

The Faith Commitment Offering

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Well, to get our hearts in tune with what we're about this in about a week and a half, let's go to 2 Corinthians again, chapter 9. I know Brother Matt gave you a wonderful message on giving from this text, but I want to look at it afresh from, um, the faith commitment perspective. This is the original text we drew that from years ago and if my notes are correct, we haven't unpacked this text in view of the faith commitment offering in 10 years, so a lot of us are new and maybe haven't heard all the aspects involved with what is a faith commitment offering for missions. Well, that's what we're going to talk about this morning because the principle is drawn straight out of 2 Corinthians 9.

Let's begin there in verse 1 and go through verse 8. 2 Corinthians 9 beginning in verse 1. Paul writes to the local church at Corinth and said,

1 For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; [that's the suffering saints in Jerusalem he's referring to] 2 for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them. 3 But I have sent the brethren, in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; 4 otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we not to speak of you will be put to shame by this confidence. 5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness. 6 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything [let's read that again], so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

Now there are three types of giving, three biblical principles, I should say, of giving that we have emphasized here since I've been your pastor. First of all, we teach tithing here,

that the Bible gives us that as a clear guideline, and we teach tithing ought to be the foundation stone for supporting the local operating budget of the church. Now sometimes folks will say, "Now pastor, we're not under law. Are we bound to tithing in the in the New Testament under grace?" No, we do not tithe under law. We tithe under love. And whatever is under grace and love is always greater than what's under the law. Remember, in the Beatitudes Jesus said, you know, if you're going along and one of those Roman soldiers says, "Now you know Roman law says you have to carry carry my pack a mile." He said, "Well, your grace, children, just tell him well I'll take it two miles then." If someone sues you and wants to take your coat, well, give him your shirt also. In other words, what what happens under grace is greater than what you do in law. So we just challenge one another, never legalistically, not a element of church discipline by any means, but we challenge each other return the first 10% under love grateful for what God's done for.

Well, secondly, we teach what I call a lifestyle sacrifice. Uh, several Old Testament texts in particular, but 2 Samuel, uh, chapter 24 gives us the picture of Araunah and the the king's going to buy Araunah's threshing floor and he says, "God forbid it. I can't give unto the Lord that was the Lord cost my cost, give to the Lord my God, rather, that which costs me nothing. I've got to do something that I feel it. It's got to come more than just what's kind of extra and left over." And occasionally we'd have a special need. I I was thinking on, uh, since I have been here all the stuff we've done. We've we've remodeled that chapel of there twice since I've been here. We've built this building and so many other things and we would have these building programs and we would challenge each other to do something of a a lifestyle sacrifice, would you, would you pray about giving something where you have to give something up to give it. And that's not an everyday thing. It's not an every year thing, but occasionally we see God's people did that in the Old Testament. I remember David, uh, when they were building the temple, talked about giving beyond and above what he had to give to make it happen.

And then thirdly, from our text today, a faith commitment giving for world missions. A faith commitment. Just what is a faith commitment offering? Let's unpack it this way. I. Let's note the purpose of the offering. Paul's writing this letter, and he's writing to a local church, and he's going to talk to them about this offering that he's trying to get up to take from them to the suffering church in Jerusalem. The the local church in Jerusalem was going through terrible persecution and so this is really the first record of a missions offering that went out from Corinth and went to the church in Jerusalem to help them along the way. And the first thing he says there in verse 1 is it's superfluous. The idea is, "I know I don't even have to say anything about this. I know that you're you're so ready to give your offering, it's just unnecessary for me to have to write this to you." Uh, the point is, he's been talking to them about it already and they have already enthusiastically freely said, "Paul, we're in. We'll do something generous to help our brothers and sister in Jerusalem." He said, "Okay, I know I don't have to write this to you, but I'm, um, going to anyway." That's kind of what Paul does.

