

Good morning. What a privilege to be speak to you this morning. I am thankful to be here along with my wife and children. I feel led to serve you meat today. I hope you're hungry.

The recent release of the book: "Evangelical Convictions: A Theological Exposition of the Statement of Faith of the Evangelical Free Church of America" is for this movement, a thoughtful and unifying exposition of the biblical *doctrine* we collectively embrace.

Doctrine. Doctrine alone can be pretty heavy stuff.

I start with the idea of doctrine today because I believe it to be the critical complement to the thrust of my message, which is deeds: Doctrine and deeds must go together.

My talk today is entitled: "His Generous Disciples." For a basic definition rooted in the NT, I see his generous disciples as people who are known for sound doctrine and sacrificial deeds.

Coming from someone who considers himself more of a teacher or prophet than a preacher, this is a difficult topic to cover in the time given me, so let me get started with three caveats before I begin. You could say I am reading the warning label.

Warning #1: Objects in the mirror are closer than they appear.

The teachings of Jesus on generosity were radically different from the ways of the ancient world and they clash with the culture we live in today. They don't just come close; they speak right to our hearts and often reveal heart issues we may have. As we look in the mirror of the Word today, please ask the Holy Spirit to guide your response to my message?

Warning #2: Please try this at home.

Before you can invite others such as your spouse, your family, your church and the world, to become generous disciples along with you, you start that journey yourself.

Warning #3: This is only your mission if you choose to accept it.

The mission I will invite you to undertake is impossible without God, but entirely possible with God. Your mission is to become generous disciples characterized by sound doctrine and sacrificial deeds.

I hope to demonstrate today that the doctrine and deeds of generous disciples represented an invincible force that helped the win ancient world for Jesus Christ. I believe this may the answer for winning the modern world. The EFCA is known for sound doctrine; imagine if we were also known for sacrificial deeds.

My message has everything to do with putting our money where our faith is. You could say the purpose of it is to put skin on our Statement of Faith, your skin and my skin.

We can't do this without God's help. Would you join me in prayer, asking the Spirit to show up powerfully today in each of our lives?

Father God, I come before you today with boldness, asking you to indwell, illuminate, guide and equip us to be generous disciples known for their doctrine and deeds. By the power of your Holy Spirit, conform our lives to the image of your son, Jesus, who emptied himself for us, that we might be made rich. Likewise, help us empty ourselves, following the example of your son Jesus, in whose name we pray, Amen.

I want to start with a story about a generous disciple which will help you get to know me a little better, and give you insight as to who I am and why I am talking with you today.

In the early 1900's, a man named John Hoag (my great grandfather) married a woman named Edna Pease and they lived in Rocky River, a west suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. Listen to this synopsis of their story:

John and Edna were followers of Jesus, active supporters of their local church, and John was quite a businessman. At the turn of the century, he wanted to build a greenhouse and grow tomatoes. When the bank would not loan him the money, he founded his own bank, serving as president of the First National Bank of Rocky River. In 1908, he started Hoag's Greenhouses, which for 82 years would be known for growing top quality hothouse tomatoes. John was instrumental in putting people to work. He helped form the Greenhouse Vegetable Packing Company for Northeast Ohio growers and the Cleveland Growers Marketing Company to help them market their produce. Additionally, he started the Lakewood Parks and Cemetery system in service to his community. These entities flourished, at least until the Great Depression hit: Unemployment skyrocketed. Food lines grew. Local banks closed, all except the First National Bank of Rocky River. As my father recently recounted to me: "John and Edna saved the businesses and the people of Rocky River, Ohio." How'd they do it? They shared everything they had. They viewed their wealth as a cup that had God filled. They believed that if they emptied it on behalf church and their community, God could fill it again. So that's just what they did.

Today, if you visit City Hall in Rocky River, Ohio, in front of it you'll find a memorial garden with a small monument capped with a sundial in honor of John and Edna Pease Hoag.

On a recent trip to Ohio, my parents took my wife Jenni, and our two children, Sammy and Sophie to visit it. Here is a photo of us in the memorial garden. The inscription reads:

*Memorial Garden in honor of John and Edna Pease Hoag
These Citizens who helped to Build our Community shall be the Inspiration for its Future*

I start with this photo for two reasons. The first is personal the second is spiritual.

Personally, I grew up hearing this expression tied to Christian generosity: "This is what it means to be a Hoag." If God has provided resources and you see a need, you give.

