

INTRODUCTION

I'm always amazed at the how desperate some people are to find spiritual truth. James Arthur Ray is a self-help guru who has written a book entitled, *Harmonic Wealth: The Secret of Attracting the Life You Want*. He leads "spiritual awakening" seminars at his retreat near Sedona, Arizona. He calls it a "Spiritual Warrior" program. Ray holds these retreats regularly and the 60 participants had paid \$9,700 each (that's \$580,000) for the privilege of fasting for 36 hours and then spending several hours in a sweat lodge. As you know by now, tragically, two people died in the sweat lodge and now a third has died. James Arthur Ray, who is a regular guest on Oprah, was sitting in the lodge near the opening where there was fresh air, and when he realized there was a problem, he quickly left and didn't return. When one of the participants, an orthodontist, tried to perform CPR on the unconscious victims, some of Ray's teams stopped her, claiming this was part of their purging process.

Within days of the sweat lodge fiasco, Ray was back teaching his wealth-producing seminar. This past Tuesday he posted this statement on his blog: "I have chosen to continue my work. It's too important not to. I have taken a lot of heat for that decision..." In light of what happened in that sweat lodge I'd say using the phrase "taking a lot of heat" is a poor choice of words!

This tragedy proves that Americans are so desperate for spiritual truth that they will follow anyone who claims to offer them a spiritual awakening, even if it costs them thousands of dollars and leads to their death. You don't have to pay \$10,000 and sit in a sweat lodge to find spiritual truth; you only need to look to Jesus. John 15 is one of my favorite chapters in the Bible. To have a relationship with Jesus you simply need to accept three invitations that He offers. First He says, "Come unto me"—that's salvation. Then He says, "Follow me"—that's discipleship. Then He says, "Abide in me"—and that's the Spirit-filled life.

John 15 is all about abiding in Jesus. Then in verse 9 Jesus shares about the joy of the Spirit-filled life.

John 15:9-13. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

The phrase I'd like for us to focus on is "that your joy may be complete." What does it take for you to have complete joy? Jesus said a life of sacrifice is a life of joy. When you allow the joy of Jesus to fill you, then you will be laying down your life for others. In this message I want to talk about how you can live a life of joy by making a sacrifice for others.

At Green Acres we are committed to reaching people for Jesus Christ and training them to become fully devoted followers of Jesus. In order to do this, we need physical facilities like buildings and parking lots. As you saw in the video, Green Acres has grown through the years because we have been committed to provide the facilities for growth so we can reach and disciple more and more people.

Five years ago we started planning the largest expansion project in our history. We knew we needed more parking and more space to train children and adults to be disciples of Jesus. Before I knew what the building plans actually were, God laid a passage of scripture on my heart to use as a theme for this project. It was from Isaiah 54:2. I had no idea at the time how this passage of scripture would fit perfectly with the building plan our Building Committee would develop. God said through the prophet Isaiah, “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 that’s what we did by adding the Lighthouse] and to the left.” That’s what we’re doing with the Crosswalk Conference Center. Then God says, “I will make you the everlasting pride and the joy of all generations.” (Isaiah 60:15)

Three years ago we launched a campaign called “For the Joy of All Generations.” And now we face the opportunity to Complete the Joy. There will be a lot of joy when we finish this project, but I believe our joy won’t be complete until we pay for it.

As we face the challenge of complete the joy I want to remind you of three very important Biblical principles about God and giving:

(1) GOD KNOWS WHAT THE NEED IS, AND HE CAN MEET IT

God always knows what we need. When Jesus was teaching on prayer He said, “Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” (Matthew 6:8) Five years ago, we honestly heard God’s voice telling us to “Enlarge the place of your tent.” He knew there would be a recession when none of us did. But do you think God is wringing His Divine hands and saying, “Uh, oh! My family called Green Acres needs \$15 million! Oh, what in the world am I going to do?” No. There’s no recession in heaven. God still owns the cattle on a thousand hills and the hills themselves, plus all the gold and oil and gas below those hills. If God wanted to, He could just write a check for the full amount and just drop it from heaven, but He’s not going to do that. We’ve got to remember that God owns everything; we’re merely managers, or stewards, of what rightfully belongs to God.

How many of you believe God has more than enough resources to meet this need? Of course He does! And He has entrusted those resources to His children. The second principle is:

(2) IF I ASK HIM, GOD WILL TELL ME WHAT PART OF THAT NEED HE WANTS TO MEET THROUGH ME

Do you believe if you ask Him, God will tell you? Here’s His promise: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” (Jeremiah 33:3 NKJV). If someone asks me, “Pastor, how much should I give?” I won’t answer that question. Instead I’ll tell you to ask God what represents a sacrifice for you. You see, God has blessed all of us in different ways.

Will you pause right now and simply ask God to show you what part of this miracle of generosity He wants you to play? He will give you an amount, and you may not like it at first;

that's a clear indication it came from God and not from your own ability. Why? That leads to the next principle:

(3) THE AMOUNT THAT GOD REVEALS TO ME WILL REQUIRE ME TO DEPEND ON HIM

The definition of a sacrifice is when we give something we value. As you ask God to reveal what is a sacrifice to you, it won't be an amount you can give and it won't really affect you. But a sacrifice means you are stretched beyond what is comfortable, and if you give it, you will be forced to depend on God to supply your needs.

