

Introduction

Good morning. It's great to see you this morning. If you have a Bible with you, and I hope that you do, I want to invite you at this time to go ahead and take it out, and open it up to the Book of Genesis. We're going to be in Genesis chapter 12. We are starting a new series today entitled "Broke." I want to begin, first of all, by just talking about the fact that we have many more questions that have been submitted through our "Ask Me Anything" series, but we felt like we needed to go ahead and continue on. We want to do justice and attempt to answer those questions, so I'm going to be doing some videos, blog posts, and some podcasts that we will be posting. We will let you know whenever we do that so that you can go back and have those questions answered. We also think that that series was such a bit hit, we are probably going to do "Round 2" of that in the not-too-distant future, so continue to look for that. I am grateful to all of you who submitted questions as we went through "Ask Me Anything." The series "Broke" is a money series, which you gathered from the video bumper. I know that now many of you are wishing you had not come to church today. I know that any time that the pastor talks about money, people are a little bit nervous. They think, "I already know the application here... you're going to tell me I need to give," and "I not giving enough" and that sort of thing. We are going to talk about giving, but that's actually not the thrust of today's message. The thrust of today's message is actually a heart issue. So we're going to be looking at Genesis chapter 12, starting in verse 2. Before we do that, I just want to let you know that our students... they did have a great weekend... I know that they had a great weekend because I was prank-called at about midnight last night... (Laughter) ...by our seventh-grade boys. I got a voicemail message and the voicemail message... are we good to play that? Let's go ahead and just take a listen to the voicemail message that I received at 12:08 this morning:

(Young male voice) "Hello, this is Miranda Simmons from Wells Fargo. I was just contacting you to let you know that there has been a \$1000 transfer from your account, as of yesterday, and I was just wondering if you were aware about this deposit. Thank you." (Laughter)

There is one key reason that I know that it was the seventh-grade boys who did this; it was that seven seconds after I received that voicemail, my seventh-grade son texted me and said, "Dad, that was just a joke." I didn't tell the seventh-grade boys that I knew that in the first service. I just told them that I wanted to give them a few tips on how to be a better prank-caller, as a seasoned former prank-caller... I told them a couple of things that they should know. Number one... if you're going to choose a cover, choose it wisely. Wells Fargo Bank would not be calling anyone on Saturday at midnight, so maybe think about that in the future. Number two... Also I said that you should know that if you're going to call a pastor and prank-call him, saying that there has been suspicious transfer of \$1000 out of his checking account... it immediately tells you that's not real... (Laughter) ...that's a joke. I just thought that was pretty great. I appreciate Pastor Jacob. I also got a text message with a picture in it, after I shared that in the first service, that the seventh-grade boys had gone and "forked"... put plastic forks... in another yard of another house. He said that the seventh-grade boys were apparently very busy last night. I'm looking forward to my son cleaning the house today... he is going to have a great afternoon. It's going to be awesome for him. (Laughter) Just joking. So here we go...

Genesis chapter 12, starting in verse two: We have got one verse this morning that we're going to read, and it's going to be great. We're going to read it twice because I want to make sure that we hear what it says. This is God's call to Abram. Abram, who was the first person to truly have a covenant relationship that many of us look at as a reflection based on righteousness... based on faith. We certainly have Noah, we certainly have Adam, but this Abram relationship is the one that is used by Paul in the New Testament

to talk about a righteousness that is given to us by faith. In that call of Abram, in verse 2, this is what we see: The Lord says to Abram, *"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."* I'm going to read it one more time. *"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."*

Let's pray. "Father, we want to hear these words, and Lord, we want those words to apply to us, and Lord, we want You to show us what they mean for us. God, I pray that this morning You would open our hearts. And Father, if there's someone who is here today who doesn't understand that You love them and that You want to be their heavenly Father, God, I pray that they would sense that. It would be just like You to use a money sermon to save someone. Father, I also pray that You would, in Your goodness and in Your grace, show us, Lord, why it is that You have chosen to bless us. Father, we love You, we thank You, and we praise You for this. We ask this in the Name of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen."

