



## SPEND YOURSELF: INTRODUCTION

By Dr. Jim Baucom, Senior Pastor



As is so often the case when God is working among us, our fall emphasis and subsequent long-term campaign to address global hunger came out of a serendipitous and completely unrelated meeting. Cindy Fisher, Celia Buffalo, Pastor Greg Loewer, and I had gathered on an early spring evening to discuss ways to more fully integrate the many congregations of Columbia. The usual suggestions—joint worship services, festivals, and the like—did not satisfy my desire to see us “take it to the next level,” and I suggested that the thing that was really needed was a church-wide mission concern, something that we could all “buy into” together. I knew that Cindy’s passion was global hunger, because we had discussed the present unparalleled food-price crisis many times, and it occurred to me that God might have placed her in that meeting for a reason. “Why not hunger?” I asked, “Why can’t we be the Washington area church that really takes the lead

and addresses this problem in Jesus’ name?” For the rest of the evening, that’s all we could think or speak about. We knew that God was speaking to and through us.

Since that evening, a lot of work has been done by Cindy and her outstanding ministry team. In my opinion, they are raising the “Igniting Passion” bar and showing us all what is possible when we join God in what He is doing. As June turned into July, this team thrilled me with a fall emphasis theme I never would have thought of based on a Biblical passage I had never really noticed, Isaiah 58:10, “If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.”

Spend yourself. What an amazing concept. We speak of spending time and spending money, but we rarely, if ever, speak of “spending ourselves.” If we do, the connotation is negative, as in saying, “I am spent!” Perhaps we fear

spending ourselves, lest we fulfill the literal meaning of the word “to use up, exhaust, or wear out.” Any sensible person knows that the self must be protected and taken care of, even conserved. Who would, in their right mind, “spend themselves?”

And yet it strikes me that Jesus asks us to do precisely that: “Take up your cross and follow me.” To follow Jesus is to be willing to spend the self until there is nothing left of the self and only Christ remains. Paul wrote it this way: “[The Lord] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10) Paul understood that he could not be utterly filled with Christ until he was utterly emptied of self.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the Creator of the Universe, the very God who was incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, should implore us to sacrificially empty ourselves in behalf of the hungry. We, so accustomed to satisfying ourselves, must learn to satisfy the needs of the oppressed if the light of Christ is to rise in the darkness and the night become like the noonday.

Spend your time. Spend your money. Become spent for the hungry and oppressed. In your emptiness, you will discover the fullness of God’s love. This is perhaps the greatest paradox of the faith and the richest message in God’s Word.



## WEEK ONE: *The Need Surrounds Us*

September 7

### AN ENDURING SITUATION

Deuteronomy 15:11 *“There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward those of your people who are poor and needy in your land.”*

“This land is your land, this land is my land...” popped into my head as I was reading this verse. The famous folk song by Woody Guthrie seemed appropriate only because of its not-so-famous ending:

In the squares of the city, In the shadow of a steeple;  
By the relief office, I’d seen my people.  
As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking,  
Is this land made for you and me?

The people of the United States of America have been exceptionally blessed by God with wealth, food, jobs, safety, and freedom. Yet we still have poor, hungry people in our land. Our “War on Poverty,” homeless shelters, food stamps, food banks, and soup kitchens have not eliminated need, and they never will. It is difficult to accept that there will always be poor, needy people among us, but that is the enduring situation God proclaims.

So what do we do about poverty if it is not temporary? We treat the enduring situation with enduring generosity. God does not command us to give to a charity once or volunteer at a soup kitchen just a few times. He commands us to be openhanded to those in need throughout our lifetime. And the Bible does not say throw some loose change at the poor, but to “give generously to

them and do so without a grudging heart” (Deuteronomy 15:10). Enduring generosity seems daunting, but God blessed us so that we may bless others.

Every time you give \$10 to a homeless charity. Every time you buy a couple of cans of green beans for the food pantry. Every time you donate that well-loved coat. Every time you commit to helping a food bank or soup kitchen on a Saturday. Every time you share God’s Word and His love with a needy person on the street you are contributing to that enduring generosity. It won’t solve poverty but it will help people in need. God bless this land that He made for you and me.

*Dan Davenport*

*Dear Father, Increase our awareness and understanding of the need in our community and around the world. Guide us in our response to the need, give us generous hearts in responding, and help us remember that individual lives are affected by our obedience to your desire for us to generously share with those in need. Amen.*



## THE DESPERATE NATURE OF HUNGER

Lamentations 4:9 *“Those killed by the sword are better off than those who die of famine; racked with hunger, they waste away for lack of food from the field.”*

Any student of history knows that common struggles replicate themselves throughout generations. Around our world, countless persons and nations have endured the sobering effects of hunger. In third world countries, the innocent and helpless often suffer the most from starvation, as food resources frequently equate to power and can become a bargaining tool amongst corrupt leaders.

Hunger spreads misery and provokes unparalleled behavior. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the famous Soviet writer who exposed gruesome conditions within Stalinist Russian work camps, detailed how lack of proper nutrition prompted men to act in radically uncharacteristic and often animalistic ways.

As a teenager I learned that a respected family friend attributed his hard work ethic to his experience growing up as an orphan during the Depression. This man had never forgotten the excruciating pain of hunger, which proved a powerful motivator throughout his life. This was a valuable testimony for me to hear, as I was prompted to comprehend the severity of hunger.

It is sometimes all too easy for us to forget the reality of the suffering, hungry, and hurting. As a nation, we’re inundated by a plethora of food selections, gourmet grocery stores, and restaurants. Candidly, I admit to being overwhelmed at times by dining choices and grocery items, as the selections seem to be never-ending!

As our Church focuses on global hunger, may we be burdened with God’s compassion toward the desperate and hungry, as we know He hears their cries and sees their tears (Psalm 56:8). Moreover, let us challenge one another to dare to give to the hungry and poor above and beyond what feels comfortable, or acceptable. Why not forgo several meals out and use this money toward Christian mission opportunities that address global hunger? Or volunteer to feed the homeless in Christ’s name? These actions may go unnoticed by others, and even our family, but God will not discard them.

