

Introduction

Good morning. It's great to see you today. I hope you have a Bible with you. If so, I would like to invite you at this time to open it up. Turn with me to Exodus chapter 35. If you don't, it's okay. Don't worry. There is a Bible in the seat tray in front of you. And if you don't own a Bible, that is our gift to you today. We believe that engaging the Bible is necessary and good for us. So I want to encourage you to engage God's Word with us. We will be starting in Exodus 35:4 here in just a moment. But hold on because before we jump into the text today, I want to have an opportunity to share with you some of the things that are happening as we are going through "Overflow." As you have already heard and you're already well aware now, "Overflow" is our response to Hurricane Harvey, and it's an opportunity for us to have a generosity challenge as a church and to consider how it is that we each ought to give. Next Sunday is Commitment Sunday, so we are asking every single person who is tied to Houston Northwest to be here next week. If you are here, we are glad that you are here. If you look around and you say, "Well, you know, so-and-so isn't here." You need to ask them and encourage them to be here next week. If you're watching online and you're on the other side of the world, then you can't be here next week... probably. But... if you're in Houston, I want to encourage you to be here next week. We need everyone here as we have the opportunity to each bring our commitment cards that we have talked about... to turn those in. We are going to put those on the altar next week and then also an opportunity to bring back that journey piece. So if you got a piece of wood from the original worship center, I want to encourage you to bring that as well and to turn that in. We will be using that as an opportunity to consecrate to the Lord where it is that we are headed as a church. I believe that as we commit next Sunday that will not only change and direct the future of Houston Northwest Church, but it will also actually change many of us personally because, for several of us, it will be an opportunity to truly trust God for the first time... many of us... in ways that will be very challenging to us with regard to our personal finances.

I want to share with you very briefly this last Sunday we gathered together several of our staff members, our leaders, elders, etc., and they participated in a night that we called our Advance Commitment night. This was a time where those who were already ready to go ahead and commit... they brought their commitment cards, they had them filled out, and they turned those in. I wanted to simply share with you that this is based on a pattern of giving that we see in 1 Chronicles chapter 29. In 1 Chronicles chapter 29, as King David is challenging the people of Israel to gather together the resources necessary to build the temple, at first, King David said, "I'm in. This is what I am giving." Then the leaders say that they are in; this is what they are giving. And then the people respond. So that was the idea. I stood before the church last week, last week at Advance Commitment night, and I said, "Hey... my family is in." And then those leaders said that they were in. So now our hope is that the people of the congregation will say that they are in as well. As I have mentioned multiple times, the number one goal of "Overflow" is not a specific dollar amount. Yes... let me be very clear... we need millions of dollars to rebuild. In fact, we set a goal of \$16 million dollars. But the first goal... the most important goal, I believe... is 100% participation. We want to ask that every single person in this room would participate with us in this journey because we believe if we get every single one of us on our face before God, seeking the heart of God, and asking the Spirit of God to guide us. Whatever it is that comes out of that will actually be more important than whatever dollar amount that is pledged, committed, or given. We believe that instead, the idea that we are putting our hearts before a loving and living God is the most important thing that we could do.

So because the most important thing is not the dollar amount but is instead actually those hearts, I want to share some stories with you from this last Sunday night about some hearts that we discovered were actually affected in a positive way, as they began to engage in "Overflow." First of all... we had 111 families

decide to commit early. So that was pretty exciting for us. Those 111 families that came gave some really neat stories, and we'll be sharing some more of those with you in the future. But one of those things that I was most excited about was that, out of that 111 that came and committed, we opened up last week "Overflow" to anyone in the church who wanted to be here. It wasn't just for leaders. We said that anybody could come. Last week, we had nine families that came and committed, and those families had never given to Houston Northwest before. Nine families are brand new givers to the ministry of Houston Northwest. (Clapping) Yah... we should give a round of applause for that. So for me, that is pretty exciting to see, out of 111 that 9 of those were brand new. I mention that because I would imagine that there are individuals in this room right now who probably are similar to those nine families. You are saying that right now God might be inviting you to be generous where you have never been generous before to Houston Northwest Church. So I would encourage you... keep praying over this commitment card... keep looking at that gift table on the back. Keep asking God to show you what it is that you ought to do and then follow God's prompting in obedience.