The second reason for starting with this story is this: After reading this inscription weeks ago, I felt like the Spirit gave me the direction I had been seeking for this message.

Even as the generosity of citizens helped build a community and serve as an inspiration to future generations, I believe the generosity of ordinary disciples significantly contributed to the building of the Church in the pagan and polytheistic ancient world, and I am here to inspire you to believe it can happen again; that is, if we are willing to be movement of generous disciples. Doctrine and deeds won the world for Christ. It could happen again.

For those who like outlines, here is an outline for my message today; it has three points: (1) Doctrine: Jesus teachings in the Gospels often took the form of parables but much of what he said regarding money was delivered with culture-shaking clarity. Though time does not permit an exhaustive study, from Jesus' teachings I will sketch the generous disciple.

(2) Deeds: The Early Church had the deeds to back up their doctrine. I will offer NT examples of this, along with testimonies of the Apostolic Fathers to demonstrate that doctrine coupled with deeds served as an unstoppable force that changed the world.

(3) Decision: Whether you consider the story of my great grandparents or the testimonies of generous disciples in the Early Church, each one had to make a decision to trust in God who they could *not* see rather than trying find security in their stuff which they could see.

I will conclude by inviting each of you to make a decision to join me on the spiritual journey of becoming his generous disciples.

Point #1 – The Doctrine of the Generous Disciple

My first text is Mark 12:38-44. Turn there please. It contains specific teaching—doctrine—that forms our understanding of the generous disciple. *Read it.*

Jesus instructs us that generosity is not for show. It is not secured through schmoozing. And that it flows not from surplus, but rather from sacrifice.

In verses 38 to 40, we see that it was not for show. Jesus calls his disciples to beware of religious leaders who participated in the ancient paradigm known as benefaction, behavior for which the text says they will receive the greater condemnation.

In considering this text, I ask myself this question: If this was so bad and participants were destined for greater condemnation, why would Jesus have to warn them about it?

I offer this plausible answer: It is easy to fall into the trap of schmoozing the rich to secure much needed support.

According to Philo, a Jewish contemporary of Jesus, participating in the cycle of benefaction demonstrates a love for money, which is idolatry! Listen to his testimony in *Special Laws*:

All the needy who are possessed by that grievous malady, the desire for money [*φιλαργυρία*], though they have no wealth of their own on which they may bestow worship as its due, pay awe-struck homage to that of their neighbors, and come at early dawn to the houses of those who have abundance of it as though they were the grandest temples, there to make their prayers and beg for blessing from the masters as though they were gods. To such he says elsewhere “Ye shall not follow idols and ye shall not make molten gods,” thus teaching them in a figure that it is not fitting to assign divine honours to wealth.¹

If we idolize people for what they can offer us, that is, treat them with favoritism we fall into the benefaction trap, even if they are funding the churches we serve.

In so doing, not only do we give them glory that belongs to God, the giver of all gifts, but often try to get a piece of that glory too. Such was the temptation of the disciples of Jesus.

Listen as I read Luke 22:24-26.

Jesus urges his disciples to bag the benefactor model, and minister not for glory, but as humble servants. Let's jump back to the warning in Mark 12.

I think the text is saying this: Beware that you don't commit the cardinal sin of loving money and using people, rather than loving people and using money to accomplish God's purposes. God is the source of everything that is good, and the only one to be idolized.

That's the first half of the text. In the second half is a “teachable moment” where Jesus provides instruction for His disciples *and us* on generosity—whether you are rich or poor—because both are present in the narrative in v. 41-44.

The giving Jesus celebrated was not the large sums from the surplus of the rich, but sacrifice offered by the poor widow. This is tough stuff.

¹ 24.3. Philo's sentiment is echoed in 1 Timothy 6:9-10.

In ministry, I like getting huge sums from rich people. I like it when they only give out of their surplus, because when I need more, I can go back to them later. No wonder I guarded those relationships so closely. See the temptation, the trap. I have fallen into it many times.

Having learned this lesson: now when I meet people they always expect me to ask for a gift of a certain amount from their surplus. Instead I ask them to follow the Spirit's leading to become a sacrificial giver.

So I ask you: What would sacrificial giving look like for you?

Personally I prefer surplus giving, because I don't like sacrifice part of sacrificial giving.