*Leslie Dunnegan*

*Dear Father, Instill within our hearts a burden for the hungry and the desperate circumstance in which they live. Fill us with compassion for them. Compel us to give more than we ever imagined we could to prevent hunger in our world. May our hearts be filled with Christ’s love for others and may our response be pleasing to you as we strive to provide relief for those who are suffering. Amen.*

## LIVING HUNGRY

Psalm 107:4-5 *“Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away.”*

The first verse of Psalm 107 states, “Give thanks to the Lord for he is good; his love endures forever.” Verses 4 and 5 describe the condition of the redeemed before they were redeemed. They cried out to the Lord in their trouble (hunger and thirst) and he delivered them from their distress. Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for humankind, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.

As believers we know in our heads that Jesus provides us drink that satisfies real thirst, eternal thirst. But do we know in our hearts that what Jesus has to offer — His plan for our lives, His invitation for us to join Him in His Kingdom business — will satisfy our deep yearning (our “thirst”) for meaning and significance?

This passage brings two thoughts to mind:

1. He satisfies us. He fills us up with good things. When we cry out in trouble He wants to deliver us from our distress. He will deliver us from our distress.
2. There are others who are hungry, who cry out to God to be delivered, and God wants to use us as their delivery service. I could be part of his unfailing love, helping perform his wonderful deeds for humankind. We know God’s plan will succeed — with or without us. But woe to those of us who choose not to be a part of His great plan.

Do I live hungry and fail to let God satisfy me by stubbornly choosing my own path?

Do I allow others to live hungry and unaware of His unfailing love by selfishly turning away?

*Kristin Clifton*

*Dear Lord, Use me as your servant to those who are hungry for you spiritually. Guide me to live hungry for you, forgetting myself and serving others. Others hunger and thirst spiritually and physically. Send me to show them your enduring love. Amen.*

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF HUNGER

2 Corinthians 11:27 *“I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.”*

My first experience with hunger was self-inflicted and really somewhat childish. I had decided to stay for the summer term at college and I did not have much money to spend on food. I had to borrow bread from my roommates to make a sandwich. This whole situation could have been easily alleviated with just one honest phone call to my parents, but I was stubborn. Once that summer was over, I had become aware, perhaps for the very first time, of how big a thing food can be to a person.

My second experience of hunger had a bit more grit to it. Moving north through Iraq right behind the 3rd Infantry Division, our unit often moved past its supply chain, putting water and food at a premium. Eventually, we had to buy fruit and vegetables from the civilian economy. Because we were buying directly from the local farmers, we did not get very much of any one thing but rather ended up with small amounts of many different things. Oddly enough, that is how the Iraqis eat as well. They put many different things on the table which people then take in what we would consider to be extreme moderation. I got used to eating like that, one or two spoonfuls of this and then something different. We did not have very much, but it was enough.

When I returned to the States, I was repulsed by the size of the portions served at restaurants. It is almost obscene how much we expect to receive before we think we have gotten our fair share. The rest of the world does not eat like we do. The people in Iraq were not starving. What would happen if we all agreed to be satisfied with less? What would happen if we all decided to eat a little less, to live in more reasonably sized homes, to drive our cars until they died, and then actually to spend some of our incredible wealth on other people, people who are starving? What if we focused on fixing those systems throughout the world that kept people hungry? What if we actually paid attention to those uncomfortable parts of the Bible that call us to live sacrificially? Wouldn’t we all be “well-watered gardens?” (Is. 58:11)

*Teresa Raymond*

*Dear God, May you be the sole source of my life’s satisfaction. Grant me freedom from what the world wants me to believe are riches when so often it is excess. Make me hunger and thirst for you. Amen.*

## HUNGER IS CLOSE BY

Job 31:16-23 *“If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eyes of the widow grow weary, if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing with the fatherless...then let my arm fall from my shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint. For I dreaded destruction from God, and for fear of his splendor I could not do such things!”*

Most of us are familiar with Job’s story and, upon coming to the end of his saga, have been horrified and ultimately relieved that he is restored in body, mind, and spirit. We read that in the depths of Job’s grief, pain, and misery, his “friends” try to get him to confess his great sin, thus ending the plagues. However, Job insists he is righteous and will not confess to sins he has not committed.

It is interesting in Job 22:7-8 that the naysayers accuse Job of withholding food and drink from those in need when out of his abundance of wealth Job could easily afford to share. But Job is guilty of no such thing! He responds to these charges in chapter 31. Evidently, withholding what he had the power to give would have justified all the disasters Job experienced. Job says that if he has not shared with those in need he should lose a limb—he would fully expect to suffer calamity and experience God’s wrath. Quite a punishment for something most of us do on a daily basis!

Do we open our eyes to see hunger around us? Are we moved with compassion to send money to feed people around the world (and we should be!) but fail to see the hungry nearby? If we see, do we have open hearts to care? Do we have open hands to actually feed our hungry neighbors? Are we willing to say along with Job, “Cut off my fingers and arms if I have not fed the hungry!”? Will we end up as amputees because of our stinginess?

So let’s quit being in awe of this larger than life righteous man named Job. Let’s start emulating him and make feeding the hungry an everyday priority and practice. Maybe we start by doing what’s right and eventually become habitual feeders of the poor. Hang onto your limbs, but pour out your heart!

*Nancy Walker*

*Dear Lord, Guide us to know what is right for us to do to help the hungry, to be obedient to act on what we know is right to do, and grant us courage to take the necessary steps to boldly help others. Amen.*

## PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS WITH THE HUNGRY

Matthew 25:40 *“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”*

Matthew 25:40 is a powerful verse that comes from Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats. In short it says, when the Son of God comes again, He will sit on His throne and divide people to His left and right. Then He will tell those on His right that they are blessed because they fed Him when He was hungry, gave Him drink when He was thirsty, invited Him in as a stranger, clothed Him when He had nothing to wear, looked after Him when He was sick, and visited Him when He was in prison. The people on the right will ask Him, when did we do that for You? And He will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the least of these you did for me.” However, He will dismiss the people on His left, for they didn’t do anything for the least of these.

What does that mean for us today? How often do we pass a hungry person in the streets? Or look away from the starving people, or victims of human trafficking. How can we help “the least of these”? A sixteen-year-old named Zach Hunter is doing just that. He has written books and speaks to many people about his campaign to stop human trafficking.

Will we be like the goats, and turn away, or like the sheep, and do something for those in need?

