



BelPres Church

Where is Your Heart?

Exodus 36:1-7; Matthew 6:19-34

Speaker: Dr. Scott Dudley

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Well, hello, it is great to see all of you guys here, and I want to say hello to those of you who are joining us online as well. Thank you for being here for worship today.

So, the Mariners. It has taken me this long to be able to process it and talk about it, right? And I'm sad that they didn't go to the World Series. But what a great year, right? Like, what a great year. Like, when they won the AL West, you know, I got kind of emotional. I think there was even a little tear that was forming in my eyes, right? When Gino Suarez hit the game-winning home run and won game five of the ALCS, again, I got kind of choked up. When they lost game seven, I did not get choked up. I had other emotions. But, you know, it was a great year. And the good news is, our record is still intact. We are the only team in baseball never to have lost a game in the World Series. We've never gone, but that's beside the point. You can't lose if you don't go. So we've got that.

But those times that I kind of got emotional, each time I'd ask myself, why? Like, why? Like, the outcome of these games have no real impact on my life whatsoever in any real way. Why did I get emotional? And I think it's because Christina and I have invested a lot of time watching Mariners games. We've invested money going to Mariners games. And because we've invested in them, we're attached to them. Because what we invest in is what we love.

Jesus puts it this way, do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moths and vermin destroy, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. For

where your treasure is, there your heart will also be. That should be kind of a sobering verse. Where we put our time, money, and influence, our TMI, if you will, our hearts will follow what we invest in. Which means we need to be really careful what we invest in, because that will shape our hearts and our loves and our character. If we invest a lot in our career, too much in our career, there our hearts will also be. If we invest too much in getting people to like us and think good thoughts about us, there our hearts will also be. So the question is, where do you want your heart to be? Because we can kind of guide that by how we invest our time, our money, and our influence.

Last week, I unveiled eight projects that our elders through prayer and fasting have discerned God is calling us to do. And if you weren't here last week, please get online, watch that sermon, because there's lots of information I won't be able to repeat today. There's also a guide you can get on the way out. There's information on our website. There are people in the lobby with a badge that says Ask Me. And then next week, we'll have a Q&A session after our 9 o'clock and after our 11 o'clock services.

But just to review briefly, eight projects in three categories. First, three projects in discipleship. Word and Spirit, which will include opportunities for deeper Bible teaching, discovering our spiritual gifts, as well as an expanded prayer team. Anchor in Flame is a spiritual coaching program where we will train people who are mature in their faith to mentor and coach people who are growing in their faith. This is a game changer. I mean, my life was changed not just by books or sermons, it was changed by mentors. I had some really great mentors who helped me experience Jesus' power in every aspect of my life. And a church where this is happening, where there are mentoring and mentees and people, everyone's growing, man, that is a church that scares the devil.

And then the third project is, we're calling One Roof Gatherings, they won't be on Sundays, but somewhere else in the week, where all of our communities, African, Chinese, modern, sanctuary, will share a meal together around tables, will worship, will have communion, and also a chance for some deeper Bible teaching, because that helps us learn. To learn about Jesus, to see Jesus through different cultural or generational lenses expands our knowledge of him, because we get to see different perspectives of who he is. Those are the discipleship things.

Then there are two projects involving our building. One is to expand the lobby out into the courtyard to create more space for community, do some upgrades to modern worship, create a permanent prayer room. And then the second project having to do with our building is to create affordable Christ-centered

preschool and childcare for low-income families in our region, which will help them get a hand up financially that they desperately need, and it will introduce them to Jesus, because it will be Christ-centered. Those are the two building projects.

And then there are three projects for our region and world. One is to create affordable housing, short-term and long-term housing for refugees and asylum seekers, some of whom are part of our church in our East African Fellowship New Hope Revival. This would include us buying houses, buying apartment complexes to create long-term solutions to housing. Second is to expand our ministry to refugees by putting teams of people around them to support them and advocate for them. And then third is to participate in a once-in-a-generation movement of God amongst Muslim refugees in Europe who are becoming Christians by the thousands. And many of them are going back to the countries they escaped from, Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, places like that, to tell people there about Jesus because they're so excited about him, even at the risk of prison or even being killed, sometimes by their own family, because that's how fired up they are about Jesus. And as a result, Christianity is growing very quickly in places like Iran. So quickly, it is possible that the Middle East will be majority Christian by the end of the century. We're going to support those Muslim background pastors with humanitarian aid, training, and equipping. Those are the eight projects. And these are on top of all the good things we're already doing, which we'll keep doing, because they matter. This is BelPres Unleashed to bring even more of Jesus' healing.

