

“Turn the Cat Around” // 2 Corinthians 9:1–15 // *God’s Power in Broken Vessels #4*¹ Th 8

Someone reads 2 Cor 9:6–15

6 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 9 As it is written,

“He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.”

10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. 12 For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. 13 By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, 14 while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. 15 Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

2 Corinthians 9! One of the few things I think we can all agree on—whether you like cats or not—is that cats are a bit ornery. Fair? Or at least persnickety—maybe that’s the better word.

I know it’s not the most popular conviction I hold, but I’m convinced that cats were put on earth to exemplify for us the craven heart of man; to hold up a mirror before us, magnifying our worst traits so we could repent of them and return to Jesus.

I mean, think about it: When you get home and call your dog, they’ll sprint from across the house like you hung the moon. Call your cat (and you cat owners know this), they might come! But other times they’re like, “*Not today, peasant.*” And by the way, this is not just my sour disposition—a recent study published in *Animal Cognition*, a peer-reviewed scientific journal, proved that cats often recognize their owners’ voices and just choose to ignore them.

¹ Sources consulted: Eric Mason, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 2 Corinthians*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2024); Gary Millar, *2 Corinthians for You* (London, UK: The Good Book Company, 2020); Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians* (London, UK: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004); Andy Stanley, *Fields of Gold*; Tim Keller, 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, “[Radical Generosity](#),” sermon at Redeemer Presbyterian; November 10, 1991. And others as noted throughout.

A cat doesn't have owners, the study concluded; a cat has *staff*. Treat a dog well and that dog thinks, *"You're the greatest!"* Treat a cat well and the cat assumes, *"I'm the greatest."*

Any cat owner knows that one thing cats really hate is having their fur rubbed the wrong way and that's because, veterinarians say, the shafts of their hair follicles go so deep that when you rub them the wrong way, it pulls against the whole grain of their being; it builds up static and gets really uncomfortable for them. The way I read that is that even their fur structure is prideful; it's as if their whole bodies are designed to say, *"You have to do it my way. My way is the only way."*

Now, if you are a cat and your owner is rubbing your fur the wrong way, you have two options: You can demand your owner change the direction of his caress—or you can turn YOUR body around.

And why, you ask, this lengthy-thought-spot-on reflection on cats? It's because in 2 Corinthians 8–9, Paul says a similar thing to us about the subject of generosity. For many of us, messages on generosity rub us the wrong way. Paul says, "Well then, turn the cat around." And so, in **2 Corinthians 8–9**, that's what he attempts to do.

For many of us, messages about generosity are like that **sex education talk** we endured at school in the 8th grade. Remember that thing? I never wanted to talk about that subject with another grown-up in public but **Coach Yokely, our health sciences teacher, looked me right in the eyes** and made sure I was aware of every gruesome detail. Did I need to know the information? Probably. Was I better off for it? Maybe. Do I ever want to have that experience again? Nope. And that's how we are with this subject.

But what if (and just go with me here) messages about generosity felt not irritating but life-giving to you? What if, instead of building up static in your fur, they released energy in you? When God turns your heart around, that's what they'll be like.

Remember what Paul said, vs. 7—such a good verse: **7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a *cheerful* giver.** (That word for "cheerful" in Greek is *hilarion*, from where we get our word "hilarious." God delights in people, Paul says, who love the subject of generosity, who are just downright chipper about it, who giggle and chortle and snort with delight when the offering bucket goes by—he loves those kinds of givers because ***that's the kind of giver he is.***)

Specifically, Paul addresses two things deep in our hearts that need to be turned around: (1) FEAR and (2) PRIDE. *Let's look at 'em one at a time.*

I. FEAR

If I had to pick out the # 1 reason people don't give, it wouldn't be selfishness, surprisingly; it would be FEAR! For most of us, money is our lifeblood; it's what grants us access to the good life now, and it's what guarantees our security for the future. We worry, "Without money, how can life be good, and stable? Without money, what kind of life will my kids have?"