1. We Are Broken In Our Understanding Of Blessings.

So, as I have already mentioned, we are going to talk about money today, and I know that oftentimes people get a little bit nervous whenever we do that. But I think it's an important thing to talk about because we live in the wealthiest nation in the history of the world. And even though many of us would often talk about having money problems, we still have never experienced the sort of poverty that the vast majority of the world lives in every day. And we certainly have been blessed beyond measure with regard to our finances. I think I could also say, without any hesitation, that when it comes to finances, finances are the number one struggle of idolatry that most Americans fight against every single day. If they are a believer, the temptation to not use their finances wisely or for Godly purposes, is the thing that they fight against all the time. So people want to talk about that because they want to understand what the Lord has to say about it. I would also submit to you that Jesus cares a great deal about it because, believe it or not, Jesus talked more about money than any other topic. It's one of those things that is essential for us to understand. So I want to talk about this. Now I have chosen the series title "Broke," not because everyone here is out of money... I mean, maybe some of you are, but that's not it. The idea is that we are broken in our relationship and our attitude toward blessings and toward finances, and I want us to talk about that freely this morning.

So whenever we start talking about blessing, I think the first thing for us to understand is that we are indeed broken with regard to our understanding of blessings. Social media over the last several years, with this advent, there's been a push in social media circles... they have this thing called the "hashtag" which was originally used as a search device, and over the last decade people have become more familiar with hashtags and how to use those. One of the first things that popped up on social media was the hashtag "#blessed." Basically, this was the way that it worked. It was that people would show to picture of something that they had received or something that had happened to them, "Hey, I got a new car #blessed." But then over time, actually #blessed got taken over by people who weren't believers, and they found it as ironic, or whatever, just to say the good things that happened to them were blessings.

I don't know if you've ever watched the show "Parks and Rec," but on "Parks and Rec," the character there, Tom Haverford, he actually found himself in a trial because in that trial he had been tweeting while driving and run into a fire hydrant. While he was in the trial itself, actually he was being cross-examined, and they were having him read back his twitter feed to the judge, and one of the things that he tweeted while he was driving was "Four green lights in a row... #blessed."

Tweets



Tom Haverford @TomHaverford
Four green lights in a row #blessed
Expand

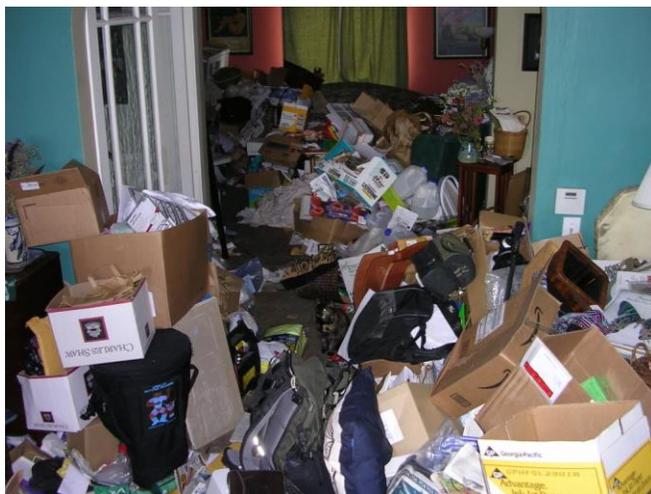
Then right after that he ran into the fire hydrant. What's funny about that is that people who are non-believers actually see something happening with believers sometimes that maybe we are even actually blind to. This is what that brokenness is: It's that many of us who are receiving blessings don't recognize that we have been blessed for a purpose. You see, we have been blessed, not so that the blessing will stop with us. I've already mentioned the fact that Genesis chapter 12 is a passage that points toward the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You should know this. If you're new to the Bible, whenever you read things in the Old Testament or you read things in the Bible, every story in the Bible, in the Old Testament, is pointing forward, looking toward Jesus Christ. There are always certain terms... certain things that are happening within those passages that are letting you know that they are looking forward to the grace and the goodness of who God is. So you can see the Gospel imprinted all through the pages of the Old Testament and the New Testament, all centering around and going back to Jesus Christ. So when we read in Genesis 12:2, "...and I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing," one of the things that we realize is this... it is that Abram, to become Abraham, has done nothing to deserve the blessing. Let's start there.

