

And Then Some

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Amen. I'm going to suspend our study through Luke for a morning and maybe a few but I want to use this opportunity to stir us and challenge us as a church family, remind us of some things, particularly after, as I said earlier in this service, being with some dear churches that have become partners with us, about 450 churches or pastors now have connected with us through our pastors network or partnership or church plants, and it's really just amazing where we are in evangelical Christendom but it's so encouraging to see these guys, mostly younger pastors, who really want to please God and to honor God in their churches but they come up and get such difficulty and opposition. And it made me think on some things because when I'm in a place like I was last week with two different churches and leaders in two different churches, I'll spend probably 4 to 5 hours a day beyond my preaching just talking and counseling and answering questions and a lot of these things come up that I'm going to mention in just a moment and I thought, "I'm going to go back to our folks and we're going to look at some things and think on some things and challenge each other afresh in one particular area."

I want you to look at Matthew 5, alright? Matthew 5 and we'll look at verse 20 as a foundation stone of where we're going, and then we are going to look at quite a few things in this chapter. A simple but penetrating truth that we need to be reminded of comes out at us in the Sermon on the Mount, particularly in chapter 5 and parts of chapter 6. Matthew 5:20, Jesus is speaking to his disciples and he says, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." You will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Now, your righteousness, he says, has to surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, the Jewish religious authorities, or you could even say the Jewish system of the day and what they taught. If your righteousness is like theirs, then you're never going to see heaven. It's not going to be yours.

Now, two sides to this: 1. You're standing before a holy God. Your standing of righteousness has to surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees. Well, what does that mean? Well, they believed that they could obey laws and do works, keep the ceremonies, keep the moral code and somehow work their way to a righteousness that would achieve an acceptable standing before God and that has never happened and will never happen. By the works of the law, no man will be righteous so that's the foundation stone and I'll return to it briefly at the end of my message but if you are hoping that you can stand righteous in any way other than through Christ and faith in Christ, then you're hopeless.

So your standing has to be different than the Pharisees or your view of how you stand before God in a righteous sense has to be different, but secondly, your righteous view of living before men. How do you view righteous living before men. Now, the Pharisees being strict legalists, had all of these rules and laws and they took the laws of Scripture and developed a multitude of rules and laws beyond the scriptural rules and laws and they learned how to dot the "i's" and cross the "t's" and they became specialists at massaging and manipulating the law so that they could actually live in the flesh but say they were law abiding. So Jesus says, "You're going to have to know that true righteous living is not a bunch of rules and laws and you learning how to twist and manipulate it so that you feel better. You'd better understand that true righteous living before God comes from a changed heart. A new heart from the new birth. A true conversion whereby from the heart you joy in God and you treasure and joy in his laws. You may not keep them perfectly but you have a new heart attitude toward the God and the laws of God and you strive to honor him from a heart attitude of adoration and love, not out of an external coercion of cold, sterile works and law."

So here is what he's saying, and Jesus says this in other parts of the Gospels, much of what the Jewish religious authorities do of the day, at the this day rather, was good and acceptable. Their hearts weren't right though, and they twisted and perverted things. Not everything they did was off-track but when you realize their heart was off-track, it makes everything off-track. So he basically says here in this text, "You're going to have to understand what the Jewish religious leaders do and what they believe and you're going to have to do that and then some." Christianity is an "and then some" religion. It goes beyond what the minimal is. It goes beyond just dotting "i's" and crossing "t's" and jumping through hoops. And he brings this out over and over in our text and I got to thinking about our church this week and to start off, I want to always say it this way and that is that we have not arrived and we are always still growing and we're always still repenting and still learning. However for over 20 years, we've seen God bless in some unique ways that unfortunately are very, very rare and why do we see some unique things about Grace Life Church that are almost unheard of in other churches? It's because you are an "and then some" church. You've never just said, "Okay pastor, what's the minimal standard for churches in the South and let's just do that and let's just get things going and get on with it." You've never been that way. You've always been a church that said, "What saith the Scripture?" We can't just do what the status quo of the day is. We've got to open this book and take maybe what the status quo does as it is doing good things, but do that and then some.