To this fear, Paul says, vs. 6: He who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully ... (10) [the God] who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and **multiply** your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness [that is, as you give].

Generosity is like a seed that you plant, in faith, he says. Planting a seed always involves taking a risk, and taking that risk can feel scary.

I remember reading about an excruciating choice a lot of Midwest farmers faced in the 1930s. Many had moved out West because the ground was fertile, and for a while things were going great, but in **1931, the Midwest entered into one of the worst sustained droughts** in history, and by the end of the 1930s, many of these farmers were on the verge of bankruptcy. **It looked like the drought was starting to end**, but there was no way to be sure.

And here was the dilemma many of these farmers faced in the fall of 1939. **Planting seed meant putting about a month's salary** into the ground, and if no rain came, then that investment would be lost. Many of these farmers had just enough grain left to feed themselves and their families for one more year. If they planted these seeds and no rains came, all would be lost and they'd be destitute.² Thankfully, the rains did come, and those farmers who stayed and planted received a bountiful harvest.

Paul says we face a similar choice when it comes to our resources. We can hold onto them out of fear, or we can plant them, trusting that God will multiply the harvest.

You see, when it comes to generosity, Paul says, God operates with us according to **"The Laws of the Harvest."** *The Laws of the Harvest*: Let me highlight three of them for you.

LAW 1: The harvest is limited to the planting (vs. 6)

He who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully ...

² From my *Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches that Send*, Introduction. <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/depression/dustbowl.htm>; <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/dustbowl/> Accessed May 13, 2014. I first saw this story connected to kingdom giving in Andy Stanley, *Fields of Gold: A Place Beyond Your Deepest Fears, a Prize Beyond Your Wildest Imagination* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2004), 9–13.

In other words, you can **only harvest out of what you sow**. If you don't plant the seed, there's nothing for God to multiply.

Remember the story of where Jesus multiplied the **little boy's lunch**—John 6? Basically, there's 5,000 hungry people with no food, and Jesus wants to feed them, so he takes a little boy's lunch: five loaves and two fish—a Hebrew Happy Meal, a Levitical Lunchable (another joke that never gets old)—and he multiplies them so that all 5,000, plus their families, are fully fed, with 12 basketfuls of leftovers.

It's a great story, but there's one little detail that people often overlook in this miracle, and that is that the text says that as they took the loaves and fish from Jesus' hands, it multiplied. You see, it wasn't that Jesus took the five loaves and two fish and then turned them into a big pile of fish and bread, and then they distributed it from that pile. No, as **D. A. Carson** points out, the text says *as* they distributed it, it multiplied. Technically, some say, the miracle happened in their hands, not his.³

Why do I point out that little detail? Because some of you say, “God, if you multiply my money, I'll give it away.” God says, “Other way around: Give it away, and then I'll multiply it!”

Write this down: *Generosity is an invitation for God to infuse blessing into your finances.*

Until you plant the seed, God can't multiply the harvest. **Law 1**, *the harvest is limited to the planting*.

LAW 2: The harvest is ***proportional*** to the planting (vs. 6)

Again, vs. 6: He who sows ***sparingly*** will reap ***sparingly***, and whoever sows ***bountifully*** will also reap ***bountifully***...

Let me say something plainly, and I know when I say it, some of you are going to bristle at it. But it's biblical: ***In many ways, your generosity toward others determines God's generosity toward you.*** Look at vs. 6: *That's literally what Paul says. God responds to you according to the measure of your generosity.*

Paul's not alone in saying that—Paul is summarizing a message that runs throughout the whole Old Testament. King Solomon had said this in the book of Proverbs: ***“Whoever is kind to the poor is lending to the Lord— the benefit of his gift will return to him in abundance” (Proverbs 19:17).*** In other words, when you give to the poor, Solomon says, or any work of God's kingdom, it's like making a loan to the Lord, and ***God repays that loan in abundance.***

³ D.A. Carson (*Matthew, Expositor's Bible Commentary*): “The bread multiplied in the process of being broken and distributed.” Cf. R.T. France (*NICNT, Matthew*): “The description allows the reader to infer that the multiplication took place in the course of the distribution rather than beforehand.”