*Jaclyn Olson, High School Sophomore*

*Dear Father, Help us to see others as Jesus sees them. Lead us to be willing to respond to people who are hungry and need food. Please turn our faces and hearts to see the need around us. Give us helping hands to respond to the need and the willingness to be “your sheep” in the midst of need. Amen*

## BEING TIGHTFISTED

Deuteronomy 15:7 *“If anyone is poor among your people in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them.”* (Read and reflect on **Luke 2:6-7.**)

In the first few years after I graduated from college I volunteered once a month at a clothes closet in Silver Spring, Maryland. During my time there I realized that serving “the needy” isn’t always fun. Sometimes the clients were grouchy... sometimes I was grouchy. One winter Saturday in particular it was bitterly cold outside but the clothing closet was hot and stuffy. I wore my sweatshirt tied around my waist as I hung the clothes on the rack. A female client sifting through the same rack said, “That’s a nice sweatshirt. Can I have it?”

I smiled and laughed it off as if she was joking even though my gut reaction was, “Seriously?! No way.” But she wasn’t joking. She persisted, and challenged me, “Why not?” In a split second of reasoning, the best I could come up with was “it’s mine,” but that felt like a childish and selfish answer. It wasn’t like I couldn’t afford to buy another one. It was my favorite sweatshirt, but come on, it’s just a sweatshirt.

I’d like to tell you that charity prevailed and I gave away my sweatshirt, but I didn’t. In my mind I reasoned that if I started to give away the clothes off my back (literally), clients might come to expect they could ask for anything. It would set a bad precedent. I said no, laughed it off again, and she let it drop.

More than 10 years have passed and I still have that sweatshirt. I still wear it even though the cuffs and collar are well worn. I can’t seem to get rid of it — it’s still a favorite but it’s also a reminder of that conversation, which sticks with me today.

Some people say it’s unreasonable to think we should give every time we’re asked. Maybe that’s right. But what if that’s wrong?

*Kristin Clifton*

*Dear Father, Remove hardheartedness and tightfistedness from my heart. Grant me understanding and wisdom in knowing your way so that my heart and life are well worn in helping others. Amen.*



## WEEK TWO: *Divine Expectation of the Believer Community*

September 14

## THE EMPOWERING NATURE OF THE DIVINE EXPECTATION

Philippians 4:13 *“I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”*

Bruno’s Food and Pharmacy is about a mile from the little blue house in which I grew up. It’s a good thing, too, that it was a relatively short walk there. The threat of putting shoes to pavement for the trip back to my cul-de-sac after a family grocery excursion was a nearly biweekly episode. There I would stand, head zigzagging the brown-paneled shelves that lined the customer service counter where the supermarket housed its largest candy stash.

I was allowed one candy bar. Thirty-three cents. That was all.

I stood just steps inside the store for the entire length of the family grocery trip. Paralyzed by the freedom I had to choose any candy bar from the large selection, I would stare for as long as 45 minutes, until a frustrated, yet unsurprised, voice sounded the threat of me hoofing it home.

Freedom can paralyze us, but it doesn’t have to. The freedom we have in Christ empowers us to fulfill our calling without ever wondering whether we’re doing enough. The freedom we have in Christ empowers us to enjoy the wild ride as we discern the path God has for us. The freedom we have in Christ empowers us with peace as we learn that when we choose to follow Him, he handles the details.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul uses his own example of Christ’s empowering him to be content in every state, in adversity or prosperity, for the

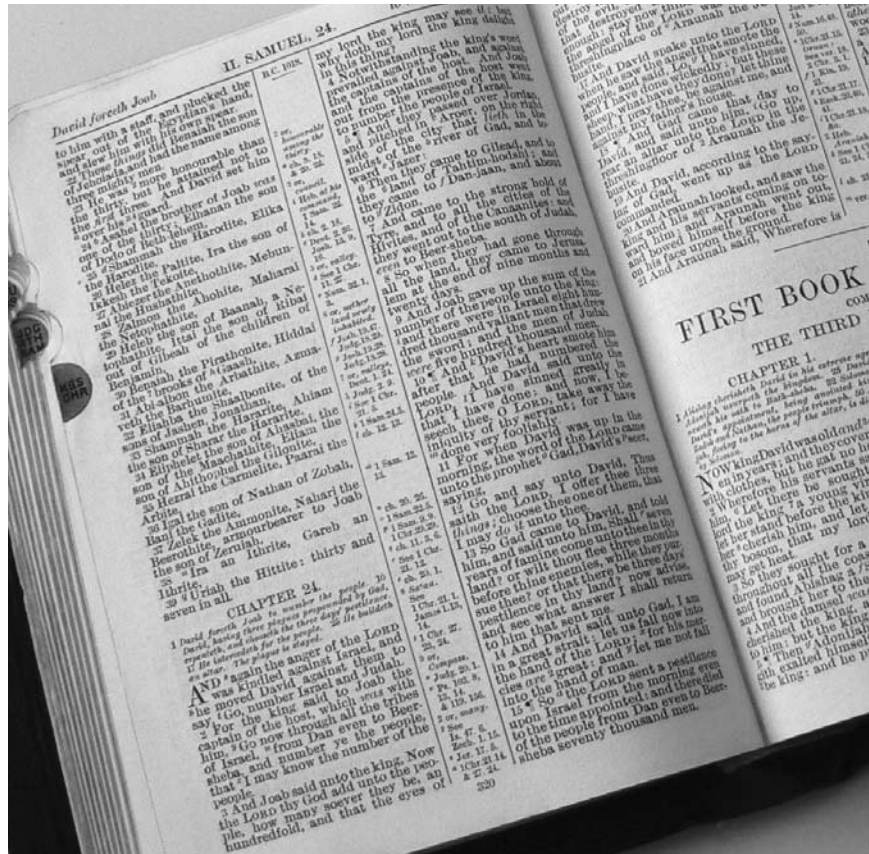
divine mission that he accepted with such fervor. "I can do all things through him who gives me strength," Paul writes.

Like Paul, even in our own weakness, we are called to use Christ's "pouring in" of strength for His purposes and to exercise the freedom He provides to serve others while letting the Holy Spirit be our guide.

Who is the Holy Spirit guiding you to serve? Trust that He will strengthen you for the task.

Jeff Huett

Dear Lord, increase our belief in Jesus Christ. May His Spirit living in us be strengthened and grow. As we seek you each day, please use our belief and relationship with Christ to boldly empower us to minister to those in need. Help us to embrace the freedom we have in Jesus to let His "pouring in" of strength be lavishly poured out on the weakest among us. Amen.



