

INTRODUCTION

We're in the second week of our stewardship emphasis called "For the Joy of All Generations." As you just saw in the video, we are faced with the wonderful opportunity of providing additional space for discipleship. It's going to cost about \$40 million. As I said last spring, "I've got good news and bad news. The good news is we already have all the money we need for this project. The bad news is it's still in your pockets."

Many people don't feel comfortable talking about money in the church, but when you examine the Bible, you discover there are over 2,000 references to money and managing God's resources. Someone once said there is more in the Bible on the topic of money than another other subject except God Himself.

A few weeks ago, I was talking to our Men's Fraternity group about managing money and I told the joke about different denominations of cash talking in a bank cash drawer one night. A hundred dollar bill spoke up and said, "Man, I've been having so much fun! Just last week I was in Paris, France where I was exchanged for some Euros to buy dinner at an expensive restaurant." The \$20 said, "Me too. I was in Las Vegas last week. You should have seen all the bright lights!" The \$10 bill piped in, "I know what you mean. I was at a college football game yesterday, and bought some peanuts and popcorn—it was great!" The \$1 bill was silent, until the \$100 said, "What about you, little brother?" The \$1 said, "My life is pretty boring actually. You know, church, church, church!" The \$100 said, "What's a church?"

I'm not worried about the money for this project, because I have a wealthy Father. In fact, the Bible says He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, and He owns the hills as well. Over the next few weeks, He's going to be speaking to His children about getting involved in what He is doing. As we move into this process, there are some very important dates I want to share with you:

(1) October 23-28 we've scheduled our home prayer meetings. Over the next week, we have scheduled 80 home prayer meetings in which members of our church will gather with their friends to seek God's face and pray for His blessings on this process. The most important thing we can do now is to PRAY. If you're a part of an SMBS, you've probably already been invited to a home prayer meeting, but if you'd like to attend one and haven't been invited, stop by the Bethany Suite after the service and I'll make sure you get a personal invitation to someone's home.

(2) November 4 is our "Bigger and Better" Garage Sale held by our Student Ministry to benefit For the Joy of All Generations. All of our Middle and High School Students were given a paper clip and were asked to "trade it" for something bigger and better. Michael G. traded a paper clip to me and I traded him a full set of golf clubs and bag. They haven't been working well for me lately, so I think I came out pretty good on the deal. This paper clip won't make me nearly as frustrated as those clubs! So, if the students come up to you, I hope you'll donate something of value to them.

(3) November 5, two weeks from today, is Vision Sunday and our children will be bringing their offerings forward that day to lead the way for our church and be the first to give. About two months ago, all of our children were given five \$1 gold pieces and were taught the parable of the talents. We've heard dozens of stories about how these entrepreneurial kids have multiplied their money.

Yesterday, Joshua L. had a dog wash and advertised it by asking, "Does your dog stink?" I think that guy has a future in marketing! Ashley and Anna O. bought silk roses and sold them at Men's Fraternity last Friday morning, and they have turned their \$10 into almost \$300! On November 5, our preschoolers will bring forward their banks, and the older kids will bring all the money they have earned and lay it before the Lord right here. It's going to be something you don't want to miss.

(4) November 12 is Commitment Sunday. I'm excited about our students and children, but they can't do this by themselves. If the rest of us will get as excited as they are, we will witness a miracle of generosity that will blow us away.

I'm asking every member and supporter of Green Acres to pray about participating in this miracle by doing two things: (1) I'm asking you to make a one-time sacrificial gift we're calling the Love Offering for Jesus. Will you pray about making this gift the largest sacrifice you have ever given to the Lord? By the way, this offering is not going to compete with our annual World Mission Offering, because we're going to take the first \$500,000 that comes in and send it directly to world missions. In addition to expanding our campus, we're also going to take about a million dollars of this offering to upgrade and relocate our Good Samaritan Outreach Center in North Tyler. This is our ministry to meet the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of people who are struggling to catch a break. So by giving to the Love Offering for Jesus, you're supporting world missions and helping the needy right here in East Texas at the same time.

(2) In addition to this one-time love offering for Jesus, I'm asking everyone to consider making a three-year commitment to give a regular amount to this building project over and above your tithe. This is going on a step of faith. You aren't signing a contract, and you'll never get a bill from the church, but by committing to give an amount in addition to your tithe regularly over the next three years, even a modest amount can multiply many times!