You may or may not know this, but according to later texts, Abram's family that came out of Ur were actually idol worshippers; they did not worship the living God. But, for whatever reason, in Genesis chapter 12, the Lord looked down and saw Abram and chose him, even though he had done nothing to deserve that. On top of that, he was then blessed... he was given favor. The word that we use for "grace" is also the same word used in Hebrew for the word "favor." So sometimes some of my friends out there that are maybe from a more charismatic background use the word "favor." Whenever they use the word "favor" they are really just talking about grace. It's the idea that nothing that they have done deserves this, yet God chooses, for whatever reason, to give a blessing to them in their lives. This is the thing that Genesis 12:2 and actually the verses surrounding it are very clear about, they have done nothing to deserve this... Abram and his family... yet nevertheless, God has chosen to bless them in spite of the fact that they have received this from no merit of their own. In other words, idol-worshippers don't get blessings from God, right? ...Except when they do. And people who have done nothing... they have never called on the Name of this Lord, people who have no skill... they don't get blessed by God, right? ...Except when they do. In this passage, what we begin to see is that God is just choosing to bless.

Now... this is important because most of us, whenever we think about blessings, we have the "#blessed" mindset. The "#blessed" mindset is this: It's that "I have been blessed so that I can hold onto it and show everybody else how well I have been blessed." We tend to think of it sort of as an equation like this: "God blesses us so that I am now '#blessed'" In other words, I hop on social media... "Hey, check out the new car I got, #blessed"... "Hey, we are here hanging out on the ski slopes, #blessed" Now, I want to be very clear. I'm not saying that those things are bad... I'm not also saying that you can't post them... I'm also not saying that you can't use "#blessed." So don't hear any of that. What I am saying is that that is the way that the majority of people, including Christians, think when it comes to blessings... that they have received something and that the end-destination of the blessing that they have received is... themselves. That's the

way that most people think with regard to blessings. It's that God has given blessings, specifically financial and material blessings, so that we can hold onto them as tightly as possible.

Maybe you've seen the television show "Hoarders." Has anyone ever seen that show? "Hoarders" is something that is fascinating to me, partly because I come from a long line of pack rats, so I'm a recovering person who is kind of obsessed with decluttering. But whenever I see the show "Hoarders" I recognize that there are individuals out there who are actually far beyond the pack-rat mentality, but they actually have almost an obsessive-compulsive tendency to hold on to things. In fact, as I was reading about hoarding this week, I began to discover that there's actually a mental condition that many people have diagnosed behind hoarding. It's an actual fear, an anxiety, that if I release things that have been given to me, then I might need them, and I will actually harm myself when I release them. So we watch that show and we think, "Well, that's crazy. Who would ever really think like that? Who would ever live like that?" But the truth of the matter is that many Christians actually live that way when it comes to the blessings that are given them. They get something and they think, "The end-destination of this blessing is me." Jesus actually talked about the hoarding mentality. You may or may not know this, but the hoarding mentality is not something that began in the 21st century or even the 20th century... but the hoarding mentality was around in Jesus' day. Jesus told a story about it in Luke chapter 12 (verse 15)... This is what He said: *"Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And He told them a parable, saying, 'The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, "What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?" And he said, "I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.'"*



The hoarder... the person who built a bigger house and bigger barns to hold all of his stuff. I know, you're listening to that and thinking, "That's crazy. Who would ever do that?" We won't talk about how many of us have our garage so full... that a car can't get in it. We won't talk about how many of us rent storage facilities. Do you ever just wonder why do we have all these storage facilities? ...Are there dead bodies in there? (Laughter) What's happening? They are filled with stuff because we have so much stuff. And we don't want to get rid of it. I mean, we don't know what we want to do with it, but we've got to keep it. That's certainly a very clear thing. You see, Jesus says that the hoarding mentality is actually foolish. He

says it is foolish because we believe that we are blessing ourselves when actually, in some way, there comes a point when we hold onto the blessings that have been given to us, and we don't actually do something with them, that we end up being rich toward ourselves but poor toward God. You see, the broken attitude that many of us have is that, "I can never have enough, and the things that have been given to me, it's still not enough... and I know it's not enough because look what they have over there, and if I don't have what they have, then I don't have enough." News Flash: Somebody is always going to have more... always... always. But many of us have deceived ourselves into believing that we don't have enough; consequently, we have to hold onto everything we have.