Growing up in the church, I was actually taught to be a surplus giver. It was not blatantly unbiblical but fit in the culture: I was taught to carve out a tenth, give it to God, save a portion, and spend the rest on things I needed or wanted. I got to liking the spending part. Because I had money to spend, I often unaware fell into the trap of thinking "life consisted in the abundance of possessions."² Buying this or that. And all this was "good stewardship."

As I have studied the teachings of Jesus *to His disciples*, I don't hear words like tithe, save and spend. I hear radical messages. Listen to a few crystal clear commands of Jesus.

On saving, Jesus says: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal."³ Are you kidding, Jesus?

On giving, Jesus says: "Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back."⁴ Everyone. Enemies included? This makes no sense Jesus.

For daily provision, Jesus says: "Give us today our daily bread."⁵ Trust God for food. Really? For years I rationalized all these things away.

At this point, you may be saying to yourself: "No one lives this way!" No one in their right mind with financial resources would stop storing up treasures on earth. That would be considered bad stewardship.

You may also be saying: "No one in their right mind would give to everyone who asks."

I actually argued that we should "give freely" in a recent issue of *Christianity Today*, quoting Scripture and citing saints and scholars alike. What happened? I got ripped by Christians whom I respect that have crafted strategies that clearly contradict the counsel of God.

Seriously, two famous Christians speak about "the importance of wealth accumulation"⁶ to truly serve the poor. I will reserve their identity to a footnote in my manuscript, which any of you are free to read. I mention it not because I am trying to pick a fight, but because I am trying to shed light on how the culture warps our view of biblical mandates.

Again, Jesus adds: "Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys."⁷

² Luke 12:13-21

³ Matthew 6:19

⁴ Luke 7:30

⁵ Matthew 6:11

⁶ Steve Corbett & Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2009), p. 188.

⁷ Luke 12:33

The common response from leading Christians that misconstrue Jesus' point about freely sharing with the poor, is to say things like: "You won't solve the problem by doing that." I believe they miss Jesus' point altogether: Jesus did not give the instruction because he wanted them to solve the problem (remember, the poor will always be with us). He said this to teach His disciples to live according to kingdom values: God values people over money.

Jesus' command to do it is not to solve poverty but to show love. He wants us to be generous disciples. He invites us to be His conduits—His hands and feet.

If you are still saying to yourself: "No one lives this way!" What I can tell you is after hearing the story of Pastor Berry from Maine last night, I believe we're not alone. I am sure there are many others in the movement too. Want to join us?

If so, we've found role models who inspire us, starting with the disciples.

Jesus urged Peter, James and John follow him and realizing it would be hard, urged them not to be afraid. In response, the text in Luke 5 says they left everything and followed him.⁸

Jesus invites Levi, the tax collector to follow Him too. In the ancient world, tax collecting would have made Levi rich, very rich: The text says: "he left everything."⁹

Just a cursory glimpse of Jesus' teaching reveals that he wants his disciples to be sacrificial givers who abandon everything else to follow him. They gave up everything. Will we?

He calls disciples to put their money where their faith is, not because He needs the money, but because He wants our hearts.

The first disciples are not our only examples. Consider the deeds of the Early Church.

Point #2 – The Deeds of Generous Disciples

A good place to start in looking at the Early Church is James. The message outlined in James is consistent with Jesus: Doctrine without deeds is dead.

Preserve your doctrine from worldly pollution and demonstrate your faith by caring about those God cares about: widows and orphans.¹⁰

Quit showing favoritism to rich people in your midst and stop giving them special seating compared to poor people.¹¹ And quit storing up treasures in the last day.

Listen as I read James 5:1-3. *Read.*

Even as stockpiling God's daily provision in the Old Testament resulted in maggot-filled manna, hoarded riches of the rich become moth-eaten and rusty. It's just like Jesus said!

Luke's Book of Acts is filled with further examples of generous deeds and sacrificial giving. The believers in Acts 2:44-47 provide a beautiful picture of the deeds of generous disciples.

Their doctrine coupled with deeds drew many to faith. Barnabas is yet another example of a generous disciple in Acts 4:32-37.

⁸ Luke 5:10-11

⁹ Luke 5:27-28

¹⁰ James 1:27

¹¹ James 2:1-4.

Followers of Jesus with stuff shared it to advance the gospel and to help those in need, so everyone had *enough*.

My son often wears a T-Shirt from Compassion International. I love it. It says on the front: *The opposite of poverty isn't wealth*. On the back it says: *The opposite of poverty is enough*.