Let me share some stories of generosity that came out of that. In one case, we had a family who multiplied their giving almost 4.5 times, going from \$3600 in the past two years to \$16,000 as a commitment to "Overflow." Another family is multiplying their giving over 7 times, going from \$700 the past two years to \$5150 for the next two years for "Overflow." There's another family multiplying their giving 5.5 times... going from \$4600 the past two years to \$25,000 for "Overflow." And yet another family is more than tripling their giving, going from \$16,000 the past two years to \$50,000 in the next two years for "Overflow." One last family... a family that is more than doubling their giving is going from \$75,000 over the last two years to a commitment of \$150,000 over the next two years for "Overflow." All kinds of incredible stories of generosity, which I thought was pretty incredible. And then after that event, we had another family who came forward and said that last week, in the middle of the sermon, they felt convicted to sell a piece of property. They told me, in fact, that in selling that piece of property, they believe that God was commanding them to use that toward "Overflow." They made a phone call to someone who they thought would want to purchase the piece of property, and within 30 minutes they had a cash offer. They then told me that they plan to use that cash offer to double their giving as they go into "Overflow." Can we just take a moment and celebrate the incredible generosity that God is doing in the hearts of the people in our church? (Clapping) Incredible.

I simply wanted you to hear about that today because, as I recognize that our goal is lofty... \$16 million over two years is enormous. At the same time, we still are beginning to recognize that God is doing enormous work in the hearts of people all across our church. Let's be honest. If our goal is to receive an additional \$8 million over what our normal giving would be, you would begin to go, "Wow... that seems a little too much." But when you are hearing stories of people increasing their giving by 4 or 5, double, triple... etc, you begin to believe that God might be doing something supernatural in this place, in this time. I truly believe that if we are going to reach that goal of 100% participation and to be able to have the funds necessary to move forward, every single person in this room will truly have to get on their face before God and say, "Lord... how would You have us participate?" I believe that "Overflow" is an opportunity for each of us to spiritually grow... perhaps more radically than we ever would have envisioned... because we actually are now recognizing that as we trust God with our finances, He would actually then begin to move us to trust Him in areas that are even bigger than our dollars. God will actually use our faithfulness with our pocketbook to begin to move to faithfulness in every other area of our lives. So I want to challenge you to participate in "Overflow." I firmly believe that you won't regret it.

We have one more story that we want you to take the opportunity to see. So I want to invite you at this time to turn your attention toward the screens and get to hear one more "Overflow" story before we continue.

[Audio playing: Interview with Russell and Beverly Ginn]

Beverly: I love this church... It's warm, it's inviting, and it's caring and compassionate.

Russell: We felt it was easy to assimilate to. The people were friendly, and clearly the church was preaching the Gospel. That's really important to us.

Beverly: What I love about this place is that when you come into this place, you see Jesus. A perfect example to me is what we experienced during Hurricane Harvey. Even though this church was badly damaged, they went out and they took care of not only church members but people in the community. That had a huge impact on me.

Russell: We grew up in an era where the Church was inside the building... we were just taking care of ourselves, basically. Let's be fair. "Are the seats comfortable enough? Is the air conditioning...?" ...all those kinds of things. And Houston Northwest is much more about being outside the building. And we believe that's what Jesus intended. We are not supposed to sit in this little box and take care of ourselves.

Beverly: There are different kinds of generosity. There's the hug that you give to somebody when they need it badly. There's the ear that you lend to someone that they need to be talking to you... they need to be heard. And there's, of course, the financial generosity. You know everything that we have was given to us by God. And we have an obligation to give back. He needs to be glorified in that way, and you need to walk in His footsteps. He was generous with us. Look what He has done for us. And I believe that God gives you things... for instance, money... whatever He gives you. And then He is going to watch you and see, "Now, what you are going to with this? I'm going to watch you."

Russell: We actually sit down once a year and discuss our giving. We go over it and we let the Spirit speak to us and tell us. Now we are being challenged to do that again. That's okay... He will tell us what to do. We are fortunate. We have enough resources that it is not as difficult today as it was at one time. So something will happen... it might be at the church... it might be somewhere else. Some need will come up. The first thing that happens is the Holy Spirit... we'll agree that He spoke to both of us. We should participate in that need in some way. Then we'll let it sit. We will pray about it, and we'll come back together and say, "Well... what do you think?" It's not always me that speaks first. It's not always Beverly that speaks first. One of us will finally commit to what we hear the Spirit telling us. Never has it been a different number. Never. It's always the same number. And my experience has been, as part of this whole generosity thing... when He tells you that, you'd better do it... because no matter how well it's going right now, it's not going to go well if you don't follow His command.