Solomon's own life is an example of this. There's a scene from Solomon's life you might remember from Sunday School. It takes place right at the beginning of Solomon's reign. 1 Kings 3:⁴ God appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, **"Request anything of me, Solomon, and I'll give it to you."** Instead of asking for riches, Solomon asked for wisdom. And God says, "Solomon, because you asked for this, and not for riches for yourself, not only will I make you the wisest king who's ever lived, I'll also make you the richest king in Israel's history." That's the part of the story many of us know.

But there's a detail in this story we often overlook too. This conversation took place on the night after Solomon's coronation. The Jewish tradition was for the new king to sacrifice a bull as a thank offering to God on his coronation day. Well, 1 Kings 3 tells us Solomon sacrificed 1,000 bulls instead of 1.⁵ In other words, Solomon went 1,000x beyond what was required. Do you think **it is any coincidence that the only time God ever said to someone, "Ask me whatever you want and I'll give it to you,"** it was to an extravagant giver who gave 1,000x beyond what was required?

To the excessively generous, God will be excessively generous. It's like we often say: You can't out-give God!

So, the answer to the question "How much should we give?" is "How much do you want God to bless and multiply?"

The harvest is proportional to the planting. I heard this great little story about **Alexander the Great**. I don't know if it's true or not, but it goes like this: Alexander the Great was riding back into Athens after one of his big victories, and as part of the celebration, he was giving out baskets of rice. There was a poor, crippled Athenian man on the side of the road, and when he was given his basket of rice, Alexander the Great saw him and felt compassion, and said to him, "Give me that back." The poor man looked alarmed. This would feed him for a month. So not wanting to disobey Alexander's orders, he reached in the basket and gave back two kernels; Alexander motioned his hand toward his treasurer, and the treasurer gave the man two silver coins. At which point, of course, the poor man tried to give the whole bowl back, but it was too late. Alexander had moved on.

I fear that's going to be some of us in eternity. So much God would have blessed, but we didn't trust him enough to sow it. **Law 2: The harvest is proportional to the planting.** *And that leads me to ...*

LAW 3: The harvest is *greater* than the planting (vs. 11)

What comes back to you is always greater than what you sowed.

- **Plant a wheat seed** and it will turn into a wheat stalk that produces hundreds of wheat seeds. **Plant an acorn** and it turns into an oak tree that produces thousands of acorns.
- **The harvest comes back to us in a different form, and greater,** than what we planted.

⁴ 3:5

⁵ See also 1 Kings 8:62–64 for what he did at the Temple inauguration: 22,000 oxen & 120,000 sheep!

Notice, **vs. 11**: Paul says that when you sow in faith, “You will be enriched ***in every way ...***”

- What does “***in every way***” mean?
- The Greek word for “every” is “panti”—a really interesting Greek word that means ... *every*.

Would “In every way” = increased financial capacity? As in, if you give, God grows your finances?

- Well, **yep**, that would be included in the word “***every***.”
- And that’s certainly a promise repeated throughout Scripture: I showed you one version of it last week in **Malachi 3:10**: *Test me in this, God says ... Give me the firstfruits and see if I don’t “open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.”*
- Here’s another one: **Proverbs 3:9–10**, “Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.” (Or non-alcoholic Welch’s grape juice for us Baptists.)
- One of the things I’ve heard **Pastor Bryan** say is that if he had to list out a short explanation of why he believed in God, God’s faithfulness to this promise would be in that list: experiencing how God multiplied and blessed him when he put God first in his giving. And I agree. I’ve seen God be faithful in this way again and again and again.