And to get all that done, we're not going to do it through a capital campaign where everyone gives some extra money for three or four years, and then it's over, no, no. The invitation is, if you are not tithing, tithe means to give 10% of time, money, and influence to the church you're a part of. If you're not doing that, the invitation is to begin to tithe or get as absolutely close to it as you can. And if you are tithing, the invitation is to give even a greater percentage, higher than 10% to this church and or give some large four, five, six, even seven figure gifts to help with the building projects and the housing projects. It is a big vision. But as I told you last week, I know your heart and I know you wouldn't be in this church if you didn't want to be challenged.

And what this is really about, what this is actually, the projects are important, but what this is really about is discipleship. Discipleship is the process by which we become more like Jesus. God doesn't use us to get projects done. He uses projects to get us done. And I think these projects can help get us done. And it's also about being unleashed. And I know from my own life, as well as the life of so many others, and this is where the tithing, time, money, influence comes

in, one of, if not the best way to be unleashed from money worries is to tithe. And one of the best ways to discover that God is real is to tithe, because we see him provide, and we know he's there.

So, when we talk about this, don't hear guilt and obligation, mm-mm, hear freedom, and God's power unleashed in your life. And for this sermon, I'm gonna talk mostly about money. We'll talk about time and influence in an upcoming sermon. And I know pastors talking about money. I know it's suspect, and there's just lots of questions around that. I get that some pastors have been unethical in how they do that, but honestly, BelPres, from my heart, and I mean this, it's not about raising money. Tithing is not something God wants from us. It's something He wants for us, because it sets us free. And one of the most significant things in my spiritual growth, as well as just growth as a human being, was learning to tithe. It is transformational, which is why the Bible commands it.

And here's just a few verses where the Bible says to tithe. There's more. I could have had a couple more slides of this. Whatever you want to say about it, it's all over the Bible. And just by the way, if you find yourself looking at those verses and going, I don't know, and trying to explain them away, and like, I don't think it really says that, why are you working so hard? Why are you working so hard? To say it doesn't say what it says.

And 10% is what the Old Testament talks about. The New Testament says giving should be sacrificial, which for my wife and me, at our income level, means we give 10% to this church, and then over and above that to other Christian organizations. And because of these projects, we'll now be giving 10%, even more than 10% to this church, and a large gift on top of that. We'll increase our percentage to this church and a large gift on top of that.

And I know some of you right now might be in difficult financial circumstances. Maybe you're laid off. So for now, you're not going to be able to give as much money, but maybe you can give a little more time or some of your influence. But here's what's important. Tithing is a blessing. Tithing is a blessing. So let me give you just two of many reasons that I and lots of other people love to tithe.

Okay, I love to tithe because first, it unleashes us from the grip time, money, and influence have on us. Three of the idols that we hang on to most fiercely, and as a result, they hang on to us, and they become leashes. We worry about money. We overpack our schedules. We're anxious about our reputation and our influence, and what other people think of us. And those things are leashes and

they bind us. And the best way to be unleashed from those idols is to give some of them away for God's purposes.

My wife and I started tithing when I was in graduate school, and we had like nicks to nothing. But we discovered two things. First, we discovered that God provides, which unleashed us from money worries because we see that He's real and that He provides, and we can trust in that. And then second, we discovered we could be happy on less money than we thought we needed to be happy. Because it turns out getting everything we want is not good for us. And that unleashed us from constantly wanting more and more, and the next thing, and the next thing, because that never ends, and that's a leash. And it's the same with time and influence.

When I spend my time or my influence on God's purposes, it's way more rewarding than if I spend those on something else.

Second reason I love to tithe is because I get to be part of what God is doing, which is more rewarding than getting all the things that I think that I have to have or that I want. There are cars I never bought. There are vacations we never took. There are clothes I don't buy. I have like four shirts that I wear over and over. And that's an upgrade. It used to be two, right? And sometimes people just give me clothes, I think, out of pity. Like, Scott, here, you're so pathetically dressed. Have some clothes. I don't care. I'd way rather invest that money and time into being part of what God is doing.

In the Bible, when it was time to construct the tabernacle, the building the Israelites would worship in, it says this: everyone who was willing and whose heart moved them came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work on the tabernacle. And the people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning. So all the skilled workers said, the people are bringing more than enough for doing the work. So then Moses gave an order: no man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary. And so the people were restrained from bringing more. What a problem to have, right? They gave too much. May we be afflicted with such a problem here. But it wasn't that a guilt or obligation or duty. It was a blessing to give.

Centuries later, when the temple needed to be repaired, which is like every pastor's worst fundraising nightmare, like maintenance, repair, right? They're like, hey, we got some plumbing problems. You want to give some more money? Not inspiring. But it says all the people brought their contributions. What's that word there? Gladly. They gladly contributed to these buildings because they're

excited about how the buildings would provide space for people to worship God together in community.

By giving to these eight projects, we get to be part of creating space for community by expanding that lobby. One of the questions that got asked last week was, is it biblical to spend 15 to 16 million dollars to expand that lobby when that money could help people in other ways? I am so glad to be in a church that asked that question. Thank you. And I share the sentiment. Some pastors love to build buildings. I don't. That's not my thing. I want to help people in other ways, which we do a lot of here. We help a lot of people here and around the world. We're going to keep doing that. We're going to do more of that. But I also know that community changes lives.

And those passages I just read, as well as a lot of other passages in the Bible, show that building from time to time is biblical. There's a lot of building going on in the Bible. Because worship and community matters. One of the best ways of creating community is to be able to sit around a table together and eat together. Like, we need to get back to the good old-fashioned church potluck with the green jello and the bananas and the little oranges. And some of you know what I'm talking about, and others of you are too young to know what I'm talking about. And that is a tragedy. We are failing to pass on the essential things to other generations.

And the best time to do that in our context is Sunday morning, when you all are here, because you all are too busy the rest of the week to come back. So that lobby would allow us to be big enough we could on a Sunday after church sit around tables, eat together, have community together. And we just happen to live in a place where it's very expensive to build anything. Like seriously, try to build an outhouse. It will cost you \$5 million. Like everything is super expensive here. But it is important to have a place for community that becomes the heartbeat of our campus, and a permanent prayer room, and a place where during the week people can come and have Bible studies and all of that.

So that in our lonely, isolated on-screen culture that's dividing and depressing us, we get back to being human beings together. And that's not the only thing we're doing. By giving to these eight projects, we get to be part of lifting families out of poverty by giving them affordable child care, which is a huge need, and introduce them to Jesus at the same time. We get to be part of transforming the Middle East. I do not want to sit that one out. I don't want to be on the bench for that one. I want in that game, because that's exciting.

We get to help refugees, including in our own church, have affordable housing, so they can get start a new life here in our country. And we get to know them and become friends with them. And when we hear the horrors, the violence, the persecution they're escaping from, it breaks our hearts. And so our hearts become more like God's heart, because where our treasure is, there our hearts will also be.

And I want my heart there, not in all the other stuff that I may think I need. When we give sacrificially, we are standing on holy ground. And we get to do this together, which is why giving to this church matters. It connects us. It puts us on mission together. And it feels good to be part of a team that's making a difference in the world.

Now, I know just, I know out there, because just where our culture is at and all that, I know you may be thinking, yeah, yeah, yeah, but you're the pastor, and you're supposed to be saying all this stuff, and you're supposed to be all holy and everything and all of that. Okay, don't be playing the pastor card on me. Christina and I did this long before I was a pastor, or even thinking about being a pastor. And it has helped unleash us from money worries and unleash us for the adventure of God's rescue mission.

See, Jesus is not so much after our time, our money, and our influence. He's after our hearts. It's just that the road to our hearts leads to those three things that we hang on to so fiercely and to become leashes for us. But, as I said, what do I know? I'm just a pastor.

So I would like you to hear this from a real person in our church. And when he heard about these eight projects, he sent me his story. He's going to remain anonymous, but he sent me his story, and I'm just going to read it. These are not my words. This comes from one of you sitting out there, out there with all of you. And this is what he says.

He says, I know the word tithing can be scary, but let me tell you my story. I joined my family's company in 2003. The first few years were great, but in 2008, during the recession, our company's revenues plummeted. It was one of the most challenging periods in my life. The one bright spot was marrying my lovely wife, but I also worried that I wouldn't be able to help provide for our family.

I was 30 years old, constantly stressed, struggling to sleep and not enjoying life. And this went on for a couple of years. Finally, trying to escape the stress, we went to Arizona for a weekend. Not the best for our budget, but I needed time to clear my head. It did not work. The next trip is not the answer.

I couldn't stop thinking about the deals I had that were collapsing, and the fact that our company was having the worst year in its history. On the flight back, I was at the point of tears. I couldn't stop stressing about the economy, and our future, and money. Something had to change. So, I prayed, and it was on that flight, I decided to try something I had never done before, tithe.

I'd give 10% of my income to BelPres. It made absolutely no financial sense whatsoever. My income was at rock bottom. It was one of the best decisions I ever made. I turned my career and financial life over to God at the worst possible time from a human perspective. But then, not instantly, but gradually, my career grew and my income grew.

But more important, tithing changed me. Before, my business had been transactional, and I desperately take any deal that came my way. After the decision to tithe, I began to form different relationships with my clients, who became not just clients, but friends. It was more relational.

I found a role in developing affordable housing, and that proved to be very rewarding because I was helping struggling families. But the biggest change was that all the anxiety I had lived with for years about money and finances began to fade. One of the things about having a commission based income is that even if you have a good year, you end up worrying about the next year. But what I found year after year after year is God kept providing.

Instead of being self reliant, I became God reliant, which decreased my money worries. I enjoy life so much more because I don't have the financial fears that I used to. And as a result, I'm a much more present dad for my kids because I'm not stressed out about money all the time. So I can be with my kids. My prayer for my kids is not that they become self reliant, but they become God reliant.