Two subpoints here. Notice first of all under purpose, it's for missions. It's for the ministry to the saints, he says in the last part of verse 1. That is, it's for outside of us and

it's for church work beyond us. And by the way, brothers and sisters, I think there's a special blessing for the local churches that put their hearts on reaching out to others and not just be inwardly focused all the time. And that's what Paul is saying here to the church at Corinth, "Let's think about those who are less well off," and that you well know that through our our Anchored in Truth ministries that is greatly supported by our faith commitment monies we turn in. We're regularly giving gifts and helping brothers and church planters and missionaries whether it's buying a motorcycle or helping build a building or whatever it is. It's the same spirit. It's a mission's gift that goes out from us and goes to others. And I believe the method that Paul lays out here, though it's not commanded, it's still an excellent guide for any church today as to how they want to raise their missions gifts.

So we've been using this for many years, and I mean, it's really history. I I remember when we first did our faith commitment offering, our total gifts to missions were around \$40,000 a year and we immediately went to the hundreds of thousands of dollars, and probably, Brother Steve, I'm just rounding it off, guesstimating. We may have averaged 3 to \$350,000 since we began the faith commitment offering. If that's true, that comes up to 11 to \$12 million since I've been your pastor that we've given to missions. Now, don't pat yourselves on the back. I'm not saying we've done anything great, but that was a lot more than we were doing. And I think the biblical principle has been so blessed here through the years as we have done this.

Well, it's for missions and then, secondly under the purpose, notice it's for motivation. It's for motivation. Look at verse 2 there. He says, "for I know your readiness," and notice how Paul keeps building these things. So first of all, "I know I don't have to, it's superfluous to have to write it. I know you're gonna do it." Verse 2 again, "I know you're ready to do it, but just in case," hee says, "of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year," and why have these folks in the region of Macedonia and Achaia been so eager to give a gift also, b"ecause you, Corinth, the local church at Corinth, your zeal," last line, verse 2, "your zeal has stirred up most of them." Paul says, "It's it's ordained of God that one local church being faithful can help another local church be faithful. One local church's example can help another local church to do better in certain areas." And Paul does this over and over and over in the epistles. He writes to the local church at Rome and he says, "The report of your obedience has reached to all." The point is, "the other local churches church at Rome are hearing how you're obedient and they're inspired to be obedient and faithful."

I've been studying this a lot lately. It's really profound to me how thorough, how exhaustive, the truth is that Paul meant for the early churches to lock arms together, to motivate, to encourage, to mentor, to edify one another, and to help one another. It's not commanded that they do it necessarily, it's so just so assumed that they would do it. And it's throughout Scripture, so he tells the church at Corinth, "Man, this your spirit, the way you've talked about how you're gonna be so generous in this special missions offering for the church at Jerusalem has really stirred up other churches to get excited about missions too." And I thought about how the Lord has used you guys through the years, and it's it's been many years ago, but we had been, um, uh, into, if you will say it that way, our

personalized strategic approach to missions for a few years. We had been utilizing this biblical faith commitment approach to missions and our missions involvement and our missions giving had soared, and, uh, I got a call from a friend in Atlanta. Well, I knew him in college actually, and he leads a ministry out of Atlanta and he called me and said, "You know, your church is the shot heard around the world." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "What y'all are doing for missions, everywhere I go people have heard about it." Well, I had no idea, to be honest. But hopefully our example was something of a motivation or a stirring up of other churches to say where are we putting our missions outreach? How important is that to us? How faithfully are we financially to support it?

It's been, uh, some years ago and, uh, we had one of those tragedies in our area where some of our church members were physically affected and a person who had left our church, I might add, not in very good standing, uh, had heard about the tragedy in the area and somebody asked him about it and he said, "Oh, I'll guarantee you the Grace Life Church army will be there to take care of it." And I can tell you, that's exactly what happened. Our men showed up in droves and ministered and cared and helped those who were hurting. I'm so glad that even those who may not hold us in the highest esteem still would say those church members at Grace Life Church get after it when one of their own has a need.