So please note these dates, and be ready to witness God's miracle of generosity! Now, let's turn our attention to the portion of God's Word that provides our theme, Isaiah 54:1-2: "Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband," says the LORD. Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, DO NOT HOLD BACK; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left." Then in the same vein of prophetic encouragement God says in Isaiah 60:15: "...for I will make you the everlasting pride and JOY OF ALL GENERATIONS." That's why we're calling this For the Joy of All Generations. Of all the words in that passage, there are four important words that grabbed my attention months ago: *Do not hold back*. As we think about this, let's consider three areas in our lives where God challenges us not to hold back.

1. GOD SAYS: DO NOT HOLD BACK IN YOUR PLANS!

Isaiah 32:8 says, "The noble man makes noble plans." Nineteenth century architect Daniel Burnham, who drew plans for the Chicago World's Fair and Union Station in Washington D.C. once wrote. "Make no little plans. Little plans have no magic to stir humanity's blood. And probably, little plans themselves will not be realized." When I first met with the Building

Committee two years ago, I only gave them one instruction: "Think big." I didn't want them to take any shortcuts, and I didn't want us as a church to dream too small. Why? Because the size of our plans says a lot about how big we perceive God to be. If we planned something we could reasonably pull off on our own strength and with little effort, we would be saying we didn't need God. And, in fact, small plans we make for our lives rarely put us in a position of total dependency on Him and they don't give us the opportunity to flex our faith muscles. Small thinking actually insults the greatness and majesty of who He is—the Alpha and Omega, the First and Last, the One with all of heaven and earth at His command.

I want to tell you about one of our students, Aaron, who showed he has faith in a big God. Remember I told you our students are trading up a tiny paper clip for something more and more valuable? When Aaron received his paper clip, he contacted one of the car dealers in town. I can just hear his conversation with the dealer, asking if they would like to please trade him a car in return for a paper clip! But guess what? Because he had big faith in a Big God, he got one. That's right, he got a great-running used car for his paper clip. Take a look—it's sitting out front of our church right now. It will be sold at the garage sale on November 4, and the value given to the building program. I *like* that kind of faith! Even more, I like what that kind of faith says to everyone about the kind of God we serve—He's BIG. And he wants us to not hold back when we come to him. The Bible says in James 4:2, "You do not have, because you do not ask God." People say you never know until you ask. I say you never know how big God really is until you ask Him to show you.

2. GOD SAYS: DO NOT HOLD BACK IN YOUR SACRIFICE!

"The End of the Spear" was in movie theaters awhile back and it told the true story of Nate Saint, one of several young and talented missionaries to the Auca Indians in Ecuador. In 1956, Nate (along with Jim Elliot and three others), were savagely killed by the very people they were trying to serve. But remarkably, some of the missionaries' wives returned to the tribe to continue the work their husbands started. Today the tribal leaders and many villagers are all believers. After his death, some of Jim Elliot's journals were published. As a student at Wheaton College, Jim wrote in his journal: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he can never lose." I cannot escape the fact the only One who has the integrity and veracity to tell us to not hold back is the One who did not hold back when He demonstrated His love for us. The Bible says in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God didn't hold back in his plans to save the world. He could have accomplished our salvation any number of ways; ways that did not cost nearly what He was willing to pay. After all, He is God—He could have sent an angel or a prophet in Jesus' place to be the sacrifice for sin, but the Bible says at the appointed time, God reached down into the depth of His own soul and sent His Son as the irreplaceable, invaluable gift all of humanity. Isaiah 59:15-16 says, "God looked and saw evil looming on the horizon— so much evil and no sign of Justice. He couldn't believe what he saw: not a soul around to correct this awful situation. So he did it himself, took on the work of Salvation, fueled by his own Righteousness." (*The Message*).

3. GOD SAYS: DO NOT HOLD BACK IN YOUR TRUST!

If we had hired a professional fundraiser for this campaign, they would have insisted the pastor stand up in front of the congregation and reveal how much he is personally giving to the campaign. I don't feel comfortable doing that. That's one reason why we DIDN'T hire any outside company to direct this campaign. It's being led by our own volunteers and staff.

I'm going to open my heart with you and share with you the sacrifice God has laid on Cindy's and my heart to give. But I'm not going to give you an amount. Because an amount may be a sacrifice for us, but may not be a sacrifice for you. It's important to remember this phrase: Not equal gifts but equal sacrifice.