# GOD'S REQUIREMENT

Luke 12:48b *"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."*

Every day at Langley High School I come across someone who has much more than I do. After a while, all these extra things that they have and I don't begin to become things that I feel entitled to. After all, why should they be the ones to have so much? The fact is that when you look at the world, or even just the United States as a whole, I am the one who has excess. I have ridiculously more than I actually need. To be honest, this unequal distribution of resources really troubles me. Why do I get to sit comfortably at home eating three rich meals a day while someone else dies of starvation, even though they are just as deserving as I?

Luke 12:48 tells us that these resources we have been given are not ours, they are God's. We have simply been "entrusted" with God's money. Everything that we "own" is God's. It isn't just an accident that we are so rich. God expects us to share our wealth, food, clothes, medicine, and everything else that we have with others in need. It's not that God loves us more or that he feels like we deserve more. It's that God has given us more so we might be used more. Will we hoard or make Jesus Lord? I am beginning to realize that the choice is that simple.

Marlee Baucom, High School Sophomore

Dear God, You have blessed us with so much in life. Help us to understand that all we have comes from you. We are rich because of who you are and all that we "own" is truly yours. Be with us each day as we make everyday choices. Give us wisdom each day and guide our thoughts and hearts to choose Jesus as Lord of our lives in all we do each day. Amen.

## JESUS COMMANDS US TO FEED THE HUNGRY

Matthew 14:16 *Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."*

Have you ever wondered why the Feeding of the Five Thousand is the only miracle of Jesus (other than His resurrection) that is included in all four gospels? Perhaps it is because Jesus used this miracle to teach His disciples (and us) two important lessons about how the Church should approach ministry.

Ministry should be motivated by compassion. In Matthew 14:13–14, Jesus models this attitude for his disciples. Jesus had withdrawn in a boat to a secluded place by Himself, but large crowds followed Him on foot along the shore. When Jesus came ashore and saw all the people, He put aside his own needs and “felt compassion for them and healed their sick.” It’s a pity the disciples did not learn from Jesus’ example. That same evening, the disciples came to Jesus asking Him to “send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves” (v.15). The disciples saw the great need, but lacked the compassion to act. They also lacked the faith to believe they could address the need ...which leads to the second lesson from this miracle.

Christ multiplies our ministry, and brings amazing results. The disciples saw the huge crowd, assessed their own meager resources (5 loaves and 2 fish) and concluded that there was no way to feed all the people. They forgot that Jesus could (and did) multiply their resources to feed that large crowd...with 12 baskets of food left over! So when Jesus instructed the disciples saying “You give them something to eat,” he was really inviting them to step out in faith and participate in a miracle.

Every day, there are more than a billion people in our world who go to bed hungry. Like the disciples, we could view hunger as “someone else’s problem” or see the problem as too enormous for us. But Jesus loves the poor and hungry just as much as He loves you and me; and so I believe that Jesus commands us to feed the hungry. What will be our response?

*Dick Cornelius*

*God, You have asked us to step out in faith and participate in your miracles. The miracle in helping others changes lives in ways we may not understand or be aware of, yet the miracle is real. Thank you for inviting us to serve you by helping others. May you find us faithful in giving them “something to eat.” Amen.*

## NEED AND OUR ABUNDANCE

2 Corinthians 8:12, 14a *“For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need.”*

God directed Apostle Paul to write these words to the church in Corinth, where “not many were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth” (1 Corinthians 1:26). However, regardless of status or wealth, everyone can be a blessing to those who are in need. In Paul’s day those in need were poor Christians in Judea. Today those in need are in many parts of the world, literally dying because there is nothing to eat.

Many of us in the United States do not realize how well-off we are until we visit some other place. We live in a country blessed with prosperity and success. Jesus teaches us to “use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings” (Luke 16:9). In this time of need for many around the world, we have a great opportunity to use our wealth to gain new friends for eternity.

The main issue according to this passage, though, is our willingness to give. This does not mean forceful seizing from one person and giving to others as in communist regimes, but giving motivated by the love of Christ. May God bless you as you willingly offer what you have to the hungry, poor, and oppressed.

*Victor Visotsky*

*Father, May our love for Christ be the motivation to give our best to Him and to those in need in our world. Use our lives and the “plenty” we’ve received from you to honor our Lord and serve others. Amen.*

## OPEN YOUR HAND TO HELP OTHERS

I Timothy 6:18 *“Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.”*

He had been a successful business man. He started his career when he was young, working as a helper at a supermarket. Just a little boy, he had decided to follow not just his own dream, but God’s dream.

He grew up, and today some people would say: “He made it big! He got it!”

Yes, it looks like he got everything in life. He has a huge supermarket chain. He has a beautiful family. He lives in a wonderful place. Yes, he got it all. He got everything that a man could dream, and some people ask, “How?”

Today he has enough, and he gives just enough to himself. This is his secret.

Once he was talking to his sons about life and said, “Pay attention, because I want to tell you about my fortune. It is not something you can learn by going to the business school. It is very simple and I will share with you both.”

“Look at my hand, my right hand.” He filled his hand. Then he said, “I never keep it too open, so that I could lose everything I have. And neither do I ever keep it too closed, so that I could not receive anything more.”

He continued, “I gain enough and I give enough, and my hand is always full. In other words, open your hand to help others, and close them to help yourself.”

*Pastor Aroldo Silva*

*Dear God, Use our hands for your good deeds in helping others. May the nail scarred hands of Jesus remind us to be generous and always willing to share. Amen.*

## AVOID GREED

Luke 12:15 *“Then he [Jesus] said to them, ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.’”*

“Don’t be greedy.”

It’s a statement we often find ourselves delivering to our children in one form or other. By way of Veggie Tales they learn early on that being greedy does indeed make you grumpy. As adults we feel the pull of possessions but reason with ourselves that greed can easily be avoided. “I just won’t let my things master me,” or “I’ll use my stuff for God’s glory.” And maybe we avoid the mall and try to limit unnecessary spending. Is it really that easy?

Jesus thought not. He counsels us to be on the watch for all manner of greed.