And so that's the kind of thing that and that's not just true about us, I just know you better than most churches, but that should be true every church should want to be a model for others. Every church should want to hold up the standard so that others can be inspired by it. And Paul says, "Look, I know it's superfluous. I know I don't have to do that. I know you're ready to do it. But I'm writing this because other churches are watching you guys, other churches are watching you guys, and if you don't come through, how disappointing is that going to be for them and maybe even keep them from doing what they ought to be doing." So Paul writes the purpose is that it's an offering for missions and it's an offering that will give motivation to others because he said it's already doing that.

All right, II. The plan to raise the offering. Now I used the word raise on purpose because it's one thing to take an offering, it's another thing to raise an offering. And we notice there's quite a plan, a detailed plan that the Apostle Paul, you could call it a detailed campaign that the Apostle Paul has put together to make sure the church at Corinth really does this offering right and gives a generous love offering. Verse 3. Now I gotta back up because we have another one of those glorious conjunctive words that begins verse 3. First of all, verse 1, it's superfluous. "I don't have to ask you about it again. I know that." Verse 2, "I know you're ready. I get that." Verse 3, "But." But. It sounds like a parrot, doesn't it? Talking to your child and you know they're getting pretty good at something, their attitude has been right, but you know they can slip on you. "Now baby, I know you're gonna do this and I know you'll do what daddy says. But." Well, that's where Paul is. I love the Scriptures because you see the personality and the humanness of the whole setting and yet it's the perfectly inerrant inspired word of God at the same time.

He said, "Okay, but I have sent the brethren in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared." Now, the

brethren, we know refers back to some men back in, um, uh, chapter 8 that Paul has put together. The first one we know from chapter 8 is a man named Titus. I'm preaching through the letter Paul wrote to Titus regularly on Sunday morning, and Titus is something of a honored brother, has a strong reputation. He has, um, been involved in the church at Corinth quite a bit, so they're comfortable with him, and so Paul strategically thinks, "Hey, they really respect and they love Titus, so I'll send Titus as the leader of the preparatory team that's gonna go to Corinth and get this offering ready."

And then he says and we know from chapter 8, there's another one that who's just called a brother. He didn't tell who he is, but there's a brother who's going with Titus, and he's a man obviously of great administrative skill and he had, um, uh, uh, great potential. Well, I shouldn't say potential, but he was well-known as an evangelist. He had a great reputation for preaching the gospel and winning the lost. And then there was another brother mentioned in chapter 8 who was probably something of a Christian accountant. He was found diligent. He's very careful and very thorough in financial matters. That's my presumption from the way it describes him.

So we've got Titus, kind of the leader, and then with Titus is another team member, a brother whose got our strong reputation in evangelism, and then the third brother who has a strong reputation of organizing, probably accounting kind of, uh, expertise under his belt. So Paul says, "I'm sending this team of Titus and two other men to work with you to get ready to take the offering." And then in second, if you would, go back to chapter 8, we'll just look at verse 24, right quick. Chapter 8, verse 24, "Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you." So what he's saying to the church at Corinth is, "Now when Titus comes and the brother and the other brother, when those three come and they're gonna be working to get you ready, now you submit to these brothers and you honor these brothers and you listen to these brothers." That's basically what Paul is saying.

Uh, back to chapter 9 and notice in, uh, verse 5 he said, "I so I thought it necessary to urge the brethren," that's Titus and the two brothers, "that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your gift," he didn't say that, "your previously promised bountiful gift." Oh Paul, you're so you're so you're just not gonna let go are you? Last phrase of verse 5, "so that the same would be ready," here it is again, "as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness." What Paul is saying is, he said, "I, I know how the human flesh is. I know about our natural lazy streak. I know how we are all naturally stingy and selfish. I know you were enthusiastic. You wanted to get in on this offering. You you took the initiative about it. You said you would do something generous. But just in case, I'm sending some of my finest men, three of my finest, Titus and two other brothers, and they're going to get you prepared. They're not coming to get the missions gift. They're coming to prepare you to get ready to give the gift." That's a real key here. That's why it's called a faith promise or a faith commitment because you're not giving the money, uh, two weeks from today, that last Sunday of our conference, you're just giving an indication of what you're prepared to give. That's what the faith commitment is.