As I share my testimony, I hope you hear my heart and understand I'm being more personal I usually care to be. My dad was a forester for International Paper Company for 20 years, then went into business for himself as a timber broker, negotiating contracts between timber owners and sawmills. My mother was a registered nurse. Our family was a typical middle class family. We didn't think of ourselves as poor but we certainly weren't rich.

After my older sister, my younger brother, and I were married, my parents settled in Mobile, Alabama. When my dad was in his mid 50s he developed cancer that soon spread to various parts of his body. He died in 1981 at the age of 58. During my dad's illness, my mom suspected she had a problem, too, but was too focused on caring for my dad in his last days to go to the doctor herself. Not long after my dad's funeral, my mom discovered she had an advanced case of breast cancer.

My mom came to live with us in North Alabama. During the last couple of years of her life, she was a member of my congregation, so I had the joy of being her pastor, which was a neat experience. By driving her regularly to Birmingham to get chemotherapy, I grew closer to her than at any time in my life. In 1984 after waging a valiant battle, she joined my dad in heaven.

My mom received some money from my dad's life insurance policy, but we spent most of it on her medical expenses before she died. She owned her home though. After she died, I was the executor of my mom's estate, and when I finished paying the outstanding bills, there was a cash amount left. We divided three ways between my sister, brother, and me. It wasn't a huge amount of money, but it was five figures, and it was more money than we had ever had in savings before.

Cindy and I immediately decided to invest the entire amount in an investment account to build up as a college fund for Jenni and Laura Grace. That was in 1984, and by the time Jenni was a senior in high school twelve years later, that fund had grown large enough to send Jenni to just about any school (except Harvard), and there would still be plenty for Laura Grace when she needed it four years later. But God is so good. Jenni was named a National Merit Scholarship Finalist. When she received that recognition we were happy, but I had no idea what it would mean in financial terms. She ended getting a full scholarship to the University of Oklahoma. So we hardly touched any of that money during her four years of school!

When Laura Grace graduated in 2000, the college fund contained enough for her to choose to go anywhere. She chose Baylor, which is a great school, but, as some of you know, is quite expensive. But, no problem, we had more than enough to cover her expenses. After one semester at Baylor, she decided it wasn't for her. She came home and worked for a year, then decided to go to U.T.

Tyler. Laura Grace was a National Merit Scholarship semi-finalist, so she received additional scholarship funds as well. U.T. Tyler is a great school, and when I wrote LG's first tuition check, I couldn't help smiling as I realized it is also one of the greatest educational bargains anywhere!

To fast-forward through this story, both our girls finished college and that college fund was still much larger than when it started! Cindy and I decided to keep this investment account as an emergency medical fund. I'm not a part of Social Security, because when I was ordained in 1973, the Supreme Court Decision of Roe vs. Wade had just been issued and I was opposed to using federal funds to pay for abortions. Pastors have a one-time window to opt out of Social Security within a year of being ordained, so I executed that option.

Whether or not that was a wise decision is yet to be determined, because since I opted out of Social Security, I will never be eligible for Medicare. So, Cindy and I designated that investment account for future medical emergencies.

A few months ago, as Cindy and I started praying about what to give to this building campaign, God began to direct my thoughts toward that account. Among married couples there is usually one who is more money-conscious than the other, and in our marriage Cindy is it. I was a little afraid to mention to Cindy giving the full amount, but when I finally did she said, "Oh, God already told me that from the first!" So, when it comes time for us to make our one-time sacrificial gift to the Love Offering for Jesus on November 12, we're going to surrender that account as our one-time gift to the Lord. Then, in addition to that one-time gift, we're going to pledge to give another amount equal to 50% of that fund over the next three years.

When we give this one-time gift, we're actually going to directly transfer all the securities directly from that account to Green Acres. I don't mean to sound like an infomercial, and I'm certainly not an accountant, but we learned if we sold the fund and gave the proceeds to the church, then we would have to pay capital gains tax on the amount the fund has grown. But the IRS has made it possible for people to maximize their gifts to the Lord by giving appreciated assets directly to the church. When you do this, you get the full value of your stock, bonds, mutual funds, or real estate, and you don't pay any capital gains tax on it.

I'm happy to tell you when we first considered giving this fund; it was a little scary, because we all like to "save for a rainy day." I remember hearing Jack Taylor talk once about the danger of hoarding God's money. He said, "If you're saving for a rainy day, God may just make sure you have one!" I don't really believe if you don't give God will getcha' but I wondered why I was trusting that account instead of trusting God.