Living in this area, it seems that many of us are cognizant of the abundance of “stuff” we have, but I think we can be quietly deceived into being greedy with our time and with ourselves. We reason that our children need us, our jobs need us, and the list goes on. Armed with the want for self-importance and unrestrained ambition, we keep a death-grip on our children’s activities with the notion that they must be provided with every opportunity in order to “succeed” in life. For many, giving less than 110% at work isn’t even an option to be considered.

Committing to help the least of these is all too easily squeezed out of the picture. Imagine what it would be like though, if we all started letting go (just a little, even) of our status to show Christ’s love to those in need? What if, along with giving up “stuff,” we gave up a little of ourselves to show people what God wants for them? Jesus knew the tug greed can have on our hearts; that’s why he cautions us to be on the alert. But he also gave us the ultimate example of sacrifice.

What are we willing to give up for His sake?

*Nikki Workmaster*

*Father, You gave us your Son. You are generous to us with your love and grace. We know that in light of all you have given us, there is no place for greed in our lives. Change our hearts to exhibit the same generosity to others that you have given us. Amen.*

## OUR RICHES ARE GOD'S

Mark 10:21b *“Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.”*

Mark 10:17–25 tells us about a man who came to Jesus in search of one specific answer: “How can I receive everlasting life?” Jesus’ answer was not a simple one. It started with the obvious—by obeying God’s commandments (and I can imagine the man happily entering a check mark on that). But then Jesus went straight to the core of the issue in this man’s life and told him he needed to get unattached from what is tying him to this world (his possessions), and, once free, follow Him.

The Bible tells us that the man’s face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Jesus’ demands were not easy ones, but we often focus only on those and forget about the amazing treasures He was offering in exchange. First, Jesus looked at him and showed him genuine love (v.21). Second, he assured the man that by losing his possessions he would not become poor, but instead he would gain riches that only heaven can produce. And finally, He told the man that by following Him, he would find the answer to the question he had asked in the first place: how to find eternal life. Sadly, the man did not value enough what Jesus offered and preferred to hold on to his finite, limited, temporary earthly possessions.

I wonder what would have happened with this young man had he obeyed Jesus and followed Him. Who knows, perhaps he would have become one of the main apostles, perhaps he would have been remembered as one of the gospel writers. Who knows? We don’t even know his name. He’s remembered only as the young man who preferred earthly treasures to heavenly ones, the man who could not realize the love of Jesus was what he needed to feel complete. He was the man who never fulfilled God’s perfect plan for him.

Help us Lord to value and treasure what comes from you and to be free of the world so we gain the world for you.

*Gustavo Ceballos*

*Dear Lord Jesus, As we live in this world, may we be free from the world’s and our own self-assigned constraints. Guide our hearts to truly value the eternal treasure the Lord desires to provide to us. Let our treasures be the treasure of relationship with Jesus Christ, obedience to Him, and giving our all to Him. Amen.*



## WEEK THREE: Prepare to SPEND YOURSELF

### RETHINKING YOUR WORLDVIEW

Philippians 2:5 *“In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had.”*

More than a century ago, the writings of a Kansas pastor grabbed the attention of Christians. In his novel, *In His Steps*, Charles Sheldon admonished believers to ask themselves a simple question and then act according to its answer: “What Would Jesus Do?”

In recent decades, WWJD, has resurfaced as a major theme. It has even spawned related questions in conversations about Christian behavior and initiative in our world: “What would Jesus eat? What would Jesus drive? What would Jesus read? What would Jesus sing? What would Jesus say?”

All such questions of decision and action flow from one basic, conceptual query: “What would Jesus think?” That is, how would He perceive a situation, a person, an opportunity? What would be His outlook on life and relationships? How would He view the world and its needs?

In his exhortations to the Philippian church, the Apostle Paul observes that a Christ-like worldview would be based on Christ-like humility. He describes our Savior as the Divine Lord who humbled Himself, emptied Himself, and gave Himself in sacrificial death on a cross.

In fact, humility was Jesus’ way all throughout His life and ministry. He stooped to hold a child, He touched a leper, He gave attention to a suffering woman, He accepted sinners, He washed feet.

He saw what society overlooked. He valued what the world disregarded. He loved what the culture ignored—the lowest, the least, the last. He healed and fed and gave.

And now Christ calls us to see things the way He did. So let us rethink the way we see things and people. Let us “consecrate our cognition,” as Pastor Jim puts it. Let us think like Jesus.

For that Christ-like worldview will impact everything, especially the way we care for a world in need.

*Greg Loewer*

*Lord, Frame my thoughts, form my outlook, and focus my perspective so that I think like you and see this world in need through your eyes. And when I do, empower me to ignite passion for Christ by ministering to the hungry in His name. Amen.*



## REORIENTING YOUR PRIORITIES

1 Corinthians 10:24 *“No one should seek his own good, but the good of others.”*

Are you aware that as a Christ follower the world is watching you? Unbelievers wait to see how you demonstrate God’s love. They wait to hear you proclaim and show Christ’s love. How should you do this? Any way imaginable is possible when your heart is willing to have your life transformed from self-centeredness and given to God’s power and plan for your life.

Meeting the needs of others and sharing Christ’s love with them opens the door for your witness to anyone whose need is unfulfilled, be it physical, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual. Sharing Christ’s love by placing groceries in a bag for a family at our church food pantry, serving a meal at a homeless shelter, or giving up something for yourself so someone else can have something they need makes a difference in individual lives, and the world notices. Is someone in your community or in another country waiting for your help? Do you intentionally seek their well-being and not your own?

Think about your priorities in life. Which priorities serve others who need your help? What changes can you make in your life so that other people receive your help? What do your life’s priorities say to the world about who you are and what you believe?

What passion for ministry stirs within you? How can you translate that passion into something that transforms others’ lives, meeting needs and sharing Christ’s love? Where will your heart, hands, and feet take you in ministry and in obedience to your Lord?

Where will you go and what will you do today...tomorrow...the next day? Who awaits your demonstration and proclamation of God’s love? Why should they wait any longer?

*Anne Tomas*

*Dear Father, Transform my life, my priorities, so that I may be an embodiment of your love for the world. Amen.*

## ENGAGING GLOBAL SOCIETY

Psalm 146:7 *“He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry.”*

Many people around the world do not have a lot of things. They do not have enough food or money. Many poor people don't have doctors or hospitals or medicine. Sometimes they just have rags. Sometimes they don't have a place to sleep or even a house. Some people don't have any water to drink. They can't clean themselves or water plants. They have to walk a long way to find a well. In some countries there are only polluted rivers and lakes and that is the only water people have to use. Some children are orphans and they have to work to make money to live.