Beverly: I think that we have the obligation to return the love, the care, and the compassion that He has shown us. If you'll do this... if you will just step outside yourself and look around and see the needs that there are and meet those needs, you'll be blessed far richer than what you are receiving.

Russell: He doesn't expect us to come up with something we don't have. And I will state there that if you want to tithe, you'd better take it out first. If you take it out first, every week, every month... however you get paid... you can tithe. If you try to take it out last, it will never work. Forget it. It ain't going to happen. But if you take it first, there's going to be enough money there. I promise you. I've seen it happen time after time.

"Overflow" for us, fits perfectly because we think that as time goes by the defining moment of this church, even though it's been around for quite a while already, is going to be the flood. I've been in church all my life, and I've never seen a church step up like what happened after that flood. "Overflow" is perfect because God is going to overflow His blessings on this church, in my opinion. So we were out in the community before the flood. Now we are **really** out in the community.

Beverly: I'm excited to see what they are going to be doing for missions... for people in the community... the outreach that they're going to have. It's going to be amazing to watch, and I'm very excited to be a part of it.

Russell: God is going to show us what we're supposed to do. We are going to build some buildings. We are going to get that done. God's going to provide in some way to get that done, but that's just a stepping stone to whatever God has got in mind.

Beverly: And He definitely has something in mind.

Russell: We don't know what the plan is; we just know it's going to be a lot of fun. [Audio ends]

(Clapping)

[Pastor Steve]

Amen. I truly believe it is going to be a lot of fun. As we trust God together and as we obey God together, I believe that God is awakening a move within our church that we will look back as a watershed moment for generations to come.

I want to invite you today to open up your Bibles with me to Exodus 35, and we are going to engage a story of a time when the people of God also had a moment where they were responding to the call of God to be generous and to create a building that was to be used for His service and to be used for His ministry. As we look at this text today, I believe that perhaps God would show you and show me how it is that we ought to respond. So I'm going to pray and then we will begin reading in Exodus 35.

"Father, we pray today... Thank you for letting us be your children. God, how good it is that we get to think about the fact that You love us... that we can call You 'Dad.' How good it is to know that wherever You see us, You are not angry but You are pleased with us because we stand justified and clean. We stand forgiven through the blood of Jesus Christ. Lord, we thank You for that goodness, we thank You so much for the call and the blessing that You have placed on us. So Lord, today we ask, as we open Your Word, would You please speak to us? Lord, it's not from lack of Your power that we wouldn't hear from You. It would be on our end that we've clouded our mind or come in with anger or stress. But Lord, today, I pray and I ask... would You settle our hearts and remove those barriers so that we would have the opportunity to truly hear what it is that You want to say to us? Lord, we don't want to miss it. We don't want to miss it when You start speaking, that we would have the chance to hear from You. Thanks Lord. We pray today that You would speak to us and move us. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen."

Exodus 35, starting in verse 4... *"Moses said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, 'This is the thing that the Lord has commanded. Take from among you a contribution to the Lord. Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the Lord's contribution: gold, silver, and bronze; blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen; goats' hair, tanned rams' skins, and goatskins; acacia wood, oil for the lights,*

spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, and onyx stones and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece.

"Let every skilled craftsman among you come and make all that the Lord has commanded: the tabernacle, its tent and its covering, its hooks and its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases; the ark with its poles, the mercy seat, and the veil of the screen; the table with its poles and all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; the lampstand also for the light, with its utensils and its lamps, and the oil for the light; and the altar of incense, with its poles, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the door, at the door of the tabernacle; the altar of burnt offering, with its grating of bronze, its poles, and all its utensils, the basin and its stand; the hangings of the court, its pillars and its bases, and the screen for the gate of the court; the pegs of the tabernacle and the pegs of the court, and their cords; the finely worked garments for ministering in the Holy Place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests.

"Then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought the Lord's contribution to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments. So they came, both men and women. All who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicating an offering of gold to the Lord. And every one who possessed blue or purple or scarlet yarns or fine linen or goats' hair or tanned rams' skins or goatskins brought them. Everyone who could make a contribution of silver or bronze brought it as the Lord's contribution. And every one who possessed acacia wood of any use in the work brought it. And every skillful woman spun with her hands, and they all brought what they had spun in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. All the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill spun the goats' hair. And the leaders brought onyx stones and stones to be set, for the ephod and for the breastpiece, and spices and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense. All the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them to bring anything for the work that the Lord had commanded by Moses to be done brought it as a freewill offering to the Lord."