I thought of some things. One of the things that the church has asked me about in the last couple of weeks was about small groups. That seems to be the one thing that comes up with these pastors and church leaders over and over is how do you do small groups effectively, and we have for many, many years averaged 90 percent plus of our worship attendance in small groups and churches of any size find that astonishing. They can't believe that for over 20 years you can run over 90 percent of your worship attendance in small group attendance. We have for over 20 years averaged over 25 percent of small group attendance at our weekly outreach visitation and they find that overwhelming. I mean, there are a lot of churches and God bless those dear pastors, where a pastor

literally, it's difficult to find one deacon who will help him visit. Do you know Brother Wayne Craft, a dear brother who is just a faithful servant of God here? When he was up in Detroit, Michigan ministering he would go visiting with his pastor of the Baptist church he attended up there in Detroit and he said, "I was the only man who would go out with the pastor to encourage him." I've never had that problem. You have always been what most folks would do and then some. That's what the kind of people you are. Many, many years ago we determined that we were going to be a church that was going to take the word of God and verse by verse, chapter by chapter, preach the whole counsel of God or you could translate it, the whole purpose of God, and that's what the Apostle Paul said to the elders at the church at Ephesus in Acts 20 as he wanted to verify that he had been faithful as their pastor, he said, "I did not shrink back from declaring to you the whole counsel of God." Now listen, that means even those doctrines that are challenging and troubling to the fallen man's understanding. Amen? All of those mysterious doctrines like foreknowledge and calling and predestination and election. By the way, all those are Bible words and they're in the New Testament many, many times. Those are challenging doctrines and to the man who likes to put everything in his own grasp and control his own destiny, they are troubling doctrines.

Someone may ask, "Well, you are a Calvinist church." Well, I don't like that label because I don't agree with John Calvin on everything. He did a good job in some areas, I believe, but I don't think he hit on all cylinders on some other areas but it's not about Calvinism, it's not about Arminianism, here's what it's about: will we preach the whole counsel of God? That's the question at hand. I understand that if we would shrink back and not do that, we would draw more people. I understand that. I understand that the average evangelical and Baptist today is not looking for that kind of preaching but that's not an option, amen? But how have you prospered as we have prospered and we're not quite double the size we were when I first became your pastor but we're pretty close to that, how have we been able to go forward even though we've had our ups and downs through the years with your pastor preaching what is very unpopular? By the way, it didn't used to be unpopular in Baptist life. I can prove that emphatically with Baptist history. It's just the last 50, 80 years we've gotten away from the doctrines our forefathers died for. How have we gotten away with preaching the whole counsel of God? Because you're the kind of church that does what other churches would do and then some.

We were striving starting over 20 years ago to develop what we call meaningful membership by developing a sound biblical understanding of evangelism and biblical conversion so that we wouldn't have these membership rolls where we have 800 or 900 in attendance and 3,000 on roll. That's common, by the way. And now our attendance is very close to our membership roll. It's never going to be perfect but we've striven to do that and that receives a lot of negative press and I know if we would compromise and pull back on some of that, bigger numbers would be comfortable with us. Meaningful membership also includes that you practice compassionate, humble, biblical church discipline, something you have striven to support and vote for and do now for over 20 years. And my question is, why would you be that kind of church? What is it about you guys that calls you to do that when that's almost unheard of? It's because you're a church that said, "We want to do what other folks are doing and then some."

We now have eight church plants and there are a couple of others that aren't officially ours but they were started as a result of our preaching internet ministry and I'm telling you, I've stayed on the phone for two hours with one of the pastors at one of our church plants this week and it's a lot of work. It's difficult. I mean, they are facing stuff we settled 30 years ago. Do you understand that? Challenges and difficulties and disagreements we waded through 30 years ago, they are just starting and so, man, when I talk to these guys, I have to go back in my mind and say, "Boy, I remember that. It's been a long time ago." And I'm thinking, "Why would you embrace that?" And you come during the True Church Conference and you love these guys and, by the way, I never know how many is coming. I'm always shocked that more than 50 want to come. I think we almost reached 700 last year. I don't know how many are coming this next year but whoever comes, be here and love those pastors. Be here and encourage those saints of God who are trying to honor God in the church. You just don't know how much you help them just by being here. A little pat on the back. But why would you embrace that ministry? Well, I'm going to be honest, the overwhelming majority of churches, that's just too much work. "Just take care of us, pastor. Quit worrying about the world. Quit wearing about planting sound churches. Just take care of us." But you're not that way. Why are you that way? Because you do what others would do and then some.