The amount we're giving isn't the issue. You just need to know we're giving an amount that, for us, sacrifices the security and comfort of knowing that money was there in case we needed it in retirement. We've simply decided to trust God rather than this savings fund. It's a liberating, joyful experience to give it to the One who is going to meet all our needs through His riches in Christ Jesus.

By giving this gift to the Lord, it pleases me to know this fund began with the money I inherited from my parents 22 years ago. It makes me smile to think that in my mind, my parents in heaven

are participating in this great project of providing space for this church to reach and disciple more people. In fact, we're going to designate this gift in memory of Orlo and Bess Dykes. It's in memory of my parents, but it's in *honor* of Jesus Christ. That's why we're calling this offering the love offering for Jesus.

That's all I'm asking you to do. Get alone with God and ask Him how He wants you to participate in what He is doing here in East Texas and around the world. This is a time when we get to reexamine our lives and see if we really trust God, or if we are trusting in our own resources. God isn't impressed with the dollar amount you give; God most cherishes our trust.

In his book, *Ruthless Trust*, Brennan Manning wrote: "The splendor of a human heart that trusts and is loved unconditionally gives God more pleasure than Westminster Cathedral, the Sistine Chapel, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Van Gogh's Sunflowers, the sight of 10,000 butterflies in flight, or the scent of a million orchids in bloom. Trust is our gift back to God, and He finds it so enchanting that Jesus died for love of it."

As we move toward Commitment Sunday in three weeks, I want to remind you of the four stakes of trust that are our fundamental convictions for this campaign. As you are praying, and seeking God's face, it would be good if you would memorize these four convictions. Or at least, take them and read them aloud each time you pray.

They are:

(1) God knows what the need is; and He can meet it

As I explained last week, we are out of space for discipleship. God wants more children in His family, and we've got to make a place for them.

(2) If I ask Him, God will tell me what part of that need He wants to meet through me

It wouldn't tax God a bit to do all of this by Himself. But He allows you to be a part of His miracle because He wants to teach you something. Simply ask Him and He will tell you what part you will be blessed to give. And He will provide it.

(3) What God lays on my heart to give will cause me to depend totally on Him

If you come up with an amount you can handle on your own, remember: chances are you haven't heard from God. When you make big plans for a real sacrifice, you will have to depend on a big God in order for it to happen.

(4) When I give what God tells me, I get the joy and He gets the glory

There is no greater joy in life than fully obeying what God asks. And in the process, you give more glory to God with your simple act of obedience than you can imagine.

When Texas pastor Jim Denison was in college, he served as a summer missionary in East Malaysia. While there he attended a small church. One day during a service, Denison happened to notice some worn-out luggage leaning against the wall in a corner of the church. When the pastor finished his sermon, he extended an invitation for people to receive Christ. A teenage Malaysian girl made her way down the aisle to announce her decision to follow Christ and be baptized. As was their tradition, they baptized the girl and a few others who had decided to trust Christ at the end of the service. Jim remembered the luggage he'd seen earlier and asked the pastor about it as he was leaving the baptistry. The pastor pointed to the young teenage girl who had just been baptized and told Denison, "Her father said that if she was baptized as a Christian she could never go home again. So she brought her luggage."

The most loving Father in the universe is completely trustworthy and He has your best interest in mind. He is asking you today, "Do you love me enough to trust me at any cost? Do you know I have big plans in store for you?" Over the next few weeks, when God lays on your heart what He wants you to do, I just have four words for you: *Do not hold back.*

OUTLINE

- (1) October 23-28 Home meetings
- (2) November 4 Bigger and Better Garage Sale
- (3) November 5 Vision Sunday—children bring their offerings
- (4) November 12 Commitment Sunday

- (1) Love Offering for Jesus
plus
- (2) Three-year commitment

God says:

1. DO NOT HOLD BACK IN YOUR PLANS!
2. DO NOT HOLD BACK IN YOUR SACRIFICE!
3. DO NOT HOLD BACK IN YOUR TRUST!

Stakes of Faith:

- (1) God knows what the need is; and He can meet it
- (2) If I ask Him, God will tell me what part of that need He wants to meet through me
- (3) What God lays on my heart to give will cause me to depend totally on Him
- (4) When I give what God tells me, I get the joy and He gets the glory

"Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband," says the LORD.

Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, DO NOT HOLD BACK; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left." *Isaiah 54:1-2*

"...for I will make you the everlasting pride and JOY OF ALL GENERATIONS." *Isaiah 60:15*



DISCLAIMER: These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. There is no legal copyright on this material. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes