

Grace Motivated Labor of Love
1 Thess 1:1-3

INTRODUCTION

What motivates us to do what we're doing?

-We want to glorify God?

-We want to walk in a manner that worthy of the calling with which we have been called

-We want to be equipped to be ready to give a defense for the hope that is within us.

One motivation that is very real, but might be assumed, is that we want to pass on the faith to the next generation.

We live in a larger culture that seems to give little thought to a sustainable future. There is a cultural undertow that works against the foundations of traditional marriage and family, i.e. the NEXT GENERATION.

At one extreme we see the undertow in the culture of death under the guise of "reproductive freedom."

To a different degree we see the undertow in a steadily declining birth rate. The current US birth rate is down to 1.64. There have been six consecutive years of decline in the birth rate. That is not a good trend since the replacement rate for a civilization is 2.1 While there are economic and political implications and considerations to this, the unspoken realities are the moral and religious implications.

In the history of the church, one of the greatest means of church growth has been the marriage bed, not door to door evangelism. Historically speaking, "making disciples" has started and continued in the home. Sadly, we're seeing that more and more young people raised in the church are leaving their faith behind. That does not bode well for the church or culture as a whole. Strong families and strong churches have been the foundation of gospel expansion for 2000 years.

As believers here at Highlands, we are FOR THE NEXT GENERATION – through childbirth, adoption, and fostering.

We are FOR enabling our children to "know the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Tim 3)

Rather providentially, I heard an interview this past week with Sohrab Ahmari, a new father, who raises this question:

"How do I transmit to my son the value of permanent ideals against a culture that will tell him that whatever is newest is also best, that everything is negotiable and subject to contract and consent, that there is no purpose to our common life but to fulfill his desires?"

The Bible shows us how grace changes us and what it looks like when we get a vision for Christ and His kingdom. One impact of a Christ-centered kingdom perspective is that it alters what we do and WHY we do what we do as we seek to be good stewards of our TIME, TALENT, and TREASURE.

1 Thessalonians also gives a perspective on what a grace transformation looks like.

1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,

These early believers were showing what grace based living looks like: the work of faith, the labor of love and steadfastness of hope. 1 Thess 1:4

Gospel truth so impacted these young believers at Thessalonica that their faith went forth throughout the whole region.

HOW ABOUT US WHO ARE BELIEVERS at Highlands in 2021? In light of the certainty of eternal life and rescue from the wrath to come –What will we do with the days that God has given us in the time that God has put us here? We are here in this place according to the plan of God for a reason.

Last week we looked at five key catalysts for growth:

- Providential Relationships
- Practical Teaching
- Private Disciplines
- Personal Ministry
- Pivotal Circumstances

Build these things into your life and build other things around them.

Tucked into this list under personal disciplines is something that we don't talk about a lot here at Highlands – STEWARDSHIP.

In one sense we haven't had to talk about giving too much because, over the years that I've been here, our giving has been pretty steady and we've not faced large-scale needs. As one who has served in several churches over the years, that has been a great blessing. Our Regular Session mtgs have been focused on the shepherding and ministry issues rather than issues of finance and giving.

The "danger" in that is that it can be easy to forget that giving IS A SHEPHERDING and Ministry Issue. Jesus draws a direct connection between our treasure and our hearts –

- **Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.** Matt 6:21

If you want to follow Christ and stay close to him in your heart, then give to his kingdom. Your heart will follow your money. If you don't believe me, believe Jesus. He said it.

RIGHT NOW we have been given an opportunity to invest in the future of Highlands Church- through regular giving, sacrificial giving, and hands-on involvement.

You've probably noticed the new storage shed and the stack of materials over by the little House. One of the goals set by the leadership team for 2021 was to revisit the best way to utilize that facility for long-term ministry. Over the 25+ years of this church that building has been offices, the worship facility, a home for a family, the home for Linda and me for 5 months, and a small group meeting center, and the VBS storage center.

In discussions and considerations last August, we thought it best to make an investment in the building and reconfigure it as office and meetings space. That enable us to free up more space downstairs for our children's ministry. You may have noticed that we have a lot of kids at Highlands. THAT IS A GOOD THING.

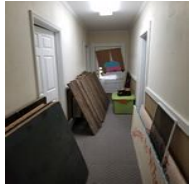
Our desire is TO SERVE the current and the next generation through our work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We just need more space and servants to do it.

Through years of saving, we have money available to refigure the House, but doing so would deplete our regular capital improvement fund, and we knew that we'd face some other issues as well.

Phase 1 is to make the HOUSE useable for office space with a large group meeting room. Since much of the space is currently VBS storage, we need another spot, thus the new larger storage shed. This stuff needs to go into the new shed.

**pics



Once Phase 1 is done, we can work on making some changes downstairs to utilize space that was for our offices.

While looking at those options, we also looked at some hard-core infrastructure needs – the treatment of the external walls of the building. We are overdue for the logs to be treated as they should be. THIS BECAME THE NEW #1 priority. If this isn't done this year, we could see some bigger issues down the road.

All that said, we have an opportunity to step up in Christ-centered faith, labor, and love. **We have a great opportunity to let this community know what we are FOR.**

We are FOR Financial stewardship – we don't want to go in debt

We are FOR RAISING UP A NEXT generation committed to the kingdom.

This vision for the next generation presents some rewards and some challenges for our Work of Faith, Labor of Love, and Steadfastness of Hope...

There are three challenges to consider today:

- People power with some of the remodeling work, painting, moving VBS items, office furniture, etc as needed.
- Children's ministry opportunities during the summer and when we relaunch in the Fall.
- Financial- We are trusting God to move among us in order to see 100K raised for three aspects of overall project:
 - 1) Restorative maintenance on the Building;
 - 2) Renovations on the House and downstairs to expand our ministry space, and
 - 3) Replenish our capital improvement fund.

Obviously, this will require additional giving. So if the topic of money makes you uncomfortable, then be encouraged. It's only me talking; if Jesus were up here he'd probably make you feel more uncomfortable.

Non-believer or visitor..."I knew he'd talk about money"- I haven't been to church in a while and this is what I get. BUMMER

The issue isn't engagement or giving per se; it is GRACE MOTIVATED ENGAGEMENT

Grace motivated engagement is a response to God's grace and the example of how Christ gave of Himself.

JESUS GAVE HIMSELF FULLY - Jesus didn't TITHE himself; He was ALL IN.

"For the joy set before him, He endured the cross, despising the shame."

His self-sacrifice was built in as INFRASTRUCTURE to his life on earth.

How should His self-sacrifice impact our generosity?

In some way, the INFRASTRUCTURE of OUR personal budget should reflect His generosity.

Jesus lived in light of eternity, and that is what happened to the Thessalonians – v. 10-12

Turning from idols of this world to serving the true living God will have an impact on how we act as stewards of what God has given us. 1 THESS 1:10

We practice sowing and reaping in light of God's grace that is given to us.

2 Cor 9:6-8 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, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

Being committed to the next generation means that we must fight the normal drift of the flesh and of the culture to pursue personal peace and affluence – “leave me alone, let me get what I can, can what I get, and sit on my can”.

When it comes to giving how does this play itself out?

WARNING:LISTENER DISCRETION IS ADVISED

- the following content will be upsetting to some – for different reasons
 - Uncomfortable talking about money
 - Too personal; gone from preaching to meddlin’
 - Trying to guilt trip us – NO, trying to grace grip you

1 Thess 2:4 ...”God who examines our hearts”. Jesus tells us that our treasure and our hearts are linked so if we’re serious about seeing grace grip our hearts then at SOME point we must address how we handle our treasure.

Don't audit checkbook, but audit your heart.

Let's consider the various kinds of giving: *(THE FOLLOWING STATISTICS were gleaned without my having any idea of what you give. Individual giving stats are not passed around. As a church we should have and WANT someone in a shepherding capacity taking a look at giving at least once a year- but that's a whole different sermon)*

Wherever we are in our giving habits, scripture and the example of Jesus will challenge us to step out in faith, love, and hope.

Where do you find yourself?

- 1) **Those who will become First Time givers**- your step of faith is to give for the first time. Giving studies show that in most churches there are folks who attend, and may join, but who never give to that church in a discernible way. That reality cuts across church size, denomination, social, and economic demographics.

Does this play out here? Most likely. If HPC is typical, then there are folks who are waiting to take that first step of faith to become a first-time giver.

EVERYBODY is a first time giver at some point. It is the first faith barrier in the area of giving that you can break.

- 2) **Those who will become Punctual Givers.** Maybe you've taken the step to be a first time giver, and you engage in giving- from time to time. Perhaps you're waiting for another good reason to give. WAIT NO LONGER. We have a Vision to enhance our overall ministry, so you have a good reason to give. Every project needs punctual gifts. Don't let your motivation be a sense of “ought” or emotion. They don't last for the long haul. **The work and the example of Christ Himself is the motivation for developing a heart of generosity.** Jesus gave himself for us and He continues to pour himself out for us through his prayers for his people and his sustaining grace given through his Holy Spirit.

GIVING REALITY CHECK: 2020 (anonymous) for analysis.

In 2020 there were 58 giving units, with the top 6 giving units (10% of total) giving 38% of the budget and the top 12 units (20% of congregation) giving 58% of the budget. That is much better than what is often seen where 20% give 80%

With those giving figures, there's still a chance that some haven't taken the step to become regular or punctual givers.

It may be that your giving is directed somewhere other than Highlands. We don't know.

Perhaps your next work of faith is...

3.) TO become a PERCENTAGE Priority Giver: You've been giving now and then or even regularly, but it's usually been unplanned. Being a Priority giver means it is built in as INFRASTRUCTURE to your budget. THAT MAY BE A BIG STEP OF FAITH and that's good.

It means that you set a % PERCENTAGE to give and you give it first – it has PRIORITY – it is part of your Personal Discipline to give to kingdom work and then you build the rest of your budget around that.

GIVE AS A PRIORITY (Dave Ramsey)

As a Priority giver, you know it will go for lights and salaries and copiers and parking lot gravel, etc, but you are willing to commit to the mission and vision and be a PERCENTAGE/PRIORITY giver – When the church is filled with Priority % givers then there is less need for one-time appeals because the funds are already there. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE WHEN there are Priority Givers ...

4) ...Who Become Tithers - The traditional biblical reference point is the tithe – 10%. Studies of church giving indicate that a small percentage of evangelical believers actually practice this. A typical church filled with tithers would be able to greatly expand its impact in its community and in the world.

Here's an example based on our own church statistics

If 2020 undesignated giving reflects tithing by ALL of our giving units, then the receipts of \$218,486 is an accurate number for this church's potential.

If 2020 undesignated giving reflects 5% giving from ALL our giving units, then moving to a tithe would result in a doubled total of \$436,972.

That would be more than adequate to meet the current project and keep future projects on track.

Reality is somewhere in between. The question to consider is, "Do we need to take a step of faith in our work of faith and labor of love?"

The final category is

5) Extravagant Giving – above and beyond the tithe- based on the example of Jesus, this is a model for Christians – Jesus didn't tithe Himself.

A work of faith and labor of love in terms of giving applies to all of us. Some of you may be giving 10%, but it's not really a step of faith for you; it doesn't stretch you. It may be time to rebuild your giving infrastructure and take a bigger step of faith.

EXTRAVAGANT GIVING can be a higher % or a specific offering above your current giving.

The biblical reference point is the tithe – 10%. That would be great. But honestly, if you're not giving as a priority right now then you might need to work your way toward that. You could go full 10% or start at 3,4,5,6 and increase as you go along.

How do we remember this grace motivation for Engaging?

LOOK AT JESUS

He gave of Himself totally- He was rich, and became poor, so that we might become rich. 2 Cor 9
Jesus did not tithe himself – he gave fully of Himself. How should His self-sacrifice impact our generosity?

This is a heavy topic to leave you with as I go on Sabbatical, but it is important.
What step of Faith do you need to take in this area??

As a body of believers, we're all called to do our part. If we don't give in a regular way then we're expecting someone else to do our part.

CHALLENGE TO EXPAND YOUR FAITH, YOUR VISION AND YOUR IMPACT.

What would it look like if we all took a step of faith from where we are in giving?

The impact of the body of Christ would expand in this community, around the world, and to the NEXT GENERATION.



SHOW SLIDE OF RIPPLES – these circles show the way our giving flows out- like ripples on a pond. You can make a big splash with a one-time gift, but you'll make a longer sustained impact through regular giving. That impact will be in the lives of others now, the next generation, and in your own heart.

Our hearts would be more invested in eternity – we'd get a deeper sense of what it means to engage in the work of faith, the labor of love and the perseverance of hope as we wait for the Son from heaven, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

PERHAPS THE BIGGEST STEP OF FAITH IS simply acknowledging that all that we have is from God and really belongs to Him.

It's not ours; it belongs to God. We are simply stewards. God lets it pass through our hands for a season of life so that it may be used for His glory.