You supported our radio and television ministry and now the internet broadcast of the ministry is surpassing radio and television, and you've done that for many years. We received a \$1,000 check for our ministry some time ago from a man in New Mexico and found out he used to watch us on television in New Mexico and we had no idea he existed. You just never know how God is going to bless. I talked to Brother Tim, our media guy this morning and he reminded me or affirmed to me that our broadcast on WHMT out of Huntsville is the number one religious broadcast of all religious broadcasts of any time period out of the NBC Huntsville market and it's been like that for many years. And you have supported that and God has blessed that and, to be honest, I'm struggling with canceling it. I thought that's a chunk of money we could save and it may be the right thing to do because the internet is filling a lot of that void because now you can just watch things any time you want. But as we were going into a volleyball tournament just, I think it was Friday in Huntsville, a man stopped me at the door, took my ticket and said, "Jeff Noblit." I said, "Yes." He said, "Man, I watch you every Sunday morning." And it's fairly regular that I'll have somebody catch me somewhere and I know this isn't huge in a lot of people's hearts and minds but they'll say something like, "You know, Brother Jeff," and I don't know who these people are. "My mom was dying with cancer but you fed her the word of God. She couldn't go to church and so much on television that's called Christian is not very sound but you fed her the word of God and it blessed her life richly until the day she died."

So you just don't know what God is doing out there. So sometimes I wrestle with these things but I was thinking this week why would this church, I mean, we're doing so many things, I promise you, this is no exaggeration, churches three times our size don't try to do all of this. You say, "Well, I can tell you why we do all this, we've had this crazy pastor for 30 years." Well, maybe so and I will confess that I've tried to go too fast at times. I've

tried to do too much and I will confess to that, but I hope in my old age I'm balancing out a little bit. But I think about why do you support things like this? It's because you're the kind of church that does what other folks would do and then some. You're just not typical.

We found out the other day that not on our internet but another pastoral or preaching website, we've had 110,000 of our sermons downloaded off that website. 110,000. It's over that now. If you add the Anchored in Truth website, I'm sure it would be hundreds and hundreds of thousands of sermons that have been downloaded through the years, maybe a million or more. I don't know because we didn't keep good records years ago.

Then our world missions ministry that supports 32 missionaries and church plants and agencies doing good works around the world. I think about all of those and, by the way, we have 129 churches or pastors or individuals who have sent us financial support in the last year or so. 129 different people outside of our Grace Life Church offerings for missions. And I think why did all of this come together and how has God blessed like this? And you may remember back that some years ago the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest mission agency in the world flew 65 mission leaders to this church and for a week those 65 missions leaders studied what we were doing so they could learn this approach and teach it to other churches and today many large churches across the Southern Baptist Convention have a new approach to missions and they learned it here. And we weren't the first ones to do it, by the way, we were one of the first Southern Baptist to do it that way but I think how did that happen? That didn't just happen. You don't just do that, trust me. I talk to pastors every day that try 1/10 of what I've just told you and get fired for it. But what is it about you guys? Here's what it is: you are the kind of people that do what others would do and then some.

And I could go on and on and on but that's the idea of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus lays out how the Pharisees would approach things, how the Pharisees viewed the kingdom of God and he says, "That's good but that's not the final, that's not enough. You've got to do what they do and then some if you're going to be walking pleasing to me and obedient to me." So you have that foundational truth here in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is contrasting the Pharisees' legalistic, cold, sterile, we've got to do these things and not do these things, versus a true child of God who from the heart loves God and is purposing to treasure God and obey God out of that heart of love. Two very different things. So he's contrasting the two.

Now, I want you to look at it a little bit. Look at chapter 5, if you will, and we'll look at verses 21 and 22 as the Lord begins to contrast the Pharisees and the Jewish view to a true genuine spiritual view of being a child of God. Verse 21, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'you shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell." So he says it's not just externally did you murder or not murder someone, it's internally what is your heart like, are you hating in your heart. Jesus said,

"Yes, do what other folks do, don't murder, but it's that and more. You've got to deal with the heart attitude too, not just did you do right in the external works."

He goes to the sin of adultery, look at verse 27 of Matthew 5, "You have heard that it was said, 'you shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." There you go again. Yes, do what others would do, avoid adultery, but you've got to do more than that. You've got to fight the lust that's in your heart. You've got to realize you've got a heart issue that needs to be addressed.

Verses 31 and 32, divorce. "It was said, 'Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'" That's how they had manipulated the law down so that these Jewish man could get them a new wife whenever they wanted one. So Jesus says, "No, that's not quite right. I say everyone who divorces his wife except for the reason of unchastity makes her commit adultery and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." Now, I'm hurrying but what I want you to see is he said, "No, it's not just did you dot the 'i's' and cross the 't's,' it's more than that."

Then he goes on to lawsuits, verse 40, "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also." Now, here's a beautiful principle and we get down into financial and material things here, so somebody wants to sue you, now, this is not a carte blanche law for all Christians in lawsuits, it's a principle. If they want your shirt and they feel like they have just cause, as a Christian you know your value, your joy and your hope isn't in material things anyway, go ahead and give him your coat also. You would do what others would do and then some. That's the principle. Be careful getting real strict laws out of this. That's not what the Lord is teaching and a lot of difference between what was going on contextually when he taught this in that day than in our day.

Now government requirements. Look at verse 41. The government required a person to carry a soldier's pack for a mile and it was part of their duty as citizens in the Roman Empire. Verse 41, "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two." Then he goes down in verse, do what you're supposed to do and then some.

Then he goes to chapter 5, verses 43 and 44, "You have heard that it was said, 'you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." He said, "Other folks would love people who are their friends," he said, "but I'm saying to you as a child of God with a new heart, you are capable of not only loving your friends, that's what other folks would do, but you're capable of doing that and then some, you can love your enemies too."

Then he deals with fasting and praying in chapter 6, verse 1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." Then he scoots on down to verse 5, "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men." Scurrying on down to verse 6, "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door." Now, what is he saying? It's

not wrong to pray in public. That's not what Jesus is saying. He's just saying the Pharisees have backslidden to the point where that's all they ever do is a public display of prayer so they might be seen and bragged on by men. He said, "That's okay to pray with men but a true child of God knows that's only a tiny part of my prayer. The bulk of my prayer is with God alone that nobody sees." You would do what other folks would do and then some.

Then he gets down to heavily dealing with finances and material stuff. Chapter 6, verse 2, "when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet like the hypocrites do." Then he goes down through to verse 19 of chapter 6, look at that, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal." Now, is the Lord saying you should never have any money in the bank? No. No, no, no, the Bible clearly teaches there's a right way to have money put back and a right amount for retirement and you need to put some back for a rainy day. Now, some of you brethren are putting some back for a worldwide flood, not just a rainy day and that may be sin. As a matter of fact, it probably is sin. So the Lord is not saying though it's wrong to put some money back, he's just saying that you don't put your hope in that. Your real hope and your real joy is, "How can I use my resources for the advancement of God's kingdom while I'm on this earth?" It's the balance there. In other words, all men, normal folks, have a concept of saving and retirement but Christians do that and then some. They have a bigger view of their finances than just that and their retirement than just that.

Then go down to verse 24, he weightily gets into wealth here, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." Then he goes down to that text that is so familiar and I'm just going to paraphrase for time. You know, don't worry about your life, as to what you'll eat. Don't worry about what you're going to drink. Don't worry about your body, what you're going to put on. God clothes the birds of the air and he's going to clothe you. He feeds the birds of the air, rather he's going to feed you. Look at how God clothes the flowers of the field and God is going to clothe you. And he goes on to amplify, "But seek first the kingdom of God," verse 33, "and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." So here's what he's saying, is he saying that you have no concern about getting a good job and buying clothes and having a house? No, he's not saying you have no concern about that, of course not. He is just saying as a child of God you have those concerns like other men have but more than that. You see beyond just nice clothes. Nice clothes are okay but when you buy nice clothes there's something in your heart that says, "This is nice but they are not my hope or my joy and I don't have to just work three jobs to have namebrand clothing so my kids will look like the other kids. I don't have to go there. I can provide for my sustenance as God enables me but my heart has got to be bigger than just that." We do what other folks would do and then some.

That's the biblical principle of "and then some" and that's the way the people of God are. Actually, III. God has woven the "and then some" principle into the fabric of life. It's just

woven into all of life. Somebody said one time that there are basically four types of people in the world: first of all, there are those kind of people who make things happen; then he said there are those kind of people who watch things happen; and then there are those kind of people who don't know what's happening; and then fourthly there are those people who try to stop what's happening. I don't know where you fit and when it comes to church life, let me ask you, where do you fit? Are you one of those that are trying to make something happen through your small group and in the ministry of Grace Life Church? Are you one of those that of sort of on the sideline and just sort of watching what happens? Are you one of those that just, "Man, I'm just kind of here. I'm not sure what's going on"? Certainly, and we haven't had this kind of individual as far as I know in many years and that someone who has the morbid gall to try to thwart God's work because somehow they have a morbid interest in exalting themselves more than the kingdom of God being exalted.

But, you know, in life the real winners are the "and then some" people. The real winners are the people who did what everyone else would do and then some. Tim Tebow comes to my mind. Just a guy that pushes beyond what the average guy would do. These are the people that are as conscientious as everyone else, they fulfill their responsibilities like everyone else did and then they did more. The business world has spent untold millions and even billions trying to instill that principle into their employees of "and then some," trying to get them to push to the next level in themselves. The athletic community teaches it all the time. They say you can't give 100 percent, sometimes you've got to give 110 percent. But oh how the flesh rejects this in Christianity, in church life. Now, the Lord laid it out that this is the kind of principle that marks true spiritual Christian living. It's just the average normal way real Christians live, doing what others might do and then some. But somehow we've let the world teach us that in the church it's got to be a very, very minimal commitment; a very, very light involvement. As a matter of fact, if you want to grow a big church today, you almost have to sell people that it cost nothing to come here. I mean membership is about as meaningless as it gets and you'll pack the place out with that kind of commitment. You won't build a church, you'll build a crowd and a mess but you won't build a church doing that though. Today's philosophy reminds me of the salesman that told a lady as he was trying to sell her, I think it was a vacuum cleaner, he said, "Lady, I have a labor saving device that will cut your housework in half." And she said, "Good, I'll take two of them." I mean, let me out of all of it. I want to get out of all of it. We are looking for shortcuts but until we get to glory there are no shortcuts.

Now, think about the Sermon on the Mount. Go back to the Sermon on the Mount and all the ways the Lord spent. Now, he's spending some real energy here to get down to these people where they live and try to show them the contrast between a cold, religious, sterile, works viewpoint and a real child of God that's got a new heart that loves God viewpoint. And the one that jumps out to me the most and I want to talk to is the carrying the soldier's pack. If a Roman soldier came through your town, he could put his finger on you and say, "Carry my pack. You are bound by Roman law to carry that pack a mile." But Jesus said, "If he tells you to carry it a mile, carry it two miles. You do what other folks would do and then some." You see, the first mile is compulsory, the second mile is

voluntary. That's where you get to show them there's something different about me. There's something different about me. The first mile you must go, the second mile you choose to go. The first mile is law, the second mile is love. Amen. I've told you many times in Grace Life Church, we don't live under the law, we live under love but love always does more than law requires. Always. The first mile is obligation, the second mile is an opportunity.

So what God is saying is that we as children of God are called to live beyond the first mile because we have a new heart and a different heart. Serving God as a true child of God is life beyond the first mile. Life's greatest blessings are beyond the first mile and God has just woven this into our makeup. A psychologist, William James, talked about the first layer of fatigue most people have when they are attempting a task. He said, "Most people get tired and then they quit and they never even know that getting tired and quitting is just the starting point. All they ever know is getting tired and quitting." So work is monotony to them, it's drudgery to them, work is dread to them. They don't have the joy of great achievement and accomplishment. They never punch through the first mile. It's a very real thing.

I don't run a lot. I do try to exercise. I don't run a lot but runners who are real runners talk about the second wind you get and it's exhilarating and it's strengthening when you punch through. A pastor said one time that he had when his son was just a little boy, that he was terribly selfish. I mean, it was just, "Mine!" and he would not share anything. And he'd been working with him and disciplining him and he would just get uptight when the little boy was around other children because if there was a toy or something, buddy, he'd get it and nobody else could get it. He said, "I'd been working with him and we were going down the road one day and he had his little buddy in the back seat beside him and sure enough, my little boy pulls out a pack of chewing gum," and he said, "I braced. Here we go, WWII is about to happen because I'm going to have to make him share." And when he got out the chewing gum, the little buddy said, "Can I have a piece?" And he said, "Why, yes." And he gave him a piece of gum and then he pulled out another piece and said, "By the way, take this one to your mom." And he said, "I was just praising God." He said, "I had to make double sure that now that he crossed that threshold, that he was rewarded so I stopped and bought him a great old big new pack of chewing gum to let him know that when you do what other folks would do and then some, there's a blessing coming." There's a blessing coming. And I really believe that Grace Life Church of the Shoals has been sustained and maintained to this day because we don't always and we fail some, but you have been a people marked by the "and then some" view of Christianity which is not nothing to honk a horn about, that just means you're trying to be normal.

Do you remember the story of Roger Bannister in 1954? A powerful story. Roger Bannister in 1954 ran the very first four-minute mile, the very first. Experts, athletic authorities said for generations it could never be done. Nobody will ever break the four-minute mile but Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile in 1954 but what's so incredible about it, 14 days later another man broke it and within the first year after Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile, 29 more broke it. In the second year after Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile, 200 more broke the four-minute mile and

today it's commonplace. If you're a runner and you can't break a four-minute mile, you don't need to run. Not on our level, but you know, the real athletes who compete. What's the significant thing? One guy had to do it. One guy had to say, "I can do what others can do and then some," and then it's like others got permission. Now, that's very true in Christianity. It's almost like joining a church like Grace Life, somebody will say, "Hey, that is biblical and that's the right place. That's a place I can raise my children and have security about what they are taught and what they believe," and all of a sudden others feel like, "Hey, I can do that too."

Now, let's talk about finances because that's where I'm going. The challenge is not financial for Grace Life Church of the Shoals, the money is there, the challenge maybe is credibility. Many are saying they cannot give the kind of money that we are asking to be given just to maintain or they feel like they can't give it but we need a few Roger Bannister's. We need a few guys to say, "You know, I can give that large gift. I can do a little more." Or maybe a few more families that say, "You know, I'm pretty inconsistent. I just need to get consistent in returning the tithe." I think it would be overwhelming how comfortable we could function if every family would just be consistent. I don't know that we have any families that just won't give but I think there are families who are just hit and miss. They are kind of doing what other folks are doing instead of doing what other folks are doing and then some. But you'll be acting like citizens of God's true household when you function not under external coercion, that's not what I'm talking about, not under legalism, but out of a new heart that loves God. You do what others would do and then some. You run the first mile and you go ahead and carry it the second mile.

It was some time ago and this has been in my notes for years, and we were doing some kind of offering here and I looked at what the staff had done and the staff at Grace Life Church for that offering gave 23 percent of the total offering. Now, that's huge. That's huge. Now, I don't know if that's true today. I haven't checked it in a long time. I don't usually do things like that but here's what I want to say to you: that's a good historical fact that your staff has been trying to model going the second mile. Your staff has tried to live that kind of commitment. We want to do what other folks would do and then some.