Christians need to care about these people, feel sorry about the sad things in our world, and find ways to help them so they can know God loves them. What can we do? We can raise money for food and Bibles. Kids can do chores around the house or help neighbors to make money to give away. We can give money and supplies to organizations that bring medicine and supplies to countries that need it. We can get involved by finding organizations who want to help people in need. We can pray for people in need, too.

If people around the world know that God loves them and we love them, then maybe people will learn to worship God. If we help them, we will be followers of Christ.

*Charles and Schuyler Workmaster (ages 9 and 7)*

*Dear God, Give me a caring heart and a willingness to do your work within the world. Make me a true follower of Jesus Christ in both word and action so that others might come to worship you. Amen.*

## WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Luke 12:34 *“For where your **treasure** is, there your **heart** will be also.”*

What is important to you? What a great question, but how do we find the answer? Jesus tells us that we can know our heart by what we consider **treasure**.

According to the dictionary treasure is defined as:

- wealth or riches stored or accumulated.
- wealth, rich materials, or valuable things.
- any thing or person greatly valued or highly prized.

How do you know what you consider treasure? Reflect on where you spend your time. Where do you invest your money? Where do you *“**spend yourself?**”* It is in those places you find your treasure.

For me, my relationship with Christ is what I hold dear to my heart. I spend time with Christ daily. A portion of my time is spent reading scripture and reflecting on what God is telling me through His Word.

Another portion is spent in prayer. Prayer is time to share with God what is on my heart and time to be still and listen to what God would reveal to me from His heart. ***I spend myself with Christ.***

I also have a heart for community; this is a part of life that I treasure. I seek to invest myself, my time, my gifts in building community. Building community through being involved in Ignition Groups that weekly allow me to be enriched spiritually and emotionally, and that hopefully allow me to enrich the lives of others. ***I spend myself in the lives of my brothers and sisters in Christ.***

My family—David, Jesse and Reed—are gifts from God in my life. What a treasure my family is to me! I ***spend myself*** with them as I pray for them daily. I spend time weekly with each one individually (with Reed, by phone) to hear what God is doing in their lives. What a joy to share that time with them.

For those who are hungry, my heart breaks and I am moved with compassion. May God use this time and focus this Fall to stretch me, and to stretch you and each of His children even more; to show us specific ways to ***spend ourselves*** “on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed” (Isaiah 58:10).

*Sandi Rogers*

*Lord, May my treasure be where your heart is. Show me concrete ways in which I can spend myself on behalf of those in need. Amen.*

## ACCEPTING YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

James 2:16–17 *“If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”*

Many of us have seen the syndrome commonly called “lip service.” It’s a common malady where people all verbally agree that something should be done but have no plans whatsoever to actually do something about it.

At its simplest, people tend to look out for themselves and size up the situation in terms of their own benefit. So, if it’s popular to support something, we will say we support it. If it’s costly to follow through, we don’t. If no one is going to hold us accountable anyway, then no problem! We pay lip service, and we aren’t alone.

Then again, we are called to a higher standard.

As believers living with the very Spirit of God in us, we can rise above the lip service approach to life. If our hearts are open to His prompting, we don’t follow the calculus above. We commit because we love our neighbor. We follow through because we know that they need us to. We hold ourselves, and each other, accountable because we love our Father.

That is living faith, the very opposite of what James is critiquing. That is the kind of faith that has allowed Columbia to provide medical supplies halfway around the globe. That is the kind of faith that lets our brothers and sisters stand up to persecution all over the world. That is the kind of faith that breaks the very paradigm of human existence.

And that is the kind of faith that allows us to feed five thousand with a few loaves ... or, in this case, billions with the resources of one church.

Lip service isn’t even required. Just start acting.

*Jim Turner*

*Lord, Please help me to listen to your Spirit, to count the cost, and to act in faith. Lord, help me to do miracles without hesitation. Amen.*

## DEEPENING YOUR COMMITMENT

Matthew 6:10 *“...your kingdom come...”*

“Your kingdom come.” How many times have I said these words and skimmed over them on my way to “your will be done”? It didn’t seem to particularly pertain to me. The vague vision in my mind was of Jesus’ return to earth, in full glory, at some point in the remote future. He would be the sole actor; the rest of us would be little more than passive observers. That’s what I thought, to the extent that I thought about it at all, but I was wrong.

God’s kingdom isn’t a distant place, invisible and unreachable by us until some God-ordained time. It is upon us even now; as John the Baptist says in Matthew 3:2, “the kingdom of heaven is near” or “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” And in Ephesians 2:6 Paul writes, “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus...” We are already citizens of God’s kingdom!

So if God’s kingdom is already present and we are citizens of it, why don’t we see more evidence of it? The answer is simple: because we are the evidence of it. God’s kingdom is visible—or not—depending on the extent to which we are engaged—or not—in carrying out God’s kingdom work.

When we choose to lose ourselves in God’s will, when love for God and others so consumes us that self is entirely forgotten, then God’s kingdom is revealed—right here, right now—for all to see. It manifests itself as food provided to the hungry, rest granted to the weary, relief won for the oppressed, compassion showered on the overlooked and ostracized. It is eyes that are ready to cry, hands that are ready to touch, ears that are ready to listen, a voice that is ready to whisper words of comfort or to speak out in strong defense. Most of all, it is a heart that is ready, at all times, to love.

“The kingdom of God is at hand.” Don’t wait! See it, experience it, and share it here and now.

*Cindy Fisher*

*Dear Father, May my sole desire be for you and your will. May I see with your eyes, touch with your hands, and love with your heart. May I be so consumed by you that the world sees nothing of me but only you, and your kingdom revealed. Amen.*

## DEFINING YOUR RESPONSE

1 Timothy 6:18 *“Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.”*

When I first read 1 Timothy 6:18 my thoughts turned to the Kindergarten class I help teach on Sunday mornings. I know that over the past year I have taught our children these three simple, and yet sometimes hard to follow, commandments.

I love to ask the children questions. When I ask them for examples of how we can share with others, someone will inevitably answer that we can share our food. In response, I often share with them a lesson I learned when I was their age. When I was in kindergarten, my elementary school held a canned food drive for Thanksgiving. I remember sitting in class thinking that I would go straight home and fill up my grocery bag with the dreaded green peas that I did not enjoy eating.