Next Sunday is Commitment Sunday so we're spending some time thinking and talking about how God's overflow would lead us to a position of "Overflowing Commitment" ...how it is that we would choose to be committed to the work of the Lord. We are committed people, after all. Most every person in this room has probably at some point in their life signed on the dotted line... perhaps for a mortgage or a lease, choosing to be committed financially to that particular agreement. Or maybe you've signed over a title so that you could participate in the purchase of a car. We are familiar with that type of commitment. Or maybe you're in this room and you're married. That means that you stood in front of some friends or a pastor or someone, at some point, and you said "I do." And in doing so, you agreed to be committed to another individual for all the rest of your days. Those are some of those more traditional commitments. Then there are also some of us in this room who are actually committed but maybe in some ways that are sometimes a little more painful. Maybe, for instance, you're a sports fan and you've got a team that you love dearly and you root for week-in and week-out... but nevertheless, they almost feel as if they are cursed and nothing good ever comes out of the energy that you place in rooting for them. Maybe... just maybe... there might be some teams in our city that have maybe experienced something like that... I don't know... we're speaking hypothetically at this point. But the point being that whenever you do that, you're not following after a particular player, but instead that commitment to that team holds you in that place and in doing so you experience the highs and the lows of a commitment.

In this particular passage of Scripture, we are thinking about what it looks like for you and for me as we engage and consider what commitment looks like with regard to the Lord. This is a commitment passage. The Israelites are dedicating things over to God. Since we are having a commitment Sunday next week, I think it is good for us to stop and consider how it is that we would prepare our hearts for a similar moment of commitment. So in order to do that, I think it is good for us to look at this passage... this time where the Israelites decided that they would indeed commit their hearts and their belongings to building the tent of meeting... and consider how it is that God desires commitment. In other words, what sort of commitment does the Lord want from His people? I think that there are at least three things in this passage that we can see, so we will jump in immediately.

1. God Desires Willing Hearts. (v. 4)

First, I think that God desires for our commitment to flow from willing hearts. If you look in verse 4, you'll see that Moses says that this is indeed a commandment from God. But then as we go into verse 5, we read... *"Take from among you a contribution to the Lord. Whoever is of a generous heart..."* In that particular moment, Moses says that it is from a generous heart, but as we go on through the passage, we'll actually begin to see God calling for willing hearts and generous hearts, over and over. Perhaps one of the greatest miracles of the Christian life is that God actually over and over again, invites us to join in with Him into His work. God encourages us to join Him in the work of spreading the Gospel. God invites us to join Him in the work of making disciples. Over and over, God does not simply say that He will do the work over here and us, His people, will be spectators over there; but somehow there is this interesting dynamic whereby God is able to actually introduce Himself into our lives and invite us to join Him in the work. The work of generosity is part of God's work in the world, and so His generosity is one of those things that He also invites us to join Him in. He says, *"Come and join Me as we decide to build this tabernacle, and I want to move in your hearts to see if you would be willing to follow Me and to obey in the work of generosity."* So as He does that, we notice throughout this passage... throughout chapter 35... that over and over the focus is on the heart. In fact we read that the selection process was not based on income. The selection process was not based on gender, but instead it was based on heart condition... whoever has a generous heart. Over and over in this passage we see "heart" mentioned:

Verse 5... *"Whoever is of a generous heart..."*

Verse 21... *"And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him..."*

Verse 22... *"All who were of a willing heart brought..."*

Verse 29... *"All the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them..."*

Over and over, God talks about a willing heart being the basis of a commitment to help rebuild the tabernacle.

Now, whenever we talk about willing hearts or generous hearts and we talk about, then tied to that, the idea that hearts would be stirred within us, it's easy for us to think about emotional manipulation. For me, whenever I think about emotional manipulation, there is really only one example that I think gives any sort of fitting participation in an idea and that is television. I mean, you guys, you're all out there and watch TV shows, and you have probably noticed all kinds of shows out there that are great at pulling the heart strings. Years ago, I thought the master of this were those emotional terrorists over at "Extreme Makeover – Home Edition." Did any of you guys ever watch that show? Those people were mean... right? They would set you up and they'd say, "Well, here's this family... they've gone through these life circumstances that are terrible." They had a story that you thought that these people had lived the worst life. They would take their