Because I know from experience that life will be far more rewarding when you turn to God versus the wisdom of this world. Our church is now embarking on a big vision, and over the years, I've seen what God can do with BelPres. I'm excited for the future of the church, not just for my family and me, but for all the people of BelPres. I will tell you wholeheartedly from my experience, if you want true, true financial freedom, tithe. It works.

And if we do this together, we can do great things. He found that financial freedom is not in having more, it's in trusting the provider. And tithing taught him that God is real, and that God provides and is trustworthy, which unleashed him from fears about money, unleashed him from being a distracted dad, and unleashed him for deeper connection with God, and family, and friends, and

community, and this church, and unleashed him for being part of God's rescue mission to this world.

God isn't using him to get tithing done, he's using tithing to get him done. So action steps are the same as last week. For the next couple of weeks, go on a faith journey, all of us, that spells the word peace. P, pray, pray that God moves powerfully in our church and in our lives. E, engage with God and ask him, why do you have me at BelPres for such a time as this? How do you want me to participate in this?

A, attend the next three sermons. Don't check out, be like, oh, I don't want to hear about this. No, no, go on this faith journey, and my commitment is to do my best to make the sermons relevant to your life, even if you don't give anything to these projects. My prayer is, I will try to make the sermons still relevant.

So attend, if you have to miss the Sunday, catch up online. And then C, commit whatever it is God is asking you to do. Not yet, Commitment Sunday is on December 7th, but go on this journey. And then lastly, everyone is needed to do these eight projects, plus what we're already doing, everyone is needed. So if you hear this vision and you think like, wow, those are great projects, I love that. I'm glad somebody is going to give to them.

Maybe go back to the top and start all over. And keep doing that peace thing. And if we go on this journey together, we will be changed and we will make a difference for a whole lot of people, which is one more thing I love about tithing. I love to tithe because we leave a legacy that lasts beyond ourselves.

Because of people whose names I don't know, because they didn't just think of themselves, but also they thought of people like me, so they gave sacrificially at University Presbyterian Church in Seattle, so that there was a church there when I was in college that introduced me to Jesus. And because some of them gave not just their money, but their time and their influence to mentor me, I grew in my faith. I wouldn't be here if they hadn't been there.

Years later, when I was going through a divorce at one of the lowest points in my life, because of people whose names I do not know, who weren't just thinking of themselves, but of future generations, because they gave, there was a church in California where I lived to catch me as I was falling, and heal me and restore me. I wouldn't be here if they hadn't been there.

The last two weeks, I've shown you this picture of the first worship service this church ever had. It met in a funeral home. Okay, they're sitting in a funeral

home. That's a bad look for the church, right? Sends the wrong message, doesn't it, right? Kind of depressing. But because they gave, they built a church building, and then another, and then another, to accommodate all of us whose lives are being changed.

But because they gave not just their money, but their time and their influence, Cambodian refugees were given a new start in a new country through the ministry of this church. Drug addicts recovered. Countless youth were mentored. Villages in Guatemala became economically self-sustaining in the name of Jesus. We wouldn't be here if they hadn't been there.

And because we will give, we will give our time, our money, our influence to these eight projects, ten years from now, every refugee family in King County will be affordably housed in the name of Jesus. Because we will give time, money, and influence, families struggling financially will be given a hand up with affordable child care and preschool so that they can start to get ahead and get introduced to Jesus.

Because we will give time and influence, everyone who wants one will have a spiritual coach to help them grow and experience Jesus' power in every aspect of their life. Because we will give time, money, and influence, we will be unleashed from the vice grip those three things have on us. All of those things will be there because we are here, ready to follow God, faithful call, unleashed, set free, to heal the world in the powerful name of Jesus.

Amen? Jesus, everything we have comes from you. You gave us our ability to earn money. You gave us every minute that we have. Any shred of influence that we have, reputation, Lord, it came from you.

So, help us, Jesus, to give back to you some of what you've given to us, to do your work in the world. Lord, open our hearts, open our minds, open our hands, to put our treasure in the things that you're doing so that our hearts are there and so that our hearts become more like your heart. We want to be like you, Jesus.

So, help us to be unleashed and generous so that we can be transformed and so the world will know that you're Lord through us. In your name, Jesus, amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or community group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What are some of the reasons the people in Exodus 36 gave so much so willingly?
- What does their willingness to give teach us about the difference between giving out of obligation and giving out of a willing heart?
- Jesus says where our treasure is, our hearts will also be (Matthew 6:21). What does that mean in practical terms?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- According to where you spend your time, money, and influence, where is your heart? Where would you like it to be?
- What would help make your heart more willing to give?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Take the challenging parts of your conversation to Jesus. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.