However, my teacher said something that I will never forget: imagine you are the child who will eat the food donated by others. Would you want people to give you the food they didn't want or would you want them to share some of their favorite foods with you? Would you want to receive only one small portion of food or would you like to eat until you were full? What a lesson for a child to learn! Not only was it important to be willing to share but to have a generous spirit that leads you to want to give the best and as much as you can. It fills my heart with joy when I encounter these same children at our own food pantry working with their families to stock the shelves with their favorite foods.

Weekly we remind the children that by obeying God's commandments, demonstrating kindness, and sharing with others, we are showing the world God's abundant, extravagant love. As an adult child of God, I need these weekly reminders too.

*Jamie Burley*

*Dear Lord, May my actions toward others be a reflection of your abundant, extravagant love. Amen.*



## WEEK FOUR: Believers Responding

September 28

## GREAT ANTICIPATION

Isaiah 58:10 *“And if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.”*

We often ask ourselves whether our service really matters in the long run. We wonder whether what we are doing is actually making a difference. Satan will continuously put a question mark over our lives and our works of faith to try to shake us (John 10:10a).

But God has promised us that our sacrificial service on behalf of the hungry and oppressed will bear fruit. It will be worth it! How? First, we will avoid many sobering Scriptural curses like Proverbs 21:13, “If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.” Second, we will inherit the eternal reward promised us by serving Christ Himself (Matthew 25:34–35, 40). Third, our light, Christ's light in us (John 1:4–5), will set people free in this life and the next (John 8:12).

God has marked out a special blessing for the hungry and oppressed from the very beginning (Deut. 24:19; James 2:5), and if we truly love God, we will truly love His people in the same way He does (John 17:26; 1 John 3:16–19). God loves to work through His people, so we may trust that our God-empowered service matters (Acts 1:8). It was once said of the Church that “none among them lacked” (Acts 4:34), so surely we can reach this goal in the present age if we make Galatians 6:9–10 our battle cry. Let us spend ourselves for the hungry and oppressed, that they may see Christ's light in us and join us in eternity.

*Grant Sheehan*

*Lord, Let me spend myself for the hungry and oppressed, that they may see Christ's light in me and be a part of your family in eternity. Amen.*

## BEING OBEDIENT

Deut. 30:11 *“Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach.”*

The story of Zacchaeus intrigues me even more as an adult than as a child. Among the Gospels, only Luke tells us about this man with such status, position, and authority in his community. But at what price? A Jew who worked for the Roman government as a chief tax collector, he was despised by his peers because his wealth came at their expense, from their pockets. One day, he abandoned his workplace to respond to the stirrings of his heart—or was it the Holy Spirit?—to satisfy his curiosity about this man Jesus who was passing through Jericho with his followers. Being such a small man, he climbed a sycamore tree—just imagine the indignity of a man of his position doing such a thing!—for a glimpse of the Savior passing by. But Jesus did not pass him by. He stopped directly beneath the tree, looked him in the eye, and called him by name. “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”

Zacchaeus did not hesitate. He was obedient—first to the initial stirring of his heart to seek out Jesus and second to the sound of Jesus’ voice. Zacchaeus’ obedience changed his heart and his life. Within his home, he declared to his honored guest that he would give half of his possessions to the poor and would make restitution fourfold to anyone he had cheated. Did Jesus ask Zacchaeus to sell everything he had to give to the poor, as he earlier commanded the rich young ruler? No, he didn’t have to. Zacchaeus was now fully obedient to his Savior, his faith complete, without being told what to do or who to help.

*Kathy Allen*

*Lord, Help me to respond to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit, to hear your voice, and to be fully obedient. Thank you for the assurance of your word that obedience will not be too difficult or beyond my reach. Amen.*

## BEING THANKFUL AND CONTENT

Philippians 4:12 *“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”*

Studying Philippians 4, I am struck afresh with what Paul tells us. He was incarcerated for loving Christ, yet that love did not fail. Even when Paul sat in the flesh for a moment wondering why his friends in Philippi were ignoring him, he continued to extol the love of Christ. Paul acknowledged that the reason for their delay in sending gifts and words of encouragement was lack of information, not thoughtlessness. By sharing all that they could, they were sharing in his troubles and offering additional support and hope.

We can offer the same support and hope to our world today.

I have found that peace, hope, and love are ideas people hold on to. Otherwise, it would be hard to go on. Day in and day out we are bombarded with worldly messages telling us who to be, what to think, and how to live. As followers of Christ we need to take the upper hand and begin to deliver God’s life lessons and offer all the hope we can.

My mother lived during the Great Depression. She came from a blended family with twelve children, had a disabled father and lived near neighbors who were often unkind. Yet there were angels who offered food, a little money, some clothing, and words of love. The unkind things served as a reminder of how she did not want to behave as she grew older. The acts of kindness gave her the hope that not everyone was incapable of goodness. She knew that God’s light was shining even when it was hard for her to see. She knew support and hope and love.

Never underestimate any gift you give to another person. Whether your gift is food for the body or food for the soul, know that you may be the only real light in their world. Pray that your kindnesses will evoke the same feelings Paul had about being content no matter what his circumstance. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to spend yourself to that end?

*Jan Brinson*

*Father God, Make me aware of all those who are in need. Make me aware of what I can say or do to brighten their lives and sow your goodness in their world. Let me bring peace and relief to those who hunger in both body and spirit. Amen.*

## REMEMBERING JESUS

Matthew 25:40 *“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”*

The Scripture is full of commands from Jesus that we care for one another. After all, Jesus declared that the Kingdom of God was love. Matthew 25:40 declares “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” So helping someone else, feeding them, for example, amounts to, in the end, feeding Christ Himself.

It kind of feels like the “whatever” we do for someone else though, is an added benefit, an “extra” to be added to our account. It does not always seem like Jesus meant for it to be the focus of our lives that this Fall Emphasis on Hunger seems to urge. But if we look at the example Christ set for us in how he chose to spend His day, the constant focus on others becomes clear. Jesus spent an incredible amount of time focusing on and meeting the needs of others. He healed them and cleansed them from demons. Those are pretty fantastic things. I probably won’t be able to follow Christ’s example in those ways. But he also visited with friends. He spent time talking to people. He gave them what they needed from him. He fed them with very little. In fact, it is very interesting that He fed the 5,000 men and their families through the disciples. It was His miracle, but it was their hands that delivered it. They did it on His behalf.