very modest home, and they would turn it into a home that would make the greatest superstar envious. And then they would have this reveal, and suddenly the people are crying and they're screaming and they're laughing... and then me, a very burly, masculine man would suddenly find himself weeping like a baby, sitting on his couch, watching people get their house. And I would say, "I can't believe these blasted people over here at 'Extreme Makeover – Home Edition'... they're always pulling my heart strings..." Maybe that's not your bag... maybe instead you might be some of those people that instead allow your emotions to be manipulated by a television show called "The Bachelor." I don't really watch "The Bachelor" but I have heard from time to time that there are a few women out there in the United States that from time to time tune in to watch this show... maybe a couple of men in the room as well. This is what I've also discovered... that they can make you like a contestant or hate a contestant on that show, based on the way that they cut the video and show their personality there. I've had a lot of people encourage me to watch the television show "This Is Us." I don't know if we have any "This Is Us" fans out there that are watching that. I tell you what... I'm not going to do that because I haven't gotten over all that stuff that I got through crying over every episode of "Parenthood" that came before that. The point of the matter is this: These guys who do the television shows are masters of their craft, and they are really good at pulling on the heart strings and having us feel the things that we like to feel or need to feel in order to enjoy their show. But this is the thing that I want you to understand. As great as they are at their job, that is not having your heart stirred in the way that the Lord is talking about in Exodus chapter 35. That is emotional manipulation. They have crafted a story in such a way that they know that it can move you to feel certain emotions. They can evoke a response within you. In other words, they have a formula by which they play; but this is different.

In this particular situation, rather than manipulating, the Lord is instead calling upon the people to recognize His goodness in their lives and in doing so to respond accordingly. This is the point: It's that I think for many of us, it would be good for us to simply allow our hearts to be stirred by the goodness of who our God is. How many of us have taken the time and simply reflected on God's goodness in our lives? Have we pondered lately the fact that God chose to rescue us... that God chose to redeem us? I know that for me, from time to time, I certainly become callous to that great truth... to the Gospel itself... and I don't stop to remember and reconsider that God has loved even me. I know that you only know me as your Pastor, but I know me as the person who grew up being all sorts of bad, in all sorts of ways. So I certainly remember all of the things in my life that are not worthy of the name of God. Instead of allowing those things to divide me from His glory and from His presence, God instead applied the blood of Jesus to my life. God, instead, decided that I was worth rescuing. God, instead, decided that I was one who was worthy of His name. I was loved so much by God that He would call me "son." And the same is true for you. That is what the Gospel is... that God looks at you and calls you "daughter" and calls you "son"...if you have applied the blood of Jesus Christ to your life. If you are in Christ... if you have given your heart... you placed your faith in Jesus, surrendered your life to Him... you have the very name of God on you. So today I ask, "Have you considered that lately?" Have you wondered why it is that God would choose to give you the blessing that He has given? Have you wondered about the life that you have? Have you looked around and thought, "Look at the blessings in my life... my job, my family, my relationships, my friends... the place that I live, the things that I experience." Have you ever stopped to simply pause and ponder why it is that God's goodness pours out so freely on you?

If you stop to ponder that for very long, it won't take but a moment for you to recognize that if God has chosen from His own innate goodness... He is good and He does good, to pour that goodness out upon you... then that also you too might be one who would respond in like kind. If you spend some time meditating on God's goodness, Church... would God's goodness move you in such a way that you would

actually have your heart stirred within you? Not because it's manipulated by a television producer... not because it's even manipulated by a preacher who might be good at using the right words... but instead simply the grace of God moves you to a place that you would certainly become willing.

The thing that I'm praying for, as we go through "Overflow," is that our church would be so overwhelmed with the grace of God in our own lives that we would consider about what it is that God has done for each of us... that we would be so moved by that that willing hearts, generous hearts would begin to spring up from within our body... that people would begin to say, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ is so good, so powerful, so beautiful, my heart is stirred to the goodness of my God. My God is so good that He would allow me to call Him 'Father.' My God is so good that He would become human to pursue me... my God is so good that the cross and the empty tomb would be done on my behalf." If the Gospel of Jesus Christ stirs and lifts your heart, then in the Book of Exodus, I believe what is happening is that God is moving and stirring so that we would be moved to response... not manipulation but instead moved. If the Lord God is moving your heart today, my hope is that you would not waste that movement that God is putting in your heart but instead would choose to respond to it as we move toward a time of commitment.