So yes, “in every way” would include financial enrichment. But does it mean only that? No. Paul said, “in ***every*** way,” which means there are other ways that God blesses you through your generosity.

Again, think about the image of a seed here.⁶ Have you ever seen a peach seed **(PIC)**? **It’s this hard**, ugly thing you’d never want to eat—it looks like a **little rat brain**—but from it come these luscious fruits **(PIC)**.

Paul says our generosity produces a harvest of fruit much better than itself. In **vs. 10** he says your generosity will “... increase the harvest of ***your righteousness***.”

What does that mean? Write this down: “**In every way**” (would mean) = ***greater contentment***

- Yes. One of the miracles that God works in your heart through generosity is greater contentment.
- **I’ve always heard that the secret to a happy life is not having all you want, but wanting what you have.** One of life’s great ironies is that some of the wealthiest people in the world are actually the poorest, at least in terms of happiness.
- Paul is showing us that God uses our generosity to grow that kind of contentment in us.
 - **Veronica and I have experienced that.** In those seasons where we’ve given in significant ways, it’s been amazing how he’s restructured our hearts to find contentment in what we have. **The secret to a happy life is not having all you want, but wanting what you have.**

⁶ Tim Keller, “The Power of Generosity,” 2 Corinthians 8:8-15, 9:6-12

- o By the way, some of you will find this interesting: You can prove this one by science. [Elizabeth Dunn](#), a psychologist at the University of British Columbia, conducted an experiment where 50 students were unexpectedly given a cash reward as compensation for participating in the study. They then had the option to anonymously donate some of this money to a classmate in need. The participants didn't know it, but the real experiment was on how generosity lowered or heightened your cortisol level. Cortisol is the hormone that makes you feel stress. They did saliva tests before and after giving them the money and compared those who gave generously and those who didn't. Dr. Dunn reported that participants who kept more money for themselves reported ... much higher levels of cortisol. High levels of cortisol, of course, have demonstrably bad effects on your health, and generosity literally reduces it. Some of you should consider generosity over all those thousands of dollars worth of supplements you take. ***There's more scientific proof for God's way of reducing stress than Big Pharma's answer to the problem.*** !! Maybe we need less essential oils and more essential obedience. Just sayin'. To quote Dr. Dunn: "Medically, it's wiser not to be a miser!"
- **"In every way" = a more generous, Christlike heart**
 - o Paul said our generosity produces a harvest of righteousness, and one of the primary ways we experience that is the development of a Christlike heart. Generosity literally forms Christlikeness in your heart. In Matthew 6, Jesus said, **"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."** For a lot of years, I would literally quote that verse wrong. I'd say, **"Where your heart is, there your treasure will be also,"** meaning that where you put your treasure reveals where your heart is. And that's true too. Other verses in the Bible say that. But that's not what Jesus is saying here. Here, he's saying that **where we put our treasure actually has a shaping, training effect on our heart.**
 - o Where we put our **treasure acts like a MAGNET** for the affections of our hearts. Let these filings represent the attitudes of your heart and this magnet represent what I do with my money ... if I put it over here, in the kingdom of God, that's the direction my heart goes. If I put it over here, in the world, that's the direction my heart goes.
 - o **When I was president of the Southern Baptist Convention, one of my primary duties was overseeing the annual meeting of the SBC,** and there would be like 15,000 people at this thing, so we'd meet in a big convention center, and there's always a big hotel that goes with it, and they'd just rent out the whole hotel, and they'd give the Presidential Suite to the president. So my family got to do this twice. Because nothing says "family vacation" like going to the SBC. So the convention one year is in Nashville, and my family and I get to stay in the penthouse at the very top of the downtown JW Marriott. It's the nicest living quarters I've ever been in—it's like where Taylor Swift stays when she performs in Nashville—so when the family gets there, Adon, who is like 11 years old at the time, starts running from room to room with mouth wide open and going, "Dad, look what's in here!" And "Dad, look what's in *here*!" And he pulls back the curtain to reveal the Nashville skyline and says, "Dad, look at the view from *here*!" And then he opened the door to the refrigerator and it was totally stocked, and he said, "Dad, look at all this food in here!" and I was like, "Son, don't touch any of that. Those items cost like \$1,000 each. In fact, don't even look at them. They have little sensors that can tell when you move them and probably when you're looking at them, and they charge you for that too. Well, finally, after about seven full minutes of him exploring this whole gigantic space at full speed, he collapses on the bed and says, "Man, this is making it hard not to love *EARTHLY* things." And Veronica and I busted out laughing.