2. Blessings Are To Be Shared.

We also have a broken attitude that says, "Whatever I have is just for me." You see, the reason that this is a broken attitude toward blessings is the fact that the blessing itself, we believe, is about us. This is the broken attitude: that we think that we have been blessed because the blessing is, of course, intended for the most noble of beings on this planet, who of course must be me. I should be the one to receive these blessings. But the repaired attitude toward blessings is actually the opposite. It's not that I have been given a blessing so that I can hold onto it. It is actually then that God has blessed me so that then I can bless others. Blessings are given so that they might be shared. How do I know that? Genesis 12:2... *"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."* Now remember, this is a precursor of the Gospel. Who is doing the blessing in Genesis 12:2? God. Who is the one that has said, "I will make your name great"? God. What has Abram done to deserve this? Nada... zip... zilch... nothing. He has done nothing to deserve it. He has simply been richly blessed by God. And He says, "I do this so that you will recognize that you are supposed to take those blessings and then pass them on to others."

Now, this is the funny thing about this. Some of us hear this and they go, "Well, that's great that Abram was blessed in that way. But Steve, you don't understand... the money in my bank account... I worked for." Of course you did. Where did you get your hands and your arms? What about your brain? How hard was it for you to make your own brain? Tell me about that; I want to know. (Laughter) Ahh... I see. Interesting. You mean, you were given those things? Now, why is it that we consider those things just sort of a zero-sum sort of thing? I mean, of course I get a brain... that's just to sort of "Go Past Go" in Monopoly sort of thing. You get \$200, right? You're born; you get a brain. That's just the way that it works. But the truth is that if you talk to someone who, for whatever reason, doesn't have a healthy body and isn't able to do the certain things that you're able to do... if you have a quick mind or if you have a sharp wit or if you have the ability to work with your hands... if you have the ability to work with numbers... if you have the ability to build things... you need to think about this: You have been blessed. Everything that you have is a blessing that has been given to you freely by God. And those blessings that have been given to you are not to be seen as terminal to you. Where our instincts might tell us that God is blessing us so that we can be #blessed... actually, what the Bible says, is that God blesses us so that we can bless others. Now here is the crazy part. What the Bible says is that when God blesses us and we choose to take the blessing that God has given us and bless others with it, then we actually experience the full manifold blessing of God. In other words, whenever we take the blessing of God and we hold onto it to ourselves, do we enjoy it? Sure. May we even feel grateful for it? You betcha. But are we getting the full blessing that God intends? Nope. We can't really experience the full blessing of God until we take the things that have been given to us... the blessings we have received... and then pass them on.

Let me put it to you a little bit differently. If God gives you something and you hold onto it only for yourself, you actually are stifling God's blessing, and you are actually saying that you don't trust God. I will give an example. I've got two sons. Ben got his driver's licence over Christmas... clear the road everybody. So Ben got his driver's licence over Christmas, and from time to time he will now drive my youngest son from point A to point B. What if I gave my oldest son Ben a little bit of money and I said, "Here, you guys go watch a movie. Buy yourselves some popcorn; we'll see you after the movie is over." A couple of hours go by and they come back, and they come back into the house and my youngest son is crying. "What's wrong? Why are you upset?" "Ben didn't buy me a ticket." "He didn't buy you a ticket?" "No... he went in, he bought himself a ticket to the movie, and he bought himself some popcorn. Then he looked at the rest of the money he had and said, 'Well, I mean, I've already got this, so I'm just going to keep it for myself. Sorry about your bad luck.' So he went in and he enjoyed the movie. He came out and then he told me how awesome the movie was and how incredible the popcorn was, and he said, 'Let's go home.'" First of all, that did not happen. This is an example. Second of all, let me say this. If that happened, I would be disappointed. Why? ...Because I had given him that money with an expressed purpose that he would bless himself but also that he would bless his brother with it. But yet, many of us understand that concept when it comes to children, but when it comes to our own financial pocketbook, we believe that all of the money that we have must be just for us... whenever we clearly see in Scripture that over and over we have been blessed so that we might bless others.