2. ...Who Give To Him... (v. 5)

But it's not only the fact that God wants to have willing and generous hearts there. It's also that God wants to have willing and generous hearts who will give to Him. If you look of verse 5 in that passage, you see that Moses says, "*Take from among you a contribution to the Lord.*" I find it interesting that the contribution is to the Lord, for His glory, for His mission... not for the building of a building, first and foremost, but instead to the Lord. In the same way that heart is mentioned over and over through Exodus 35, we can go through this passage and find that the Lord is mentioned as the object of generosity in this passage again and again:

Verse 5... "*Take from among you a contribution to the Lord.*"

Verse 22... "*...every man dedicating an offering... to the Lord.*"

Verse 24... they "*brought it as the Lord's contribution.*"

Verse 29... "*...brought it as a freewill offering to the Lord.*"

This is interesting to me because they would likely say that the gift is, in one way, for the tabernacle. But at the same time, the writer of the Book of Exodus, most likely Moses, recorded it as a gift to the Lord. The people there... the Israelites... clearly knew what the gift was for... a tent of meeting. This tells us that while it may not always be our favorite thing to give toward, these physical... tangible representations of ministry – buildings... certainly have a value. We certainly see that in the case of 1 Chronicles 29 as they build the temple... about having an outpost. That's good, but this is an interesting tension. Are the people giving to a project... to a building... or are they giving to something higher? What are we giving to? Are we giving to a building... to a kids' building... or are we giving to something higher and bigger? I believe this... that God certainly would have us give to those certain projects because they are used for His name, but the point is that they are used for His name. The point is this... it's that when we are giving, we actually are not giving for a kids' building or anything else. We are giving to the Lord Himself. Whenever we are giving, we are not giving to Steve, we're not giving to the Church... we are handing it over to the Lord our God.

Over the years, having been a pastor for almost 23 years now... that's kind of crazy... I've heard all sorts of reasons that individuals are reluctant to give to churches. I want to just go ahead and acknowledge those. One of the questions that I've often heard is, "How can I know that I can trust what they are doing

with my money?" Great question. Another question I hear is, "Do they actually need my money?" Another great question. Again, I suppose I can't speak for other churches. I can simply tell you that we at Houston Northwest are very diligent to use the dollars that are given and do so in a trustworthy manner that reflects Kingdom purposes and ministry. At the same time, I can also answer, "Do we need your money?" "Yes." I have all kinds of crazy ideas that I would love for us to do that we do not have enough dollars to do, and we probably would not have enough dollars to do in the rest of my lifetime. I don't anticipate that that will ever change. We will always have things that we are wanting to do in the name of Jesus Christ. But the truth of the matter is this: It's that when you are giving, you are not giving to Steve or Houston Northwest... you are giving to the Lord. And the Scripture encourages you to think like that. Whenever I'm giving, whenever I'm looking at my money and I'm giving to Houston Northwest or to any other ministry... certainly I have responsibilities to vet that organization, to make certain that I'm being responsible... but then there comes a moment where I take the things that God has given me and then I release them. I give them over to God, and I say, "My responsibility has been fulfilled because I am doing what God has called me to do." In the same way, those of us who are in leadership in churches have a really big responsibility. We are using other people's money... other people's funds. We will be held responsible for the way that we use those dollars. I recognize that and I understand that it is a very heavy responsibility. I also want you to know... I take it very, very seriously. And those who are in leadership in our church take it very, very seriously. We have that serious responsibility, but we also want you to know that we believe that God would call us to do that because giving to Him is the highest and best thing that we can give toward. In other words, even though yes, it is a big responsibility... and even though, yes, you're right... once you have released those dollars, you don't know exactly how they will be used. You can't be there seeing how every single cent is spent, and you have to trust leadership. I believe at the end of the day, the thing that we must remember is not that you're giving to me or to the church, but instead that I am handing this over to God, trusting Him because God has asked me to do so. I want to encourage and exhort you... if God is moving in your heart, giving you that moment where you're saying, "My heart is willing but I have some doubt within me... wondering if I can commit, if I ought to commit, if I should commit..." I would say to you to trust the movement of your heart that God is putting within you and to give to the Lord.