- o But he was right. **C.S. Lewis** said, **"Wealth has a way of knitting a man's heart to this world."**⁷ You parents who are well-off, it's going to be nearly impossible for your kids not to grow up loving earthly things.
- o **But see, generosity helps knit your heart to the heavenly world.** So by all means, enjoy the blessings of your money, but you should be rich in generosity too, because that's the only way to train your heart, and your kids' hearts, to love eternity. Be rich in generosity in front of them. You better show them how you are reducing your lifestyle to invest in heaven, and they better be able to see that; otherwise, they are going to grow up loving the things of this world and not the things of eternity.
- o Again, generosity *"increases the harvest of your righteousness."*
- **One more: "In every way" = spiritual anointing/power in prayer**
 - o **Listen**, if you're a connoisseur of the biographies of great Christian leaders, you'll know that some of the most anointed people in the world in Christian history became that way through extravagant generosity.
 - o Or I think of **John Calvin**, who together with Luther birthed the Protestant Reformation. When he died, **Pope Pius IV** groused in disgust about him: *"The strength of that heretic was his utter disregard for money."*⁸
 - o Or **Count Nicolas von Zinzendorf**, whose willingness to **liquidate his sizable estate** to fund missionaries is a big part of, historians say, what sparked the **modern missionary movement**.

The point: God uses generosity to enrich you in every way. (Peach PICS) God takes our peach seeds of generosity and turns them into luscious fruits of righteousness. So **Paul's answer** to the problem of fear in our hearts is the **Law of the Harvest**: (1) *The harvest is limited to the planting*; (2) *The harvest is proportional to the planting*; and (3) *The harvest is greater than the planting*.

And see, unlike those farmers in the Midwest, Paul would say, we know, we're assured, that God will be faithful to send the rain on our generosity. Vs. 8 [We know that our] **And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.**

In this arena, God will never fail to send the rain and bring the harvest. That's how Paul attempts to turn the cat of our fear around.

But there's a second thing facing the wrong direction in our heart that sabotages our giving:

II. PRIDE

⁷ "Prosperity knits a man to the world. He feels he is 'finding his place in it,' while really it is finding its place in him." — C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain, Chapter 6 ("Human Pain")

⁸ Pope Pius IV upon Calvin's death, "The strength of that heretic consisted in this, that money never had the slightest charm for him. If I had such servants my dominion would extend from sea to sea."

Stinginess with your money grows out of the conviction that you're the one responsible for all your money. You think, "I'm the one who made all this money; thus, the primary one who should benefit from it is me." Paul says, vs. 10 "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply [you] ..."

Who enriches you, Paul asks? God does. I know some of you think you're a self-made man or woman, but hear me: Even the slightest touch of humility should make you aware that underlying that hard work were a lot of things you didn't earn and really had no control over. In fact, I'd argue **the** most significant factors in our lives are things you couldn't control. Did you determine what talents you were born with? Even that internal drive—those were all gifts of God. And do you really think that you'd have accomplished all that you have if you'd been born with a cleft palate in a Brazilian favela? Or grown up as an orphan in south Sudan, or even south Harlem? Every successful person I've ever talked to acknowledges there's a decent amount of luck in their success—or providence, or whatever you want to call it. My point is not that you didn't work hard, just that in the final analysis, we're all the recipients of a lot of grace. Don't make God give you a microscopic virus to demonstrate to you how fragile you are and how much you depend on him for life and success.