Our God is a God who desires that everyone has *enough*. When dividing the land in the Old Testament. The land was divided so the bigger families had bigger lands and smaller clans got smaller lands, so that everyone would have *enough* space.

God provided manna for his people in the wilderness so each person had *enough* for each day. All efforts to store it up were futile. God could be trusted to deliver *enough* every day!

No wonder the Early Church grew. Their deeds showed that they cared more about others than themselves. They were being self-less in a selfish Greco-Roman world.

Paul was another great example of a generous disciple and he urged those in the churches he planted to be likeminded. He was so excited he got to participate in the kingdom, he wanted everyone to join him. Consider these words in *Philippians in 2:3-11*.

I believe the willingness of the leaders of the Early Church to obey the teachings of Jesus and live them out, regardless of the cost, is what took over the ancient world. To test this point, let us consider the testimonies of four Apostolic Fathers of the first and second centuries. I believe they took the baton handed to them, which is for each of us as well.

Clement of Rome writes:

"This world and the world to come are enemies. We cannot be friends of both. To get the one, we must give the other up. We think that is better to hate what is here, for it is trivial, temporary and perishable and to value what is there: things good and imperishable."¹²

What happened to him? He led the church in Rome. To attempt to thwart its growth, the Romans tied him to an anchor and cast him into the sea in 101. The church kept growing.

Ignatius of Antioch writes:

"Constantly pray for others; for there is still hope that they may repent so as to attain to God. And so, allow them to learn from you, at least by your deeds. In response to their anger, show meekness; to their boasting, be humble; to their blasphemies, offer up prayers; to their wandering in error, be firmly rooted in faith; to their savage behavior, act civilized. Do not be eager to follow their example. Through gentleness we should be their brothers, And we should be seen to be eager to imitate the Lord."¹³

What happened to him? He was arrested under Trajan, sometime between 98-117, and taken from Syria to Rome. En route, he encouraged Christians along the way and wrote letters we can read today. At Rome he was martyred; the church continued to flourish.

One young leader he visited along the way, Polycarp of Smyrna writes:

"The love of money is the beginning of all difficulties. And so, since we know that we brought nothing into the world and can take nothing out of it, we should arm ourselves with the weapons of righteousness and teach one another, first of all, to walk in the commandment of the Lord...I am extremely sad for Valens, once a presbyter among you, that he should so misunderstand the office that was given him. Thus I urge you to abstain from the love of money and to be pure and truthful.

¹² 2 Clement 6:3, 5, 6

¹³ To The Ephesians 10

Abstain from every kind of evil. For if someone cannot control himself in such things, how can he preach self-control to another? Anyone who cannot avoid the love of money will be defiled by idolatry and will be judged as if among the outsiders who know nothing about the judgment of the Lord..."¹⁴

Polycarp, mentored by the Apostle John, didn't bail like Valens, he was martyred in 155.

And one of my favorite Apostolic Fathers, the Shepherd of Hermas, writes:

"Instead of fields, buy souls that are in trouble according to your ability. Look after widows and orphans. Do not neglect them. Spend your riches on these kinds of fields and houses."¹⁵

How about that for financial advice for building your portfolio: buy people over property!

At this point, you may be wondering why I am tracing these testimonies through the Early Church. What I am trying to show is that the doctrine and deeds called for by Jesus, were not only proclaimed and practiced the first disciples, like Peter, James and John, and they weren't merely lived out in the Early Church in Acts. They were also embraced by the Early Fathers, even to the point of martyrdom.

Were their lives wasted? I think not. I think they sacrificed everything for the cause of Christ imitating our Lord who gave His life for us.

By the second century, Christians became known for their voluntary, radical Christian generosity. Tertullian of Carthage testifies to this around 200 or so:

"Though we have our treasure-chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are, as it were, piety's deposit fund. For they are not taken thence and spent on feasts, and drinking-bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession. But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, *how they love one another*. One in mind and soul, we do not hesitate to share our earthly goods with one another."¹⁶

Christians became known for their generosity. Their actions were motivated by love not law, gratitude not guilt and flowed with justice to the needy rather than through favoritism to friends.