Let me go to my last point and I'm done. IV. We need a renewal, I think, of "and then some" giving at Grace Life Church. To be honest, I know what I've done through the years. I know how weightily and heavily and consistently I used to teach stewardship and I've gotten away from that. I don't say much about it anymore and, by the way, I've heard pastors say, "You know, I never preach on giving to you." That's not something for a pastor to boast about, that's something to repent about. Material stewardship and financial stewardship is a huge part of Christian teaching. As the Lord teaches on the Sermon on the Mount, a weighty portion of the whole sermon is on dealing with financial and material things.

Now, what 22 weeks ago, first of June, we began a stewardship challenge and I challenged you, "Guys, if we can maintain \$36,000 a week we can get by. It's bare-bones. It's bare-bones but we can get by." Well, right now we're averaging \$33,166 a week so we're \$3,000 a week or so down from the bare-bones place. So here we are, we have 10

weeks left in this calendar year and we need to have some "and then some" giving over the next few weeks. I just want to challenge you. It's not about legalism. Nobody looks at your giving. Nobody knows your records. It's not a matter of discipline here concerning your giving but I just want to challenge you. I just don't know how you can believe the Scriptures and know how we are and what we are and not have some degree of thanksgiving that God has brought us to where he has brought us. I just want to challenge you to have an "and then some" spirit in our regular offerings over the next 10 weeks until we end the year.

December 9 is our annual Christmas love offering. What is that, six weeks away, and we need to have an "and then some" kind of offering. I need my men who can do it to do good. I just need you to. I'm telling you point blank, I need you to do good. We need to knock some things out and catch up on the budget some and then make a big chunk on debt retirement going forward. That's six weeks. And to be honest, you know, giving was better a little earlier in the campaign and then the end of summer came, fall came and back to school stuff and giving always dips and then usually November, December, we really make up a lot of ground. All I'm saying to you is, brothers and sisters, we need to make up a lot of ground and do well. Can we survive where we are? Certainly but not doing what we are used to doing and the point of diminishing returns is coming for us where this is going to affect personnel soon if we don't see a difference and that's very, very hard because all of our guys and ladies are rock solid. They believe in what we are doing. They're not just employees.

So let me close with four considerations. 1. There have been far less offerings emphasized this year. What I mean by that, we had no fall harvest revival or fall outreach so we didn't take up a special love offering. That's usually \$20,000 so it's out there somewhere. I've spotted you 20. So there should be a little more out there than we had. The other consideration is that last year I urged some of our guys who could to give some \$10,000 gifts. We made two or three payments out of it and got us through. We just haven't had to do that, though it's tight, we haven't had to do that so we haven't pushed for those offerings. So in consideration, there has been no special love offerings, no special push to make a payment or two. I'm asking you would you consider seeking God and saying, "Lord, can we do some extra in these last 10 weeks, do some extra on the Christmas love offering?"

2. That's one consideration, the second consideration is: catch up. Can I challenge you as your pastor in Christian love that if you have not been faithful, ask God to let you catch up. Try to figure out what your tithe would be and say, "Lord, how can I measure what you have done for me? Would you give me grace to try to catch up in these last 10 weeks and by the time the year closes out, to return the whole tithe to your work?" Now, many of us try to give more than the tithe but I'm just challenging you. Try to catch up. Nobody is going to beat you up about it. Nobody will know but, man, what a blessing that would be in this last 10 weeks.

3. Be consistent. Of course, that ties in with number 2, doesn't it? Be consistent. When we started June 1 with this stewardship challenge, saying if we can average \$36,000 a week

the rest of the year we can bare-bones get by, \$38,000 would restore the staff benefits that were taken away this year. You know, the first six weeks when we started that June 1, we averaged \$38,381. For six weeks that was our average per week. That's good. That's glory and I felt so good. I slept well at night. I didn't beat my dog up, I felt good. Then, boy, you've humbled me the last few weeks. It took a reverse trend but here's my thinking, I looked at that and I didn't look at individual gifts, nothing would be wrong if I did, but I didn't, but it wasn't a few big gifts in there necessarily, it was just a lot of people did better and then a lot of people didn't do better and that's why I'm saying be consistent. I believe we've got a number of families that tithe some then don't tithe some, then tithe some, and don't and that's killing us. If you just put the tithe first and honor the Lord, you'd be shocked at what he would lead you to do. So strive to be consistent. Our average again right now is \$33,166 so that shows you after the first six weeks we did real good and then we dropped back off a lot.