In fact, this idea runs throughout the New Testament. Let me give you just a few examples:

Acts 2:45... "And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need."

Acts 4:34-35... "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

To me, when I read those verses, that sounds a lot like the Benevolence Ministry of our church. What's the Benevolence Ministry of our church? People give to the church, and the church sets aside some money for benevolence. There are people in our church who would say, "We're in a place of financial need," and we take those dollars that have been given, and we help people that are in a place of need. It sounds a lot like these verses.

You see, money wasn't just given in Scripture to help those in need. It was also given to help further the mission of spreading the Gospel. What about these verses:

1 Corinthians 16:1... "Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do..."

1 Corinthians 16:3... "...when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem."

2 Corinthians 9:5... "I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead of you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised..."

What is happening in these instances and other examples that are in the New Testament is that churches are setting aside money, they're sending it on to Jerusalem or to other places, and then that money is

forwarded to an area where churches are being funded so that the Gospel can be proclaimed, but there were not enough believers there yet for that church to be self-sustaining. That sounds a lot to me like the way that we support many missionaries through various organizations in our world today. We take our dollars, we send them to a central location and are then sent on to a place where the Gospel is being proclaimed in a forward area.

Then there's another verse that actually talks about the local church... that talks about salaries for pastors. It says in 1 Timothy 5:17-18... *"Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer deserves his wages.'"*

Those are just a few examples, talking about benevolence, talking about spreading the Gospel through missions, and talking about the local church being funded. But all of those things are examples of ways in which people are generous so that the Gospel might move forward, the Church might be supported, and people might be blessed. What's the point? In each and every one of those cases, people were generous because they had been blessed, so that they might be a blessing.

So here comes the kicker. Why? And that's actually the thing that I really want to build toward today because the truth of the matter is, if you have grown up in church or you have been around church, you have certainly heard other pastors talk about money before. But the truth of the matter is that even though many of us have heard these sermons before, we automatically put up walls. We get worried about it. Why is that? I would submit to you that actually the reason that many of us get nervous is not because of the fact that we disagree with the concept of generosity, but I would say that many of us are not as generous as we ought to be, for this single reason: We don't understand that generosity flows from the Gospel itself. The reason that we ought to be generous is because God was generous toward us. You and I, according to Scripture, were dead in our trespasses. According to Scripture, you and I have nothing good in us. There is no reason that we ought to be saved or that we ought to be blessed. According to Scripture, we are useless and helpless, yet, nevertheless, the Lord, prior to the foundation of the earth, looked down on us and saw each one of us and declared, "I want him; I want her. I want that daughter; I want that son. I want them in My family." And consequently, the Lord then drew you into His good grace. Scripture actually tells us that no one can come to the Father unless they have been drawn by the Father. What does that mean? You don't even have the power to know that you need salvation until God deposits faith into you... until He tells you that you need to be brought in. Why does that matter? It matters because, apart from the generosity of God, each and every one of us has an eternity in hell. You say, "Wow... what's hell got to do with money?" Everything... because when we realize that we have been rescued and sent to heaven... what happens? We are then suddenly motivated to be generous. The Gospel itself is the very first blessing that we have ever received.

We have been given the very nature of God; we have the Spirit of the living God within us. And that great truth... that we've rescued, that we've been set free... that is one of those things that shows us the character of our God. Scripture tells us that we are to attempt to live like our God, to imitate our God, to carry the very character of Christ, to imitate Christ. If the nature of our God is a God that would choose to bless freely those who did not deserve, would we not also then, by extension, choose to be generous with the things that have been given to us? Wouldn't we take the words of Genesis 12:2 and say, "May we be generous as well because we have been blessed by God"? You see, this God that blesses us doesn't hold anything back. He gives us His best; He gives us His Son. We too, ought to hold nothing back. You see, we

have been blessed, but the blessing doesn't end with us. If we want to truly experience the blessings of God, then what we need to do is we need to bless others because it reflects the nature of the Gospel itself.