In bad times, such as plagues and diseases that ravaged the Roman world, their deeds shined even more. Dionysius of Alexandria writes this around 260:

"Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead...The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen, winning high commendation so that death in this form, the result of great piety and strong faith [deeds and doctrine], seems in every way the equal of martyrdom... The heathen behaved in the very opposite way. At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and

¹⁴ Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna and Martyr, *Letter to the Philipppians* 4.1; 11.1-2.

¹⁵ *Parables* 1.8. FC 1:289.

¹⁶ *The Apology*, XXXIX, 5b-7a, 11a, translated from Latin by S. Thelwall of Christ's College.

treated unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease; but do what they might, they found it difficult to escape."¹⁷

Friends, nothing in the pagan, polytheistic world could touch Christianity. Julian the Apostate offers a fitting ancient pagan testimony to affirm that what I am saying is true:

"I think that when the poor happened to be neglected and overlooked by the priests, the impious Galileans observed this and devoted themselves to benevolence...The impious Galileans support not only their poor but ours as well."¹⁸

It worked. Christianity took over the world through the doctrine and deeds of generous disciples.

So why spend so much time making this case? I think sound doctrine coupled with sacrificial deeds is God's plan for the Church, and for the EFCA today. What does this mean?

We may need to stop going to church and start being the church. We may need to stop handling money like the world and obey the doctrine we embrace. We may need to stop schmoozing people to give us gifts and embrace our spiritual responsibility to help people become givers. We don't have a resource problem. God owns everything. Whatever behavior we want to see in the pews, we must model in the pulpit. If we believe God has called us locally, nationally and globally to multiply healthy churches among all peoples, then we must put our money where our faith is.

My final Point, Number #3 – The Decision to become a Generous Disciple

Jesus wants each of us to become generous disciples, but I believe the decision to become generous disciples is hard for us because we are so rich.

Don't feel rich? Compared to the world's population, if you make \$25,000 your income ranks in the 90th percentile of the richest people in the world.

If you make \$50,000 you are in the 99th percentile.¹⁹ Friends, we are among the richest people in the world.

Before I invite you to decide to become generous disciples, I want to ask you to look at one final NT passage directed to a rich person. Listen as I read Mark 10:17-31. *Read.*

For about 18 centuries scholars almost unanimously have taught that the rich man missed the kingdom. I too thought that for years.

Around the year 200, Clement of Alexandria looked closely at this text in his treatise: "Who is the Rich Man Who Will be Saved?" Rather than condemn the rich man to a Christ-less eternity, he said "do not judge who is worthy and unworthy" because you may be mistaken, and called readers to "accommodate rather than criticize" the rich man.²⁰ Interesting. Though time does not permit me to work through this Greek text word for word, let's look at what the text does say after Jesus invites the rich man to "Go, sell, give, come and follow." In doing so I think we will see what Clement saw.

¹⁷ Cf. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), pp. 82-3. Brackets mine.

¹⁸ Roman Emperor Flavius Claudius Julianus Augustus (c. 331-363) is known as Julian the Apostate for his rejection of Christianity. This excerpt from letter to a priest quoted by Rodney Stark in *The Rise of Christianity*, p. 84.

¹⁹ Retrieved from www.globalrichlist.com.

²⁰ I credit Andrew Clarke, my PhD upgrade viva examiner for helping me see this. To read his argument in its entirety, see this article he wrote: 'Do not judge who is worthy and unworthy: Clement's warning not to speculate about the Rich Young Man's response.' *JSNT* 31.4 (2009).

After those imperatives, the text says this: "At this saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions." For years I thought this meant that he was a lost loser, but the text does not say that.

When it says "He was sorrowful", that Greek verb may actually help us locate the rich man and gain insight on his situation. It is found two other times in the book of Mark. From those instances, I think we gain what may otherwise be missed.

The first usage appears in Mark 6:26 when Herodias danced before Herod and in appreciation he offers her any wish up to half his kingdom. What was her wish? The head of John the Baptist. What was Herod's response in 6:26. He was exceedingly sorry. Same root word. He was sorrowful, but did he do what he said he would do? Yes. It was hard.

The other instance is actually a scene with our Lord Jesus in Mark 14. *Listen as I read verses 32-34.* Friends, now my goal is not to give you a Greek lesson, so I won't, but I must make a very profound point. Jesus was sorrowful. Deeply distressed and overwhelmed at what was before Him, but did he go to the cross for us? Yes.

It would be hard, really hard, the hardest thing he would ever do. Suffer and die on the cross for us, but did he do it, yes.