Fourth consideration is we have this special opportunity at this very, very low interest rate. We have to refinance our loan next year. We have a loan at, is it 1.59, yes, 1.59 percent interest is our present loan. It runs out in July so we're going to get on it strong in January. We've already talked some with banks and financial institutions. But right now everything we can give on our Christmas love offering, everything you give period that we can get on that debt retirement payment, I think we're about 2.4 million. Everything we can give now is going to go to principle overwhelmingly but when we refinance, it's going to be 3.5 to 4 percent and so obviously a lot more is going to go to interest after that so we've got a real incentive in the next few weeks to really hit a home run, really do good on paying toward our debt retirement and that's what the Christmas love offering chiefly goes for before we hit that 3 1/2 to 4 percent interest rate that we're going to have to refinance for.

Well, that's what I'm telling you about. You deal with God and I can say this strongly and clearly because I am 100 percent confident, if you knew mine and Pam's giving record here, you would say, "I believe my pastor has tried to live in the second mile of giving." I believe you'd have to say that and I'm just challenging you if you're not there to get there, or if you're blessed and can do something, be a Roger Bannister. Man, if one guy would get out there and say, "This church means something to me. My children were impacted here. In 33 years we've had the same guy leading us and God has blessed us and we know what we are and we know where we're going and we're trying to do the right things the right way for the right reasons." But if one guy would get out there, I believe he would be just like Roger Bannister, others would say, "Let's get this done." Who knows, then the Lord might sell that property next door or whatever and we'd be out of debt. Well, if we were out of debt, it would be a huge difference but for the value of our property, our debt is not bad at all but it's still a payment we have to make every month.

Well, Jesus said, "Those in my kingdom don't look at the sterile requirements of the law, their hearts are changed. Their values are different. They would do what other folks would do, the religious crowd, you know, the calculation crowd, they get their calculators out and they figure if this guy will give that and this guy," it doesn't work that way. I mean, you've got to get with God and seek God. If you're behind, try to catch up. If you're

not consistent returning the tithe, get consistent for the glory of God. If you can do something big or generous, go out there and do it.

I'm going to say this because I've been told by a number of people that this isn't understood. As you know, I have whined and complained a little bit about the fact that for the first time in the history of being here, the staff has no retirement benefit. The elders removed that this year with the promise that we're going to do everything that we can to make that up, and that's okay but what you do need to understand is our ministerial staff as ordained ministers have opted out of Social Security and that's something financial advisors have encouraged ordained staff to do and you don't get that option. So when they opted out of Social Security, that also keeps the church from having to pay the 7.5 if we were just employees so it's a savings to the church but then the flip side of that is we've got to invest on our own or we have nothing. So when the retirement benefit is eliminated, we haven't got Social Security. There's nothing there so some of the folks are dealt with as employees, the support staff, and they still have their Social Security, they just don't have the extra retirement benefit but ministers on staff will not have anything if we don't restore that. So this last year, the retirement benefit was \$85,000 so, in effect, what happened was your ministerial staff gave an extra \$85,000 this year so our ministries could stay strong. That's what they did and that's okay and I want to say this as God is my witness, my life is here, my purpose is Christ and his kingdom. If I have to move something or sell something or change something, I'll do that, that's fine, but I just want you to get with God too and say, "Lord, I want to be an 'and then some' kind of Christian."

So this is been something of a family meeting in a way on Sunday morning but I think it's an important meeting that we remind ourselves of our Lord's principle and where we are. When you add in our missions giving, we're still \$39,000 a week. Most folks would say, "Hey, that's strong." It is strong. We can get by on that well but we can't do what we've done with that. We can't be an "and then some" church. And by the way, if we need to be for a while, that's fine with me, but I'm not going to go there without exhorting us to seek God first. So let's just have a season of prayer. Could we do that? Every head bowed and every eye closed.