So he said, "I thought it necessary," verse 5, "to urge the brethren." It's it's an idea that he's pressing strong on Titus and the two brothers to go there and, look, he's saying, "Titus and brother and brother, don't you guys just go to Corinth and go through the motions and check off the boxes. Get excited about it, Titus. Get excited about it, brother and brother. And you go there, try to get those folks stirred up to do what they said they were gonna do." Have you ever made a faith commitment and then about September and October and November and January, what's that about 6-8-9 months into it, you were behind? Well, see, we need a team like Titus and the brother and the other brother to come along and say, "Now you said you're gonna do it, now let's let's get it going now." That's the way Paul is dealing with these guys.

And then of course, that simple phrase, the last part of verse 5, "to arrange beforehand." So Titus and the two brothers are not coming to take the offering, they're getting ready for it to be taken. They're in the process of, if you will, raising the offering, preparing beforehand. "Not affected by covetousness." And that can always be a problem, can't it? I remember hearing it described this way and I've used it several times, but it's like Titus and the brother and the other brother get to Corinth and, uh, like sometimes happens in our stewardship campaigns today, the the Stewardship Director will go house to house and talk to you about your commitment to maybe a a building program or something. So I can see Titus and the brother and the other brother going up to Mr. Brown's house. Knocked on Mr. Brown's door. Well, Brown had heard they were in town. Everybody knew it. Brown heard. Here's Titus, and here's the brother, the other brother, they've been they've been sent from Paul and it's about the missions offering. Well, Brown was a wheat farmer and Brown had just put his crop in the ground. You know there's two kinds of people that never have any money, those of us who don't have any money and those that have their money tied up everywhere. That's two kinds of people there usually are. So he knocks on Brown's door and Brown comes to the door, and he knows who it is. He opens the door and before Titus could say a syllable, Brown says, "Titus, I know why you're here. I know it's about the offering. I believe in it. I think we ought to do something generous. But Titus, I don't have anything available right now. I'll have to give you something later." He started to close the door and Titus sticks his foot in the door. "Mr. Brown, before you close the door, let me tell you I'm not here today to get any money." He said, "You're not?" And he said, "No. What I'm here today to do is to ask you to pray, and by faith think about what you can give maybe later on." He said, Mr. Brown said, "Well, oh that's different. Let me think about that. Well, you know what? We ought to give the best to the Lord. I've got hundreds of acres of wheat. I tell you what, there's 100 acres down by the creek and it's always the best. I tell you what, when the crop comes in, I'll commit whatever profits come out of that 100 acres down by the creek to the missions offering." And Titus got out his faith commitment card and Titus wrote on there "Mr. Brown, 100 acres of wheat when it comes in." He said, "Thank you, Mr. Brown." Put in his pocket. Went on down the road and comes to the next house.

It was Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith was a cattleman. He'd heard that Titus and the brother and the other brother were coming around and he was had knots in his stomach too. Titus knocks on the door. He opens the door. Mr. Smith opens the door. "Titus, I know why you're here. I agree with the offering. I was enthusiastic about it. I I appreciate what

you're doing, but I don't have anything today." He starts to close the door, Titus sticks his foot out, catches the door. "Mr. Smith, before you close the door, let me tell you, I'm not here today to get the money. This is this is just to get us ready. I want you by faith to think about what you might can do for the missions offering, and then we'll take it up down the road." He said, "Oh well, that's that's different." He said, "You know, I've I've got 100 head of heifers out there and I'll tell you what, I'll commit 10 calves. We have a a good good bunch coming along this year, I'll commit 10 of those calves and whatever they sell for I'll give that to mission." So Titus got out his Grace Life Church of Corinth faith commitment card and he put on there "Mr. Smith 10 calves." Working pretty good so far.