Now let's go back and read the text of Mark 10 again starting in 21 through 23. Note again Jesus response, "How hard it will be for those who have riches..."

Jesus is not condemning; He's sympathetic. He knows how hard it is to lay aside riches because he laid aside the riches of heaven to come to earth for us. That's awesome!

He knew how hard it would be for the rich man to accept his invitation. If you are sitting there right now saying, I want to be a generous disciple. I want to mine the depths of sacrificial giving, but man, that would be hard.

I am here today to say, our Triune God understands that and by His Spirit, will take care of the work that needs to be done if you let Him. I love how Brennan Manning describes this:

"It is natural to feel fear and insecurity when confronted with the radical demands of the Christian commitment. But enveloped in the lived truths of God's furious love, insecurity is swallowed up in the solidity of *agape*, and anguish and fear give way to hope and desire. The Christian becomes aware that God's appeal for unlimited generosity from His people has been preceded from His side by a limitless love, a love so intent upon a response that He has empowered us to respond through the gift of His own Holy Spirit."²¹

God has empowered each of us by His Holy Spirit to become generous disciples.

By now you are saying to yourself, "I understand the doctrine." I would say that many of you all probably know it better than I do.

You might also be saying, "Ok, I never thought of the connection between the deeds Jesus called His disciples to demonstrate and how they contributed to the spread of the Gospel." Now you have heard it.

My question is what are you going to do about it. Well, one of the most common questions asked of me, is this: "What are we doing about it."

²¹ Brennan Manning *The Furious Longing of God* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), p. 120.

I will answer that today not to draw attention to us but to invite you to join us on a journey that's like a roller coaster: It's simultaneously scary and absolutely thrilling.

We have no savings or retirement. We serve using our gifts, and from the income we make, we give to God, live as simply as we can, and if we have any extra, we share it to advance the gospel or with people who are in need. If we lack, which we did recently when my wife contracted breast cancer, we trust God to provide, which He did. That's our basic rule of life.

We want to give all we are, our gifts, and all we have, our goods, to make known the gospel. There is one goal, one final exam we are preparing for, and that is to live our lives in such a manner, as to hear God speak the words: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Any work I do to serve this movement is to help each of you, and to prepare every man, woman and child in your care to hear those words: "Well done, good and faithful servant." Want to join us on this journey of generosity?

If so, I invite you to take three steps, prayer and further study of the Scriptures and obey. You are on your own with prayer: Ask God what sacrifice looks like for you.

To assist you in further study, I wrote a book and want to offer it to you freely. It's entitled: *Generosity Exercises*. It is a three-week spiritual tool intended to help stewards grow in their biblical understanding and practice of Christian generosity. Week one walks through the Old Testament, week two the Gospels and week three the Early Church in the rest of the New Testament. Because I know it's hard, I added quotes from saints through the centuries to serve as sojourners with you. It is free for download in pdf form on the conference website.

As for obedience, do whatever the Spirit leads you to do. If it's to give your car to a ReachGlobal missionary, do it. If you are supposed to sell something and give the money to the poor, to a ministry, to your church, do it. If you are supposed to change your whole financial strategy to be in line with Jesus as a steward of His money, do it.

I leave you with the words of Augustine on Mark 10. Augustine's Letter 157 to Hilarius.

"I who write this have greatly loved the total devotion of which the Lord spoke when he once said to the rich young man: "Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and come, follow me." I have so loved it myself, not by my own strength but by his assisting grace. The apostles were the first to follow in the practice of this complete self-giving."

Would Hilarius follow by God's assisting grace? I don't know. Will you. I hope so. I will pray right now to that end!

Father, give us total devotion for you. Forgive us for loving money and using people. Make us a movement that loves people and uses money according to the teachings you have set forth in your Word. Forgive us for rationalizing away our responsibility to obey your teachings and do the deeds you call us to, even though it's really hard. Forgive us for thinking our plans can make our churches grow when obedience to your commands is what wins the world. May our deeds glorify you by proclaiming the Gospel and showing your love to a broken and hurting world! If we have enough, help us be content. If we have plenty, give us courage to do good, be rich in good works, and be generous. If we lack, strengthen our faith to trust in your provision and the grace to endure such times realizing all we need is you anyway. We offer ourselves up to you as your servants. Transform us to become generous disciples for your glory, even if it costs us our lives. In Jesus name, I pray. Amen.