3. ...That Which Is Valuable. (v. 5-9)

But then, last, I think... it's most interesting in this passage... it's not only that it comes from a willing heart that's directed toward the Lord. But then it's what they give. And they give things that are so very valuable. If you start there in verse 9, you notice that they begin to give *"...a contribution: gold, silver, and bronze; blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen; goats' hair, tanned rams' skins, and goatskins; acacia wood, oil for the lights, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, and onyx stones and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece."* Now what do you think this is about? Why is it that they are supposed to give these nice materials? Is it because the Lord God is a diva and demands only the nicest of materials for His place? I actually don't think that that is what is happening here. Instead, I believe that, in this particular moment, God is asking for the things that would be valuable to those people, in that day, in that time. And in doing so, he is combating against idolatry. He is saying, "Give to Me the thing that is valuable, and then we'll use that in the construction of the tent of meeting." In our own setting, it's actually a little bit different. We give things that are valuable to us... I don't know anyone with a storehouse filled with ram skins, goat skins, or acacia wood here at Houston Northwest. Perhaps I might be wrong, and if so, please invite me over. I would love to see your storehouse filled with ram skins some other time. But, nevertheless, I don't know that we will be incorporating ram and goat skins into the kids' building. But I do think that God would call us to give, in the same way, things that are valuable. Because

in giving things that are valuable, we actually begin to respond to God in the way that He would have us to respond. It's not then about the fact that God has to have the nicest of materials in whatever is built. It's about the fact that we build what is culturally and ministerially appropriate for a particular setting in a particular time, but it will always take valuable things... in this particular case, financial resources or gifts in-kind, in order to be able to build the thing that is necessary.

If you notice, they don't only give valuable items. They also give of their time. Why is that? Why would they also ask those who are skilled craftsmen to give of their time? I was raised by a plumber, and this man was someone who worked from daylight until dark. Why? ...Because in the construction world... in the skilled craftsmen world, as many of you probably know... you aren't paid a salary just showing up for your job. You are paid for the amount of work that you complete. In other words, whenever you finish a job, whenever you finish a task, then you are able to collect the dollars on that particular task at hand. The point being that the more tasks you can complete, the more things that you can build, the more money you can make. Whenever Moses called on skilled craftsmen to come and to make things for the tabernacle, they were giving their most valuable resource... their skill and their time... because in doing so they actually could not then be making money for themselves during that time. If they were building something for the tabernacle in that moment, they aren't making money for themselves at that same particular time. This is good for us to recognize that God was calling on individuals who were white-collar and blue-collar to give those things that were valuable to them. God also did not delineate based on gender. He said for the men to come in to bring in certain things, and for the women to come in and to bring certain things. This was an invitation for every person within the body of the Israelite camp to say, "We want you to come and to bring that which is valuable." As I have already mentioned, the reason for this is that God would invite us to give what is valuable so that He might prevent idolatry.

If I'm completely honest with you, I am someone who has lots of things that tend to compete with my affections for the Lord. I have said this before... but it's tempting for me to love my wife and my children more than I love Jesus. I don't mean to say that I don't love Jesus... I certainly do... obviously, of course... but because every single morning I wake up and I see the woman that I love, and every morning I wake up and I see two sons who are dear to my heart and for whom I would willingly give my own life to protect and to provide. Sometimes it's easy for me to forget that they are not as essential and as important to me as my own Lord God. That's why every single day, whenever I pray for my wife and I pray for my kids, one of the things that I have to do is entrust them over back to God. ...Because I cannot be a generous person unless I have surrendered every single fiber of my being over to the Lord. If I haven't given every single piece of who I am over to God, I'm always tempted to hold certain things back. The heart of generosity is to give the thing which is most valuable to us. That's why I dedicate my wife and my kids to the Lord every single day in my heart so that I have a moment where every day I hand them over to the Lord and I say, "Lord, You do with them what You would do... Lord, I entrust them to You because they are most important to me. I give that possession over to you because I trust You to have them more than I trust my own plans."

Whenever we talk about generosity and commitment, you begin to recognize that this posture flows from God's posture toward us. I want you to recognize that what's happening in Exodus chapter 35 is really just a foreshadowing of the Gospel itself. This thing that they are building... the tent of meeting... is actually known as the tabernacle. You've heard that before. The tabernacle, if you're not already aware, was a tent. They could actually take it down; so whenever the pillar of cloud or the pillar of fire moved, the Israelites could take up their camp and take that tent and move it around so that they could then set up the tabernacle to worship the Lord again. And whenever it would be time to set up camp, they would set up the tent, and the presence of God would come in and move where the Ark of the Covenant was, and they