Christ did not mean for His work on Earth to end with His Ascension into Heaven. We are supposed to continue it on. We are to be His hands. It’s not just an added bonus to our account, but the actual task on Christ’s “To-Do List” crossed off. The “Whatever” of Matthew 25:40? That’s supposed to be the whole point.

*Teresa Raymond*

*Lord Jesus, Fill my life with whatever it is you have for me to do to honor you. Help me to trust your presence in my life to go beyond my reach in helping others. Amen.*

## TAKING STEPS

Micah 6:8 *“He has shown all you people what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”*

In this section of Micah, God is rebuking the people of Israel for the way they are living—particularly their idol worship of money and possessions. And their response is a plea to know which sacrifices will appease God—burnt offerings? Thousands of rams? First-born children? But the answer is none of these. What God requires of us is to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with Him. This is not a suggestion; it is a command.

God wants us to become “living sacrifices,” spending ourselves sacrificially. He wants us to have hearts that are changed not just to recognize suffering and injustice in the world, but to ache to the point that we are willing to make sacrifices in our own lives that contribute toward the eradication of the suffering and injustice. He wants hearts that are willing to share their abundance so that every mother can feed her children.

And so, God is asking you what steps you will take to share your time, money, and other resources to bring justice and mercy to a hungry and hurting world. What are you willing to give up? One less manicure, one less meal out, one less round of golf, one less hour in front of the TV or a computer game, one less pair of shoes. Imagine if that time and money were directed to feeding the millions of people living in poverty. How many children could go to bed without hunger pains? How many lives could be saved from hunger-related causes? It is all a matter of those with enough being willing to share with those who have nothing. In God’s economy, it is a matter of the heart.

*Sandy Tarpinian*

*Dear God, You have shown us what is good. Help me to live with your heart as my own heart. Order my steps in life to meet your requirement to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with you. Amen.*

## BEING THANKFUL AND CONTENT

Philippians 4:12 *“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”*

Paul says he has learned the secret of contentment. What is that secret? What can we learn from others who seem content with their lives?

People who are content are satisfied with their current situation. They are grateful for what they have. They have hope for the future and still wait patiently in the present. They don't spoil what they have by focusing on what they don't.

We can be more content if we change our expectations. Don't let the world define our wants and needs. Expect that God will provide for us. Paul learned to accept what he received, realizing that it was provided by a loving God and was sufficient to meet his needs. Contentment comes from accepting and being satisfied with what God gives us.

We can also be more content by counting our blessings. Recognize and appreciate all that we already have. The truth is that we have much for which to be grateful. God's gifts to us are greater and more satisfying than any wish list we could come up with.

Contentment is a challenge for people whose basic survival is at stake or who do not know Christ as their savior. It is difficult for a poor mother with starving children to be content. As Woodrow Wilson said, “No one can worship God or love his neighbor on an empty stomach.” Also, if people do not have Christ in their lives, they will not know and benefit from the blessings that come from being a child of God.

The secret of contentment is to be thankful for what you have and realize the blessings come from a loving God. Even Paul had to learn to be content. Each of us should seek contentment, with the help of the Holy Spirit, each day of our lives.

*Murrell Shields*

*Lord, May my faith in and love of you never be swayed by the circumstances of my life. Rather, may my hope rest solely and securely in you so that I may joyfully carry out your will in all that I do. Amen.*

## MEANINGFUL FAST

Isaiah 58:6–7a *“Is not this the fast I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter...”*

People often speak of fasting in terms of sacrifice: sacrifice that reminds us of Christ's sacrifice for us; sacrifice that demonstrates our obedience to God; or sacrifice that focuses our minds and hearts on feeding ourselves spiritually rather than physically. But in Isaiah 58, God clarifies both what a meaningful fast is and what it is not.

We see, first, that a fast is not about us; it is not about currying favor with God or receiving special recognition for our actions (v. 3). Second, we see that the spirit of the fast is not limited to the act of forgoing food but extends to the entirety of our behavior (vv. 3 and 4). And third, we see that it is not about empty ritual, one more line checked off on the Christian “to do” list (v. 5).

So what is a meaningful fast? It is loving others (vv. 6–7 and 9–10) and loving God (v. 13). In short, at the heart of a meaningful fast is this:

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Matthew 22:37–39).*

With these commands in place, the fast is transformed from sacrifice (a self-centered perspective) to surrender (a God-centered perspective), a willingness to spend ourselves serving God and others. If we truly believe that all we have and are already belongs to God, then where is the loss in surrender? And if we truly value the blessings with which God responds, then where is the sacrifice?

As Paul said, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). In Paul's words, we see complete and eager surrender of self. When we hear God's call, “Spend yourself,” how do we respond? If our fast is sincere, then there is only one answer: “I will.”

*Cindy Fisher*

*Dear Creator and Lord of All, Out of your love for me, you made the ultimate sacrifice when Jesus died a grueling death on the cross to give me life. There is no sufficient response but to surrender my life to you in return. I pray that you will “take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee.” Amen.*

## EXTREME GENEROSITY

Acts 2:45 *“They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.”*

We all can probably name a TV show or two where contestants participate in “extreme” sports or some competitive risky behavior. They seem to put all of their energy and effort into the game, competing for their 15 minutes of fame and possibly some financial gain.

In Acts 2:45 we see a very different type of “extreme” behavior: complete and unrestrained generosity. This early fellowship of believers didn’t weigh the cost of giving, but went about finding the means to do so, by selling possessions. When we are faced with the needs of others, do we act so quickly? Do we eagerly look for ways to support those in need, by sacrificing our comforts, possessions, or financial resources? Or do we hold back, talking ourselves out of giving up our “stuff”? Maybe we give so little we hardly miss it?

There is a special blessing that God gives those who follow His prompting to give generously. Even out of their “extreme poverty,” an “overflowing joy” prompted the Macedonian churches to give with rich generosity (2 Corinthians 8:2). Second Corinthians 9:11 also speaks about God making us spiritually rich so that we can be generous on every occasion. In Christ, God has shown us how eternally generous he is. Remember, we cannot possibly outgive God.

*Celia Buffalo*

*Dear Lord, Teach me to look eagerly for opportunities you bring to me to give generously to those in need. Amen.*