3. God Blesses Those Who Give From Their Blessing .

We also recognize this, that strangely... and I don't understand how it works... but God then chooses to bless those who give from their blessings. 2 Corinthians 9, starting in verse 10: *"He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be..."* (Listen to this...) *"You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God."* Now that was a pretty compact passage, so let me break it down for you. What Paul is saying is that the more that you sow, the more that you reap. That makes sense. You can't reap unless you plant a seed. But he is drawing a parallel between the farmer and the person who has a bank account and saying, "The more that I sow..." In other words, the more that I am generous, "...the more that I am to then reap a blessing." In other words, "The more generous that I am, the more that I also then reap from God. And on top of that, why am I then blessed in return?" *"You will be enriched in every way..."* Paul says, *"...so that you will be generous in every way."* Let me break that down for you. There is a false gospel that is out there called the "Prosperity Gospel" What does the "Prosperity Gospel" say? It says, "You give so that you will get more." But that is a false gospel because it is about blessing me. How is this different? What this says is that God chooses to bless you so that you can be even more generous than you were before. God blesses you so that you can continue to be generous and pass forward that blessing. "Well, what do I do whenever I do that?" Whenever I take that blessing and I pass it on, I am actually showing people how great God has been to me. The more generous I am, the more that I am preaching the Gospel saying, "This is how good my God is. When I give, I am showing you how gracious He is to me."

You see, in Malachi 3:10 has been quoted by pastors for years. It talks about the tithe, and this is what it says: *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."* Now that is a collective verse, talking about a collective group of people, the nation of Israel, but I think the principle is the same there as it is in 2 Corinthians... that whenever we are generous, God still chooses to turn around and bless. And the more generous we are, God continues to bless even more. Why? ...Because we are trusting that His blessing will come, even when we have nothing to do with it. Aha! Did you hear that? Think about this for a second. We have already stated the fact that every person in here who is saved by Christ, who has been saved by grace, believes that they have been saved through no good of their own... right? We believe that we have been saved simply because God does it. But what's funny is, even though we believe in that miracle... we believe in a miraculous death that was sufficient for us, to be saved by grace... even though we believe that the blood of Jesus covers and forgives our sins, even we believe that God then raised that same Man three days later, and now that that same Man sits at the right hand of the Father. We believe crazy, metaphysical, cosmic things, but when I say, "If you give, God will then turn around and bless you even more," ...not necessarily just financially but in other ways... many of us are sceptical. It's funny, we believe in soul salvation, but we don't believe that God has power over the almighty dollar. [whistles] That's a problem. You see, we love the fact that we can give God the things that are spiritual, but if you really want to see if you have true faith, see if you will hand Him the things that are physical. ...Because our faith is ultimately a physical faith. A physical man was physically killed and physically resurrected and physically sits at the right hand of the Father... that's the Gospel. If you believe it, you would take it at face value... the Word... and you would also say, "I would be willing to give." Why?

Chip Ingram wrote a book called "The Genius Of Generosity." Chip was the pastor of Country Bible Church in Kaufmann, Texas, years ago... long before I ever ended up at First Baptist Church of Kaufmann. In this book, Chip tells the story: When he was 28 years old, he was asked by a man in that church, a man who was an accountant who worked in a high rise in Dallas, Texas, to come and have lunch with him. Chip was nervous because the man was a leader in the church, and he asked him to wear a tie to lunch. He showed up at a restaurant that was the nicest restaurant he had ever been to, that looked out over the skyline of Dallas, Texas, where they had the best steak that Chip had ever eaten. There that man handed him a checkbook... a checkbook that had \$5000 dollars in the register and he said to him, "This is what I need for you to do. You run into people every single day who are hurting and need to be helped. I want you to take this money as God's money, and I want you to use it to help those that are hurting and meet back with me in three months and tell me what's happened." Chip said that he woke up every day thinking about how to best use that money. And every single day he would look for people. "Should I use the money for this? Should I use the money for that?" He would weigh it out and he would think about it, and when he had an opportunity to be generous, he would be generous. And he certainly kept a very close account of all of those dollars. Three months later he showed back up and he said, "This is what I did with your money. This is how I used it. This is how people were helped. This is how people were blessed." The man said, "That was awesome. Let's celebrate." They ate another great lunch and the man said, "I'm going to put \$5000 more in that bank account. Go back and do it again." Chip said that it was somewhere around the second or third time that he was doing that when he realized that that was the same case with his own money too. He was so careful with the other man's money because it was something that wasn't his, and he needed to really keep a close account of how it was that he was using it, when suddenly he realized that every red cent in his bank account was something that actually had been given to him by God, and maybe he ought to think about how he was going to use God's money that had been entrusted to him personally as well.

You see, what happens whenever we begin to recognize that the material possessions that have been given to us are in some way an extension of God's grace. I don't understand exactly the way that it works, but Scripture is very clear that whenever I choose to be generous, God chooses then to use it in a certain way. Here's the funny thing. People always want to jump straight to the point. How much should I give? There's a lot of confusion out there about that. People have talked about tithing and grace-giving and all kinds of stuff. I'm not even going to talk about that today. I'm actually going to talk about it next week, so if you want to schedule the time to skip church, next week is your time to schedule it. But this is the thing that I think. I think that you actually begin to know how much you ought to give when you understand this: It's not yours in the first place and that you have been blessed so that you might bless others.

So let's just be intently practical for just a moment. Let's talk about the fact that some of us don't give and would actually like to, but we don't really know what to do. Why do some of us not give?

1. Some of us don't give because we just don't know the best way to do it, and we're actually a little bit nervous about it. Let me just start with this. Number one: If you're not giving right now, can I just challenge you to start? This is what I would say. God says in His Word that He will bless you when you give. How much do you want to be blessed? I would challenge you to start giving if you're not giving. In my family, we use the Push-Pay account that you can do... that's giving by text: "HNW" to 77977. You can set that up or you can go online. We do recurring gifts in that way, automatic. Why? ...Because then we just know that we're not having to remember and not having to physically think about it. It's being taken out. Other people say, "No, no, no... I want to actually give. I want to participate in the act of giving." They want to bring it personally. That's fine. Do

whatever you want to do. Here is the great thing you know right now. We've already passed the offering baskets; this isn't driven by manipulation or guilt. Right? We've already done it. You can just freely decide. "Do I want to experience and see if what this Book says is true?" If you want to find out, start giving and see if God will bless. Pray and say, "Lord, I'm going to try it out. I'm going to see if You will actually bless whenever I give." Can I tell you what? Personally, every time I have given, God has always blessed. There were times whenever I gave and I thought, "We don't even have enough money to buy groceries..." God always provided. I want to be very clear. I'm not a millionaire today... so I don't want to sit around saying, "Well, if you do this, you will be the most wealthy person in the congregation." That's not it. Maybe you will be, but I think that God always keeps His Word, and He always says that He will bless. I would challenge you to start giving.

2. Others of us don't give, and this is why: Our finances are a wreck. And I know this... I've been there, in the past. Maybe you're sitting here right now and your finances are a wreck... for whatever reason. Maybe you've got debt; maybe you have a bankruptcy in your past. Maybe you just simply need some counseling and you're not sure how to go. There are lots of different ways that you can proceed through that, but we are committed to helping people get their finances fixed so that they can be generous, because we think that God actually commands us to be generous for a reason. Many people aren't saying that they need help because they are embarrassed. You don't have to be embarrassed. We are going to start a class. It's going to start the Sunday after Easter. It's called "Financial Peace University." "Financial Peace University" was started by Dave Ramsey years ago. It was designed to help people, and it has helped countless people over the years to get their finances in order so that they could not only have financial security personally but also be generous. That class is going to start, and it costs \$99 to join because of kits and materials and things like that. If you cannot afford it... I had a church member after the first service come up to me and say, "I've taken that class, I've seen it is good. This is what I want you to tell. If there is anybody in our church that cannot afford it, I will pay for them personally to take that class." Yeah... this is the thing... they have been blessed, and they want to be a blessing. That's the Gospel right there in action. So here's the thing. That's going to start the Sunday after Easter. We want you to do that. Jonathan Sanders is going to lead it. It's going to be an awesome class. You can sign up by going to the church website HNW.org/fpu... it stands for "Financial Peace University."
3. Here's the thing, I think many of us... do you know why we're not giving? Many of us aren't giving for this reason: We haven't actually comprehended what God did for us on the cross. So let's talk about that for just a second. What happened on the cross? You were thought of by the Creator of the universe. You were thought worthy of rescue. You, in spite of your sin, in spite of your brokenness, in spite of your rebellion, it was thought... "My Son Jesus is not too precious for Me to hold onto. I will give even Him... even His blood will be shed so that I might pay the sin penalty for each of you." And some of us here today have never said "Yes" to Jesus Christ. Do you know why we're not giving? ...Because we have not said "Yes" to Jesus. Others of us aren't giving because we haven't understood that the cross and our bank account are actually linked.