They go to the third house and Mr. Jones. Mr. Jones had heard Titus and the brother and the other brother were in town, had knots in his stomach. Aren't you glad I don't come knocking on your door? And, uh, who am I on? Mr. Jones. He comes to the door, "Titus, I know why you're here. I want you to know I believe in the I think it's a wonderful thing. I love my brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. Man, they were God's people who helped bring us the Messiah and we want to bless them back. Us Gentiles got the the Messiah through through the through, the Jews, and so we we want to do it, but I don't have anything right now. It's all tied up." He's a developer. So he said, "You'll have to come back later." Starts to close the door, Titus sticks his foot in the door. "Mr. Jones, you don't understand, we're not here to take the offering up, we're here to get ready for it. I want you what I want you do is is pray, ask the Lord, Lord in faith what might I be able to do later to give the missions." He said, "Well, that's different." He said, "I I do have a new shopping center I'm putting in south of Corinth. I'll tell you what, if that development goes through, I'm going to give a large percentage of the profits of that to missions." So Titus took out his Grace Life Church of Corinth faith commitment envelope and he wrote on there "Mr. Jones proceeds from a new development south of Corinth." Thank you.

That's what we're talking about. So a faith commitment offering is not cash. Now it is an envelope so you can put a one time gift in there to help offset the conference expense, but as far as your faith commitment gifts, that starts in April and you may give one gift in the whole year, you may give a gift every week, you may give it twice a month, but what I challenge you to do is reach out in faith and see how God might do it. You know, we've had a number of senior adults over the years who took a a part time job. They retired and they took a part time job and said whatever the Lord brings in through that, I'm gonna give all of that, a percentage of that to missions. That's the way the Lord might bring it. We had a man who restored cars and he said, "I'm gonna take one of the cars I'm gonna restore this year and whatever profit it brings in I'm gonna give that to missions."

Now I remember Brother Wayne Kraft. He was, uh, such a dear brother. Brother Wayne Kraft, uh, loved to fish. He was retired. Uh, he called himself a cop. I don't like using that word sometimes because I think it could be derogatory and so, but he called himself a cop. He said, "I was a cop from Detroit," and he's retired, moved back down here and, uh, it was time to give an offering here and he took the money he was going to buy a boat with and he committed it to the Lord's work. And he's told me, remember it very well, he said, "I had a dear, dear close friend of mine who had the nicest bass boat and never used

it. He came over and brought me the key and said this boat needs to run. I know you love to fish, take this boat and use it like it's yours."

Y'all remember the shanky Sharp? Was our mayor for a long time. Brother shanky Sharp has a similar testimony of looking out in faith and making a commitment not really sure how it might come in, and sometimes folks just do that. Now look, if we have writing on an envelope that looks like a 10 year old wrote it and it's for \$10,000, we may not count that one. So it's got to be within the realm of what God might do. Brother shanky gave a a commitment to his offering and he had been in a fender bender accident, some, actually I think it was a couple of years earlier and he'd already written it off like I'm gonna get nothing out of this, and he told me he went to his mailbox after he made the commitment and there was a check from the lady's insurance company that hit him that covered all that he had promised to give. That's what we're talking about. Reach out there and see what God might do. Now for a lot of us we give, uh, just give a gift and I know Pam and I through the years, um, back before we knew what a, uh, an emergency fund was, we just would try to put put an amount down not really sure how it was going to come in and God has always taken care of us.

So that was the plan. Titus and the brother and the other brother were going around. I gave you an illustration of how it might have happened. I doubt that's the way it happened, but it's an illustration of the idea of getting the people ready to give the offering. All right, III, and we only have three, all right? III. The principle that undergirds the offering, verses 6 through 8. And that's faith. That's faith. Notice what Paul says here at the end of verse, um, 8, our verse, let's see, we'll start in verse, um, 6. Well, actually the whole verse. "Now I say to you, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly," now that's in the context of giving to missions, "and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." In other words, if you don't do much, don't expect God to bless you back much. That's what Paul is telling the church at Corinth. If you don't get very excited about it, if your heart's not in it, and I've told you as your pastor many times, if it grieves you to give it then keep it. I mean, I don't mean that ugly. I mean, just just don't. If there's not something in you that says, "I want to get in on this," then do what you can do without grudging or compulsion, the text says, but understand that God has a quite consistent pattern that if you're generous toward what matters to him, he'll be generous back to you. The question is do you believe that? That's faith. Do you believe that? See, that's the principle that undergirds this whole thing. Do you believe that? Do you have that faith?

Well, in verse 7, "Each one must do just as he's purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion," don't look at your neighbor, even though it is biblical that one man can sharpen another or challenge or be an example for another in the area of giving, we need some of that, that's biblical, but he says at the end of the day it's your own choice, "not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Do you believe that? Do you believe that the special favor or blessedness of God shines on you when you're cheerfully and generously supporting what's important to God? And I'm telling you, the New Testament makes it explicitly clear there's nothing more important to God than spreading his gospel, winning the lost, and starting new churches. Do you believe

that? Paul says if you sow sparingly, you'll reap sparingly, if you sow bountifully, you'll reap bountifully, if you're generous and joyous it thrills the heart of God. Do you believe that? It takes faith.

Lastly, reiterating what he's really already said, each one verse 8 rather, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you so that always having all sufficiency in everything," in other words, in grace God can even make sure you get back materially what you need so, "that you may have an abundance," verse 8, "for every good deed." Do you have faith? Do you believe that? See, that's the key. That's the whole key. Do you believe that? It doesn't matter if all the other men in your small group are tightwads. It doesn't matter if the ladies in your prayer group don't view it that way. What about you? Do you believe that?

A word about faith before we go any further. Let's talk about that for just a moment. Hebrews 11:1 reminds us that, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." The King James Version says "the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen." That's not a bad translation, but I think the New American Standard fits modern English better. And while while this can be called, Hebrews 11:1, a definition of faith, it's also a description of what faith does. Did you hear me? It's a description of what faith does when it's in you. When faith is in you and God's truth comes out like I'm preaching this morning or maybe in your Bible study this week or Bible reading or Bible memorization and meditation this next week, the word goes in and the faith factor rises up and helps you be assured that's the truth and convicted that's right. But faith is the foundation thing. It's the foundational element otherwise it's just thoughts going in your head and going back out of your head. But faith grabs your heart and says, "I assure you this is true. This is right. I want to convince you this is right." That faith factor.

Faith is my proof that what the Bible says about me, about my Christ, about my walk with Christ, is right and true. Where's your faith? And see that's as a young pastor, I didn't grasp this like I should have. As a young pastor, I thought my job was to beat it into you. Think you still kind of seem like you do that some. Well, I don't mean to. I'm just excited about it. I just like what I'm doing. But as I grow older, I realize only the Holy Spirit of God in you can generate faith in you that brings you to say, "I want to assure you. I'm assured that's true. I'm convicted that's right." Isn't there something in you when we preach the glorious truths of Christ and the world would mock and scoff and ridicule and call us crazy, but there's something in us that says, "Amen. That's right." When the old book is preached and taught, something in me says, "I believe that." The faith factor. It's the assurance. Faith gives you an assurance it's true and a conviction, a proof that it's the right thing. After all, we are saved by faith. Ephesians 2:8 and 9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God," which includes the faith you believe with is the gift of God. It's the gift of God. Philippians 3:9, "and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ." The faith factor.

I did not see Christ die but faith assures me and convicts me he did die. I did not see Christ rise from the grave but God put something in me at the new birth that enables me in faith to say, "I'm assured and I'm convicted He did rise from the grave." I did not see Christ ascend into heaven. I cannot see him at the right hand of the Father. But something God put in there, it's called faith, rises up and says, "But I'm. I'm assured and I'm convicted He did ascend into heaven and He is seated at the right hand of the Father for me." I did not see my sin, guilt and punishment fall on Jesus on the cross but faith speaks to me and I'm assured that it did happen and I'm convicted it did happen. Aren't you glad for faith? Woo, what a gift that is. Brothers and sisters, I tried to read the Bible before I was converted but I had no faith factor. Just kind of generally agreed with it kinda, sorta sometimes, but it didn't it didn't start my soul. Are you with me? Didn't didn't grab my heart. I can only I can only shepherd effectively Spirit-reborn people. If the Spirit hasn't birthed you, I can't help you until the Spirit births you, at least as far as how to live as a Christian. I can help you perhaps urge you to come to Christ.

That's that's what faith does. That's what faith does when it's activated in our lives. We're saved by faith. Also, we serve by faith, of course. 2 Corinthians 5:7 tells us, "But we walk by faith and not by sight." Walk means our Christian walk, the totality of our lives flow under the faith factor. The totality of our lives. I go to work, "Well, how am I supposed to act at work, Brother Jeff? How are we supposed to do that?" The faith factor comes alive. "Oh, that's what the book says I'm to do." Or we going to school, young people, "Well, how am I supposed to act at school?" The faith factor rises up and says, "Oh, I'm supposed to do what this book says." Now the other kids at school might say, "Well, that's crazy. You don't have to believe it like that." That's okay, they don't have the faith factor. Faith rises up and says, "No, you're assured what the Bible says is the right thing." Moms and dads, whoever it is, wherever you are in life, the faith factor takes the word of God and you're assured it's the right thing and convicted it's the right way to go because it's in the old book.

The word speaks and the faith factor assures and convicts that we're on the right track, and then lastly, I love this one, we rejoice by faith. Faith is the element that undergirds everything about this faith commitment offering. We're saved by faith. We serve by faith and we rejoice by faith. You can't rejoice without faith. You see, my joy and my pleasure because of faith is not in God's stuff. Let me say that again: my joy and my pleasure is not in God's stuff because all the stuff I have is not really my stuff, it's God's stuff because I'm going to die and I don't have it no more. But it's still under his authority and control.

Remember how I've told you I have to pray and I have to pray this because not because I'm strong but because I'm weak and I forget. "Lord, I thank You for Your car You give me to drive. I thank You for Your house You let me live in. I thank You for Your clothes You let me wear. I thank You for Your hunting property You've given me to hunt on, hang out on." And you can go on and on and on. I have to do that to remind myself God's stuff is not my stuff and it's not my ultimate joy. I like to say it this way. I've said it many times, we can enjoy these common graces but we can enjoy them only if we know they're not our joy. Have you found through life that, I've been here a long time and I always

wanted a four-wheel drive truck. I just, I'm just that kind of guy. Mine had a lot of mud on it until yesterday about 5:30. I had to take it to the car wash because I didn't want y'all to see your pastor driving a truck with mud all over it. I always wanted a four-wheel drive truck and that and so many other things in my life when I still wanted it, but when God got me where I didn't have to have it then he gave it to me. Are you listening, church? It's astonishing how often God supplies even material things in the the common grace world. And they're not saying you don't want them or wouldn't like to have them, I'm just saying you get to the point where you're not, that's not your goal. I want to say to you, Grace Life Church, God's been working on me. He's been working. I've been your pastor 40 years and I thought I'd be spiritual by now, and I still have to repent and humble myself and get back in line again and he's just reminded me afresh, "I'm your joy. If everything else goes, I'm still here." And I am willing to say and I bore this testimony to you many times, I started with nothing, I may end with nothing, I don't know, but I'll still have him. I can rejoice in him. Psalmist said in Psalm 16:11, "In thy presence is fullness of joy, in thy right hands there are pleasures forever."

So by faith, this time of the year, I I purpose to take a portion of God's stuff he's given me and dedicate it to missions because in faith I believe it's right. Believe it's right. Now Satan in the world screams at me and my old, fallen, unredeemed nature, my old flesh screams too, "No!" But Satan's a liar. The world's a liar. The flesh is a liar. It takes faith to allocate a chunk of your wealth and give it to missions.