would worship God in that place. It was the idea that the presence of God was in the middle of God's people wherever they went. If you go and you read in John chapter 1... a very famous passage in the New Testament... you will read that *"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."* It's a fancy way of saying that God became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ and dwelt among us. But you may have heard over time that that phrase "dwelt among us" literally says "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us." It's the idea that God continues to set up His tent in the midst of His people, but no longer through a tangible building but now specifically through the gift of the person of Jesus Christ. What we are reading in Exodus chapter 35 is a foreshadowing of God's continuing plan to have His presence available to all people, in all nations, all over the world at the same time because of what God continues to do. I mention this because, as we consider giving those things that are valuable and having willing hearts and dedicating those things to the Lord, those reflect the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Think about the very first thing that we talked about today... "coming with a willing heart." Who has a more willing heart than our God? Who has a more willing heart to say that He wants to save and to redeem and to rescue and to build His Kingdom than a God who would look out on a broken humanity and say, "I will give of Myself so that I might have you"? God looks at every person in this room today and says, "I love you and I want you and I want you to respond to My Good News... to My Son." If you're here today and you have yet to hear this news, I want you to know this... that God looks at each of you and says that He gave His Son because He has the most willing heart to draw all to repentance. That is what the Scripture says... that He desires none to perish. He wants you to say "Yes" to Him.

But then beyond only a willing heart, it's also the idea that our hearts are directed toward Him. Then you think, "How could God and the Gospel direct His heart toward Himself?" The way that He did that was by giving us Himself. He gave us His presence. In giving us Jesus Christ, God allowed us to have the opportunity to not only receive salvation but also to have the even higher gift which is the presence of God Himself in our own lives. Whenever we respond to the Gospel, we are responding to the fact that God wants to give us the gift of His presence. That is the heart of the Gospel.

But then finally, the idea that we are to be people who give that is most valuable, that is a definite extension of the Gospel because God gave that which was most valuable to Him... He gave His Son so that we might have relationship and fellowship with Him. All of this pours from an overflowing love that flows from the heart of God... not to keep it unto Himself but instead to extend grace, love, peace, and mercy to every single person who would turn to Him. Today I don't want you to hear that we ought to be people who are only people that are concerned about monetary giving. What I want you to hear is that the God of the universe loved you so much that He modeled this pattern of giving long before there was ever a flood in Houston, Texas... and that He gave of Himself.

So today my challenge and my hope for each and every one of us is that we would hear that our God became flesh and tabernacled among us and that we would hear the great truth that God wants us to participate in giving because in giving in the way that the Israelites gave in Exodus chapter 35, we are actually modeling and participating in the way of giving that God Himself gives. May we model our lives after Him, and may we say "Yes" to the God who has been pursuing us across time and eternity. My hope today is that we would receive the challenge. Would you pray with me?

I want to take an opportunity at this time to pray and to simply ask about some of the hearts that are in this room. If you are in this room and the Lord has spoken to you, I want to give you a chance to respond to Him today. If you would say that today God has spoken to you and you recognize that you need to surrender your heart and your life to Him... it's time. This isn't about money. I'm not talking about money;

I'm talking about your heart and your life. It's time to surrender. Would you just raise your hand and say, "That's me right now, Steve." Okay... who else? Okay... I see you. Who else? Okay. Anybody else? "Father, I've seen three hands go up today. I don't know their stories but You do, and so Lord I pray for them, that they would surrender their heart and their life to You today... that they would respond... that they would commit... that they wouldn't give an excuse, but that today they would receive the grace given in Jesus... that they would receive the forgiveness of sin given in Jesus, and that they would surrender and follow... and Lord, in doing so, that they would follow in baptism... that they would follow in being part of Your Church."

Others of us today here, we need to respond in a different way. If you would say, "Hey, do you know what it's time for me to do? It's time for me to be baptized. I've given my heart to Christ, but I haven't been baptized." Would you just raise your hand and say, "Alright... it's time for me to do that." Okay. I'm not seeing anybody saying that. Is there anybody out there saying, "Today is the day for me to commit and to actually commit to be part of a church... whether it's this church or another church." I will pray for you. Okay... okay... "Father, for these that are raising their hands, saying 'Yah, it's time for me to commit my heart over to not only just the idea of Jesus but to a tangible family.' Lord, we hand that over to You. God, I pray that these who have raised their hand would take that next step and get committed to a family... find a way to get plugged in at Houston Northwest or a different church in our area so that they could follow You faithfully. Father, whatever it is... the different heart conditions that are happening... I pray that You would move, that You would work, that You would do the thing that only You could do. Father, I pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen and amen."

I'm so glad that you've decided to join us today and hope that God has spoken to you. [audio ends here]