Someone may look at this need and say, "Pastor, it is simple math. We have 15,000 members. If we just ask everyone to give \$1,000, then you have the \$15 million." Do you know what's wrong with that picture? First, most of those 15,000 never give a dollar to the Lord. Second, there are some of you who couldn't scrape up \$1,000 without going deeper in debt. And for others of you, \$1,000 isn't very much at all—you spend more than that at one weekend attending a Dallas Cowboys game. So, our approach isn't equal gifts but equal sacrifice. And I believe if you ask God, He will reveal an amount to you that represents a true sacrifice. I want to share with you what we are hoping to accomplish through Complete the Joy.

(1) OUR GOAL: To eliminate/reduce the debt on our \$40 million construction project

When we completed "For the Joy of All Generations" exactly three years ago, our members pledged to give about \$21 million over this three-year period. Since then, we have actually been able to receive and spend over \$24 million on this project. And remember, we devoted the first \$1.5 million to missions, to our World Mission Offering and to purchase the New Good Samaritan Outreach Center.

As the money has come in, we had money available before construction bills were due so our Finance Committee has invested it in very safe short-term investments. We didn't invest any of it with Bernie Madoff, by the way. And over the past three years we've been able to earn \$473,000 in interest! We started borrowing money last spring and as of this past month we have paid about \$65,000 in interest, so we are still ahead in the interest comparison.

We knew as we proceeded with this construction we would face the possibility of borrowing money, and I want to assure you we are fully prepared to assume this debt and to pay it off over a period of 10-15 years. We have budgeted wisely so we will continue our same level of excellence in ministry and missions while we service this debt.

Let me assure you, we are NOT in any financial trouble. God has blessed our church financially and He continues to do so. God's Word doesn't forbid debt, it warns against unmanageable debt that enslaves. Our debt is manageable.

To give you a frame of reference, in 1960, when Cecil Johnson was pastor here, Green Acres undertook a HUGE challenge of building what we now call the Chapel. A few of you were around back then. The church was only five years old and had about 700 members. The

sanctuary was going to cost a whopping \$400,000—and that amount was five times the annual budget of Green Acres at the time. If we end up with a debt of \$15 million, that is roughly equal to one year's budget. If we facing a debt five times our budget, it would be \$70 million!

Four years ago at our 50th Anniversary Celebration, Cecil told me over lunch that many people in the church and community were upset that Green Acres was spending so much money on a building. He said some members even left Green Acres over it. But now, nearly fifty years later, it's clear these spiritual forefathers were wise to build for the future. Today Green Acres wouldn't be the church we are, giving millions to missions and sending people around the world for Jesus if those people hadn't been willing to step out in faith. You may be asking, "Pastor, if we can manage this debt, WHY do we want to pay it off?" Here's the answer:

(2) OUR PURPOSE: To honor God by using His money for Missions and Ministry instead of interest

We don't have anything against Southside Bank. In fact, we love those folks. They're our friends and they have generously given us a very favorable interest rate on our line of credit. But what they're giving us isn't a donation (or a bailout) they want all that money back and not just the amount they loan us: They want more back! But Southside Bank is doing well, and they don't really need this money—they want it—that's what banks do, but they don't need it.

But millions of lost people around the world NEED what this money can do by sending missionaries to the people groups in remote places who have never heard the name of Jesus. There are people right here in East Texas who need to learn about Jesus. I'm convinced we can be better stewards of God's money by using it for missions and ministry rather than paying interest. Most churches would simply move on from this point and service the loan for the next 10-15 years.

But Green Acres isn't most churches.

From the beginning, Green Acres has been a congregation with a vision to reach the entire world with the gospel. That's why I'm calling on us to pay as little on interest as possible because that just means more dollars get to go directly to ministry and missions.

When people all across this community and this country heard that God had blessed us to be able to move into this building, and into the Lighthouse debt free, the one thing I heard most was "Wow! God is really up to something in that church." In other words, God got the glory, we didn't. And that's what my prayer is for this project, that we would make the name of Jesus famous by allowing Him to perform a miracle of generosity again.

(3) OUR PLAN: On or before November 1, EVERYONE make a sacrificial gift—regardless of the amount

I especially want to encourage our new members to make a sacrificial gift to Complete the Joy. In the little downtown area where I grew up, cars parked diagonally and there were parking meters in front of each space. The only parallel parking place in town was at the high school so

driver's ed students could practice. My mother was pretty frugal, so when she was looking for a parking place she would pass two or three good ones because she was looking for a parking meter that still had some time on it. When she found one, she'd pull in and say with a smile, "Let's park on someone else's nickel." Most of the time we got to park on someone else's nickel—and that was a good feeling.