We, um, let me close just with this simple statement kind of bringing everything together. We here at Grace Life Church have a faith-based priority on missions. I I've said this to you before when I don't know how long ago we began having a major personalized strategic world missions effort but it's been a long time, many, many years, and I remember distinctly feeling in my heart when we would do it that I wasn't excited about it. But I just don't. I'm just not really excited about it. And this is back when we needed lots of stuff. This is back when we owed millions and millions and millions and millions of dollars and could have paid it off way early if we hadn't committed to missions the way we did. So it wasn't logical maybe from a human perspective, but we wanted to have a faith-based approach to missions and we tried to commit our hearts to say, "Let's let's try to put first what Christ says is first." For example, if you go out across just to say our Baptist churches, you'd be hard to find, it's really, really rare to find a Baptist church that has a regular annual missions emphasis of any kind, really. A very small percentage of churches spend more money on a mission's conference than any other event in the year, but we do. We spend way, way, way, way more on our True Church Conference, our mission conference, that we do anything else. Why? Because it's a faith-based approach.

Faith tells me that's right. That's the right thing and is it not, is it not amazing far from perfection, but trying to do that, how God's taken care of us here? Is it not amazing? Just the stuff that that we've we've, we don't owe any money. We don't have any debt. And we didn't have to rob missions to do it. Isn't it amazing? Could have been out of debt early if some of y'all give a little more along the way maybe, but I put myself in that camp too. In the average church, you might have one or two missionaries give some kind of report in a year. Brother Steve, we probably show 50 plus and take the conference and

all year long, 50 plus reports from missionaries. Why? It's a faith-based. It's the right thing and faith assures me it is and faith convicts me that it is. And I know I'm echoing your heart. Going into all the world to preach the gospel and establish biblically spiritually healthy local churches is the only command given in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts. No other command can I find is in the four gospels and in Acts. That's worded differently, but it's going to all the world, preach the gospel to all the nations. "You shall be my witnesses." Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, uttermost parts of the world. It's worded differently, but going everywhere to preach the gospel everywhere and bring the lost to Christ and form local New Testament churches is the one clear command in four gospels and in the book of Acts. And then you get the apostle to the Gentiles, the Apostle Paul and bless his heart, the only thing he does, the only thing Paul does is preach the gospel, get his associates to preach the gospel, win the lost, and constitute churches and go do it again, and go do it again, and go do it again until they lock him in prison and then he sent his guys out to go do it in his place.

So it's a high high priority on the heart of God and by faith it's a high high priority on our hearts. So this, what, two weeks from now when we come together, we'll on that Sunday wait till the last day, we'll receive this faith commitment offering and it's an envelope, so if you would prayerfully give a generous one time gift to help offset the conference expense. We, well our our guys come free, don't they, Brother Steve? Some guys paid who are not part of our partnership or plants or missionaries, but they come free. And so on the top line after you give the one time gift, you indicate the amount you're committing for this next 12 months beginning April 1st, and then the frequency of that amount, and when we total all of those up and we form our faith commitment world missions budget. And it's really amazing, um, what is it it? Let's say, you students, I want everyone of you students to do this. Don't think this is for mom and dad. I want you to think about it, students, and I think this really matters to the heart of God that you actually were willing to do this, you know, before you grew up and got married and all that stuff. Just wait a while with some of that, all right? But if you, if you gave up a soft drink a day for missions, that's about \$45 or \$55 a month that can go to missions. Just a Coke a day. Really amazing. See if you just think, "What what could I pledge that God might allow me to do?" And bless your heart, some of you moms, you're a single mom and goodness knows when eggs cost \$50.00 a dozen and gasoline, it's just, it's crazy. I know it's tough. But you do what you can do. And your \$25.00 a month is as much as one of these other brothers who might give \$20,000 a month in God's eyes. Can I get an Amen there? On faith.

This isn't new for me, and certainly not new for you but it's a reminder of who we are and what we are and what we're about. Faith-based commitment to world missions. "Well, pastor, I'm not excited about it." Doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. I'm not at times, but my faith tells me it's right. It's funny, when I when I when I do what's right, the excitement comes later. Some of you need to learn that about your marriages. You treat your spouse like you do love them, but you don't feel like you love them sometimes. You feel like you want to kill them sometimes. Not me, but you guys. But, you know, if you'll love them biblically and love them right, then you'll start feeling better toward them. The love emotion follows the commitment of love. And so it is in God's work.