So God is the one who enriches you. Second, why does he do it? Vs. [11] You will be enriched in every way ... **to be generous in every way ...**

God is the one who enriches you, and he does it for reasons beyond just you. **We always say:** God prospers you not simply so you can increase your standard of living, but so you can increase your standard of giving.

And can I just say, especially to you well-off people, please listen to me: This is why some of you who are rich are still so unhappy. You've achieved more than you thought possible financially—but you're still unhappy. And you don't know why.

It's because God didn't create you to be primarily a receiver, but also a giver, like him. A pond that collects water with no outlet becomes stagnant and dead. Think: the Dead Sea, or the great Salt Lake out in Utah. Beautiful and huge, but dead. Compare those lifeless bodies of water to a mountain river or an underground stream that not only has life but brings life wherever it goes.

Only when you're a river of life will you experience the fulfillment of all that God created you to be. "You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way" (vs. 11).

So Paul says, "Turn the cat around. And then you won't be a reluctant and resentful giver; you'll be a cheerful and joyful one." **And then, as he rounds third and heads for home**, as Pastor Bryan always says, Paul appeals to one more thing that should motivate the heart of any Christian to be generous.

Vs. 11, You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. 12 For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

Your giving results in people giving thanks to God. Through your generosity, you see people find Jesus, escape from addiction, discover forgiveness of sins, reunite with their families, and there's nothing that thrills God more than people being reconciled and restored.

Your generosity produces thanksgiving in others, Summit, and I wanted you to hear about some of that today.

(Legacy Lanes)

Last year, we introduced something to you called **Legacy Lanes**. We took that language from [Psalm 112:5–6](#): “It is well with the man who deals generously ... For the righteous will be remembered forever.” By the way, this is the very passage Paul quotes in vs 9. Paul says, “**Because of your generosity, Paul says, people will give thanks to God forever.**”

We have five legacy lanes where we give in ways, mostly outside the walls of this church, that increase thanksgiving to God. Those five lanes are: **International Missions, Leadership Multiplication, Local Outreach, Domestic Church Planting, and Triangle Gospel Expansion.**

At our church, we have structured our budget so that 35 percent of all we receive automatically goes into these lanes. 65 percent runs all the ministries of the church; 35 percent goes into these Legacy Lanes.

Last year I told our pastoral team: Let's dream about what God wants us to do in each of these areas. And I said, only realistic stuff, not stuff like, “Let's start our own Christian NBA franchise” or “Let's plant the first church on Mars,” or anything like that. But just ask God what he wants to do through us, and let's not let the size of our budget right now determine the size of our faith. Let's ask God what he wants.

And so our team basically came up with \$300M of future projects we believe God is leading us toward. 35 percent of our budget automatically goes into these lanes (which is a huge amount—much, much higher than what most churches give). So 35 percent of all you give automatically goes into this, but then our elders said, “Anything that comes in above budget will go exclusively to these lanes. In other words, we'll direct 100 percent of all extra money into one of these five lanes.” So if our budget is \$55M, and you give \$60M, that extra \$5M goes exclusively into these Legacy Lanes.

We put that out there and you responded, and so let me tell you some of the things that we, by God's grace and your generosity, have done over the last year.

In the **International Missions** lane:

- We partnered with the **Museum of the Bible** and **IllumiNations** to fund two **Bible Translation Projects** in **two of our strategic locations overseas**. **(PIC)** We had Summit people in two regions in Asia that didn't have a copy of the Bible in their native language. Each of those

translation projects cost about \$150,000 and because of your generosity, we fully funded BOTH of those projects. We are mobilizing not only our people to the ends of the earth, but also the Scriptures, because that's where the power is.

- Something we'd love to do next year is a retreat overseas for all the international missionaries over there we've sent out—which is about 300 right now. A time where they can reconnect and recharge, and we can pour into them. I mean, imagine that: 300 Summit missionaries and a bunch of you in a retreat place in Europe where we can pray and dream together. That retreat will cost about \$500K, but through your generosity, we can do it.

In the Leadership Multiplication lane: We wanted to mobilize not just those called to full-time ministry, but also those gifted in the marketplace who wanted to use their talents for the kingdom of God. So we started something called the **Renewal Residency, a three-year program where** young professionals get trained to use “secular” skills in the Great Commission. Your generosity funded the first year of that program, which was about \$100K, and we have our first class ([Photo](#)) of 11 young adults in it learning to do business as mission. That's on top, of course, of all the **Summit Institute** and **Summit Collab** ([PHOTOS](#)) training we're doing. We want to see these things grow and expand.

In the Local Outreach lane: Some of our members had a dream to partner with NC prisons ([PIC](#)) to provide tablets with Summit sermons and Christian life resources specifically curated for prisoners. It was really innovative and cost about \$200K to get these in prisons across NC, but through your generosity, it's fully funded. By the way, through these tablets, we've already seen over 5k prisoners become subscribers to our channel, with over 100K views so far and 45 salvations!

- We also wanted to offer a ministry called **Recharge** for **FOSTER families**, ([PIC](#)) in which we'd offer a monthly night out to foster parents, all expenses paid ... something they *desperately* need and rarely get. That costs about \$100,000 a year, and we've funded ½ of it.
- **We also wanted to translate all our G4 Resources** ([PIC](#)) **into Spanish (G4 is how we minister to people in crisis—addictions, bereavement, grief, divorce, any of it)—we wanted to translate them into Spanish for our SEE as well as other Latin American churches who would like to develop lay-counseling ministries.** That cost \$35K, and through your generosity, we fully funded it. It's done and out there.
- **One more I'll mention here:** We're dreaming about setting up something called a “**Summit Family Life Center**” ([PIC](#)) in the Triangle that will serve as a headquarters for ministering to the homeless, orphan, prisoner, unwed mother, and high school dropout in our communities. Think everything from daycare facilities to emergency food supply to tutoring services to job training to healthcare offerings. Imagine a Jesus-center committed to ministering to the most broken places in our city! That will cost close to \$40M.

In the Domestic Church Planting lane: **We planted 15 churches last year and have** committed \$1M to them over the next three years. One of those churches was Kings Church in Wilmington. I've told you this story:

- Core team ...

- Well, a little update. They launched this fall: They had 600 at their launch service, with 300 college students, and they've already baptized over 20.
- We also sent out one of our staff members, Peter Park, to pastor an **international church in Kuala Lumpur** and help him establish a multiplying collaborative out there. That church is growing like crazy; they just went to **two services**, and they are preparing to plant a church.
- We're now at the stage where our plants are planting churches. We planted a church in Charlotte that planted one in Kenya that is now planting one in South Sudan, and one in Denver that planted another one in Denver that is now planting a third one in Denver. Summit, you're a great-grandparent!
- All that was fully funded because of your generosity.
- Summit, get this: Our church plants have seen over **2k baptisms** so far this year!

In the **Triangle Gospel Expansion** lane: **We've purchased land for campuses in Fuquay-Varina and Chapel Hill**. Those land prices were \$3M and \$6.4M respectively. And through God's grace, the county's support, and your continued generosity, we hope to start building on those soon.

One more thing I want to tell you about ... actually not me, but I want our college leadership to tell you about. I wasn't sure what lane to put it in because it kind of touches several of them ...

(JOSH/WES: stories and future)

- **Leadership Multiplication:** UNC Ministry House (PIC)
- **Domestic Church Planting:** UNCW (PIC); Launch College Ministry @ Southern Illinois University (PIC)

(VIDEO of Luke and John)

Summit! These are the kinds of things that result from your generosity!

12 For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

Go with me for a moment into eternity. We're 100 years in, and you're meeting all these people whose lives were changed because of your generosity. Don't you think that there, we'll be glad for every act of faith and every sacrifice of generosity?

(By the way, I got a letter from Luke's mom a while back ... she said, "I just wanted to say thank you. He came to college not a believer. We were praying for him. Through your church, he came to Jesus, and now look at how God is using him." Summit, because of your generosity, there's

“thanksgiving” in the hearts of parents whose kids find Jesus here, and now thanksgiving in places like South Asia. What a privilege to be involved, amen, Summit? Isn’t this what you want to give your life to?)

Conclusion:

Here's my invitation to you:

- If you feel led to give today, you can respond to God’s generosity right now. Again, whenever you give to **Summit**, 35 percent of your gift goes directly to fund the incredible things God is doing in the Legacy Lanes. **Text GIVE to 33933, give online at summitchurch.com/give, or drop your gift in the buckets on your way out.** Or talk to your campus pastor.
- But here’s something else. Listen closely: In December, the weekend of Dec. 14, we’re going to have a special opportunity to give to the Legacy Lanes. Everything collected on that weekend will go exclusively to the Legacy Lanes. 100 percent. You’ll hear more about that in weeks to come.
- Now, maybe some of you hear this and say, “The company I work for has a way of giving to charities, but we can’t give to churches directly.” Some of the projects in Legacy Lanes may qualify for that kind of giving. **If that’s you, come talk to your campus pastor or let me know.** I’ve told you: I want us to be for you regarding giving to the kingdom of God what my financial planner is with me and stocks ... For ministries, I can tell you where to get the best EROI. So if you’re in a situation like that with your company, let us know and we’ll help you.
- **Finally, for some of you, this has sparked something in you.** We have a group here at the church called **the Legacy Team**—they are just ordinary Summit members with the spiritual gift of giving. You say, “What does it mean to have the spiritual gift of giving?” We don’t strictly define it. In most cases, it means you give *over and above* your tithe, even one dollar over it, or you have been entrusted with substantial resources to invest in God’s kingdom and you want to invest them wisely. When you join the team, you get to be on the inside of the development of some of these projects, and you can contribute directly to the lanes if you want. If you’re committed to generous giving here and care about where that money goes, you should be a part of that team. **Text LEGACY to 33933** to [join the Legacy Team](#).

OK? Those are three to four ways you can respond. Let’s end with the last verse of chapter 9: **15 Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!**

See, Paul can’t help himself ... when it comes to God, we are never the giver, always the receiver. We’ll never be asked to give to others, we never could give to others, more than God has given to us. God’s gift to us, Paul says, is “inexpressible!”

You see, God doesn’t approach us as a God with needs. The God who died for your sins when you were his enemy will take care of all your needs today and tomorrow and the day after that and then every day forever. So you can afford to trust and obey him today and experience the joy that comes from leveraging your resources for other peoples’ salvation and hearing them give thanks to God through your generosity. Generosity is never something God wants from you and always something he wants for you—it’s an invitation to infuse God’s blessing into your finances.

So let’s bow our heads and LISTEN to the Holy Spirit ... where is God telling you to be generous? What’s your next step?

- To start tithing?
- Maybe one of these projects grabbed your heart and you felt the Holy Spirit pull on a heart string, saying, “Hey, this is for you. I want you to invest specifically in this.” Could you just listen right now and be open to him moving in your heart or prompting you on any of these things?

- Maybe it's for you to join the Legacy Team so you can hear about these things as they develop.
- Let the Holy Spirit speak, and you just say yes ...

Maybe you have a need ... off to the sides. Come and ask God to supply it.

Let's all stand and celebrate and declare the faithfulness of God as we sing this great old hymn, "Great is Thy Faithfulness," as our worship teams lead us! Don't just mindlessly sing these words either; celebrate them! And cling to them! And let bold, selfless generosity flow from them!