I have a word for those of who have started attending Green Acres in the past three years: You're parking on someone else's nickel—in this case, someone else's millions. You get to enjoy the facilities and ministries of this church because a couple of generations of people have given sacrificially to make it possible for Green Acres to continue to grow. If at any point, these folks had said, "You know, our church is big enough, we don't need new facilities," I believe Green Acres would be a sad, dying church instead of the vibrant, growing congregation that we are today. You're parking on someone else's nickel, so now it's your time to help out, not just for now, but for future generations.

We're aren't going to launch another intensive fund raising campaign, I'm just letting you know about the need and I'm simply asking that *all* of us to give something. Those who are rich: Give something. Those who are poor: Give something. It's going to take all of us sacrificing together to make this happen.

If everyone gives something, regardless of the amount, I believe we will witness a miracle of generosity. Parents, I want to encourage you to help your kids earn some money so they can give to Complete the Joy. The amount isn't as important as the fact that they can be a part of a miracle. If you don't think you can afford to give anything, contact me and I will personally give you \$10 so you can make an offering to complete the joy. I'm so serious about everyone making an offering, because I don't anyone to miss out on the joy. I really believe it's going to take every one of us giving something if we are going to see a miracle of generosity. Even if it's a little, a little can become much when God is in it!

One of our core values at Green Acres is that everyone matters to God and everyone has a job to do for the Lord. You may not think you have much to give, but your gift of money and your gift of service is more valuable than you will ever know until you get to heaven.

Many Sunday mornings, when I arrive, I'm greeted by the smiling face of a young boy who opens the door so I can walk in. His name is Parker Noble. Parker and Tyson are Jeff and K'Linn's sons. Parker has cerebral palsy. But he doesn't let a little thing like that stand in his way. You can often find him at that door, pushing the button and smiling and greeting people as they come to church. Parker is a perfect example of someone who can't do a lot of things, but what he *can* do; He does for the glory of God. He serves the Lord with gladness, and he is a blessing to my life.

What about you? What if everyone in our church had the same attitude of service and generosity that Parker has? I believe we'd see God do amazing things in our church, including completely paying off this \$15 million debt.

CONCLUSION

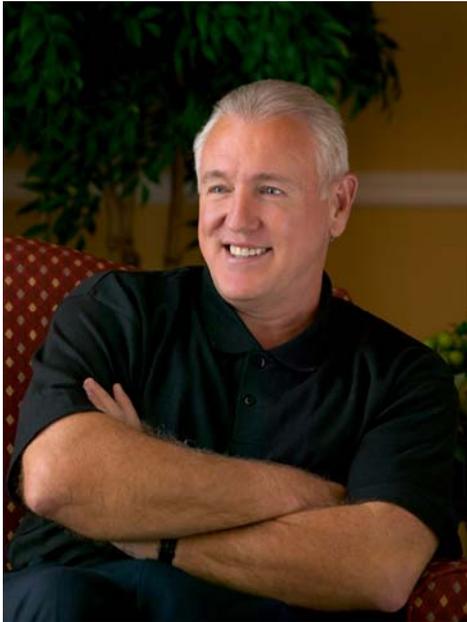
My heroes in life aren't people like Tiger Woods or Michael Jordan. My heroes are people like Parker Noble, and people Lonnie and Janelle Doyle. For over fifty years the Doyles served as Southern Baptist Missionaries on the Amazon. They retired to Tyler and 11 years ago we were in the middle of a fundraising campaign called Discover the Joy to build this Worship Center. People were making amazing sacrifices. We had people giving shares of stock, shares, houses, land, boats and cars. Michelle Stevenson even donated her wedding ring, and when someone heard of her sacrifice they redeemed it. In other words, they paid more than the price of the ring as a donation and then gave it back to her.

Lonnie and Janelle didn't have much money, but they made a sacrificial gift to Discover the Joy. We had a special service at the Oil Palace and had a huge crowd of over 3,000 people attended! Lonnie went to heaven seven years ago and after he died, Janelle continued to serve the Lord here by faithfully teaching a Sunday Morning Bible Study class. A few months ago she moved to Arkansas to be closer to her family. I still have Lonnie's solid gold tie pin. It weighs at least an ounce, and gold is selling for around \$1,000 an ounce. But rather than selling this and donating \$1,000 to Complete the joy, I believe there are folks in our congregation who would like to redeem it for Janelle at an extravagant price, not just one of us, but many of us. If you'd like to help redeem this tie pin, just write on your envelope "tie pin" or "for the Doyle's" or "for the missionaries" and we'll get the idea. I plan on delivering this pin to Janelle, and I'd love to tell her their original gift to Discover the Joy has resulted in thousands and perhaps millions of dollars given for God's glory. Will you help me redeem this little piece of gold? Little can become much in God's hands.

When you make a sacrificial gift to God, He doesn't get your money, He gets something more valuable to Him: He receives glory and honor. And what do you receive? You receive the joy. So He gets the glory and you get the joy.

So, all I'm asking you to do is to get alone with God and ask Him to give you an amount that for you and your family represents a sacrifice. Then let's stand back and see what God can do! If you will make a sacrifice, I promise your joy will be complete!

— MESSAGE DISCLAIMER —



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes