said, "Yeah, this town needs that. Somebody ought to do that." The foundation said, "We think you guys ought to do that. You have the school. You have the church. You have the counseling center. You're going to have the community center. You've got the property." We said, "We can't. We're tapped out. We've got the community center going on. We're also starting a seminary at the time. We can't do that." The foundation said, "Well, figure out what it would cost," so we wrote a quick feasibility study. We said it would cost a million and a quarter dollars to build a facility capable of doing what you're suggesting but even if we had that, we wouldn't build it unless we had half of the operating budget committed for the first 10 years which is another one and a quarter million dollars. We said to that foundation, "There's 2 ½ million reasons why we're not doing it." To which they said, "Fine, we're giving you 2 ½ million dollars." So that's how we were able to build Vision of Hope. I realize some people think that's my house but that's not my house. I cannot exist, my wife and me and Bear on 17,000 square feet, we need something bigger than that. That's Vision of Hope. And I don't believe in the prosperity Gospel. It's not where you do this and then God is obligated to do something in the same way but listen, we would be deaf spiritually unless we heard the message that at a period of time in our church when we were giving in especially generous ways, God poured out blessings from heaven in a way that absolutely unbelievable.

Well, where are we now? You know we're in the last month of a three year capital campaign which allowed us to build Faith West and I'm happy to tell you that our church family has done everything they promised to do in that three year capital campaign and more to the amazement of the bankers who couldn't believe we would start construction of the building in the first six months of a three year campaign because they were absolutely convinced as soon as the building was up, our people would stop giving and that's not what's happened. That campaign has been a fulfilled satisfactorily, assuming December goes as it would appear to go and I know it's hurt. I had the 35 ouches just like many of you did and the last one is going to come in December. One more ouch and it's hurt many of us. We have sacrificed greatly for that and during that time, what has God chosen to do? Last December I was able to announce that a gift of land, 90 acres of property was given to us contiguous to this site, valued at \$1.4 million and today had the happy privilege of telling you about this gift from Jack Viel. During this period of our Faith West capital campaign, God has given us special gifts totaling \$3.4 million. It's all about his faithfulness, friends. "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house and test me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven."

And I would just encourage you to think about the kind of steward you have been to this trust. Frankly, some who will hear this sermon probably have some repenting to do. I would encourage you to do that and many would say, "I'm so happy to have been a part of this in all these previous years and I can't wait to commit myself to continuing down this path and just watching what our faith God will do."

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

Father in heaven, thank you for the opportunity to think about these marvelous truths. Thank you for the great heritage we have even in this and, Lord, I pray that you would help us to joyfully be part of the future in the same way. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.