So today, here is what we are going to do. We are going to have a time of response. I'm just going to ask everyone right now... I want to ask you to just bow your head, close your eyes... and we're going to think right now how we ought to respond. This is how this is going to work. If you are here today and you are kind of in Number 1... the reason that you haven't given is maybe you're just scared. You're scared to

give; you haven't done it and you're afraid. You think you don't have enough margin to give. I want to pray for you right now and just ask that God would give you courage. So if that's you... nobody is looking around... you just raise your hand and say, "Steve, I am scared to give; I'm afraid. I don't know if I can actually do it." Raise your hand right now. I want to pray for you. Who would say, "I'm afraid; I don't know if I can give"? Okay... I see some hands going up. Who else? Raise them up. It's okay; nobody is looking. I'll pray for you. Anybody else? Okay. "Lord, thank You for these who have the courage to say that they're afraid. They want to give, they want to be generous, but they do not know exactly how they could do that. So Lord, I pray that You would challenge them right now in this moment that they would give. Lord, I don't know if that's through online, Push-Pay, giving money in a basket... I don't know what that is. Father, You know that, but God I pray that You would tell them right now... Your Word does not lie, and Lord, that this is their opportunity. Lord, I ask that they would do that."

Number 2... If you would say, "Hey, Steve... the reason I'm not giving is because my finances are a mess." I want to pray for you. Would you just raise your hand and say, "Hey, that's me; my finances are a wreck, and I may need to sign up for that class or get something else." I see hands going up. Just raise them up; I want to pray for you. Who else? Raise them up. It's okay. You don't need to be embarrassed. Lots of folks are in this situation. Lots of hands are coming up. Who else? Okay... "Father, for these that have raised their hands up right now, I just want to pray, Lord, first of all, that You would let them know that You love them. They are not under judgment right now. There's grace even for them. But Father, I also would pray this... that they would be aware of the fact that there is counsel available to them. And Lord, I pray if it's the 'Financial Peace' class, that they would sign up for that. Lord, if it's a friend or something else that they need to seek out, then Lord, I pray they would seek that. God, I pray that You would provide a path of counsel so that these individuals could get their finances repaired so that they too could even be a blessing."

Finally, there are some of us who are here today, I think, who would say, "Hey, do you know what, Steve? Maybe I'm not giving because I haven't actually understood that my heart and my life needs first and foremost to be given to Jesus. I've been thinking about it; I've been kind of nervous about it, but I haven't actually surrendered to Him." If you're ready today, to say, "Today is the day that I will become a follower of Jesus Christ," would you just raise your hand up right now and say, "Today is my day to follow Jesus for the first time"? Raise up your hand if that's you today. I want to pray for you and commend you in that act of bravery. Okay. I don't see anybody raising their hands up right now today. If that's you, wave before me so I see you. If not, we're going to move on.

"Lord, for these who are here today I thank You. Thank you for the blessing that You've placed in their life, and Father, if there is someone who is here today that needs to give their life to You, I pray Lord that You would draw them. And if not, Lord, then that's fine. We're just going to celebrate those who are here today that are ready to be baptized and ready to follow You in faith. Father, for everyone who is here, we pray that You would show us how to take that next step and what it means for each of us. God, we love You, we thank You, and we praise You, and we say all this in the Name of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen."

This is how we're going to respond. We're just going to take a few minutes and we're going to sing. And as we sing, this is an opportunity to respond to the graciousness and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There will be some people here at the front, if you need to pray, you can come and do that. If you need to visit with someone about following Jesus... while this song is being sung, you can just stand up and go right out those doors and go to the Connection Center. [Audio ends]

#Blessed | Genesis 12:2; 2 Corinthians 9:6-10 | February 26, 2017

By Dr. Steve Bezner. Week 1 in the series "Broke – A Journey From Broke To Better."