

# Missions as Fasting: The Forsaking of Things Present for the Global Exaltation of Christ

Dr. Michael Oh

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Now usually when I speak somewhere almost everyone has the same question **burning** in their minds, “**How old is that guy?**” I’m actually quite old – older than Matt Chandler in fact – I’m 37. **Honestly, I’m really NOT sure why I’m here.** I’m young, foolish, inexperienced. Who I am that you should listen to anything that I have to say?!

Some of you have children my age. You’ve experienced more, you’ve learned more – who am I? I’m... nobody.

**I actually have a confession to make. I’ve been telling people that John Piper is crazy.**

In November when John and I were talking about why he invited me he mentioned that he was (quote) “poking around the internet” and heard several of my sermons and decided to invite me.

Then I thought to myself, “**He IS crazy!**”

So I’m really not sure then why he invited me; I mean... to tell you the truth most of my sermons aren’t much more than a string of John Piper quotes!

Ironically... today might be one of the first talks ever where I don’t quote John Piper!

So I’m just this sinful little boy plucked out from Japan brought here to Minnesota with 5 loaves and 2 fish. But if that’s enough for you and the Lord then let’s give this a shot – AMEN?

**Can I ask that we start with a time of personal prayer? I’m going to ask you all to pray for yourselves.**

I think sometimes when a missionary speaks, the listeners put up guards.

**First of all** without realizing it, you find your hand slowly going for your wallet to make sure it’s still there as if you’re walking in a dangerous part of the city.

**And secondly** sometimes we guard against opening our hearts too much kind of like before going to the mall saying “I’m not going to buy anything, I’m not going to buy anything!”

So I’d like to ask you all to pray two things – number one – “Lord open my heart and speak to me.” Number two – “Grant me grace and power to live out what you teach me.” And whatever else you want to pray. Or to pray for me.

Ok? Let’s pray and I’ll close our time after a short bit.

Father I join with the Psalmist and pray, Hear our voices when we call, O LORD; be merciful to us and answer us.

Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me; O LORD, be my help.”

In Jesus’ name we pray, AMEN

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**So as John mentioned, I’m not Japanese. I’m Korean.**

But my father was born Japanese – or at least he was forced to take a Japanese name Hideo Matsuyama as a subject of the Japanese Imperial Government which controlled Korea from 1910 to 1945. As a child he would be beaten if he used his Korean name Sung Kyu Oh or spoke Korean.

And now I his son serve as a missionary among the people he was taught to hate.

**And there is perhaps good reason humanly speaking to hate the Japanese.**

We talk about the horrors of the holocaust when Nazi Germany killed 6 million Jews and 20 million Russians.

According to Historian Thomas Chalmers the Japanese slaughtered as many as *30 million* Koreans, Chinese and other Asians. *There was a holocaust in Asia – but no one seems to have noticed.*

In Asia Japanese scientists tested various chemical and biological weapons such as bubonic plague and anthrax on human victims.

Human vivisection was performed without anesthesia; body parts were cut off and blood loss tested.

Women were impregnated by soldiers and doctors; their bellies sliced open; their babies removed and then tested upon leading to their death.

Nazi scientists who visited Japanese medical experimentation facilities vomited from the horror of what they saw.

200,000 Korean women and girls as young as 12 years old were forced to be sex slaves of the Japanese Imperial army, subject to rape upwards of 100 times per day. They are known today euphemistically as the “Comfort Women”

Many of them ended up dead as we can see in this picture a ditch filled with the dead bodies of women. By the way all of these pictures were taken by Japanese soldiers as souvenirs.

**Undergirding all of these medical and sexual atrocities was a racist ideology that sought to subdue, civilize and subject lesser races and peoples.**

On top of all of this, many Japanese leaders today STILL do not admit to fault during Japan's Imperialist past and they wonder why Koreans and Chinese and other Asians aren't more thankful.

It should come as no surprise then, that the question that people most often ask me about our mission work is, "WHY JAPAN?"

"Of all the places in the WORLD, why would a Korean person choose Japan?"

The answer that I give is quite simply, "Jesus says, 'Love your enemies.'"

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That was what originally brought me to Japan – but over the years I've learned that the Japanese are an AMAZING people – industrious, dependable, engineering geniuses; they are steadfast friends; respectful and kind.

All of this is so much so that you might be tempted to ask, "Do they really need the Gospel?"

But if you can look beyond the high technology, the smiles and politeness, you will see a nation so DESPERATELY LOST WITHOUT CHRIST.

They are a nation spiritually lost.

They worship 8 million gods, but so few know the ONE TRUE GOD.

The Protestant population is 0.2%

There are 183,000 cult groups in Japan

They are a nation that is also sexually lost

The historical legacy of the so-called "comfort women" that I mentioned before is today continued as there are 150,000 Filipino and Thai women who are being exploited in the Japanese sex industry having been lured by so-called, "entertainment" jobs.

I was in Thailand attending the 2004 Lausanne Forum where I met Patricia Green, the founder of Rahab Ministries where they seek to rescue Thai girls from prostitution. She told me that 70% of tourists who enter Thailand are men. 70% of those men participate in the sex industry. And the majority of those men... are Japanese.

I've walked the streets of Pattaya Thailand with friends praying with tears in my eyes as I saw not only women involved in prostitution walking hand in hand with their Japanese clients but also young girls and young boys.

And they are a nation that is also relationally lost

There is a phenomenon known as "hikikomori" where people refuse to work or participate at all in normal life. They sleep all day and if they venture out at all,

it's at night to their local convenience store to pick up some cup of noodles and some pornography. There are today in Japan more than 1 million young men who are hikikomori.

Young girls in Japan are so desperately seeking fatherly attention that many have turned even to teenage prostitution. Having a dirty old man touch you and pay you doesn't seem to me like a fair substitute for a father's love. One study says that upwards of 9% of high school girls and even upwards of 4% of JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS report having participated in such prostitution.

The Japanese need the Lord and our love as well

So the Lord called me, my family, and our team to love the Japanese people.

Humanly speaking there is almost no hope for reconciliation between the Japanese and Koreans – but in Ephesians 2 we are reminded that in Christ there is power to reconcile Jews and Gentiles, Blacks and Whites, Koreans and Japanese... to God and to each other through the cross, by which he put to death our hostility.

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**Our ministry is called Christ Bible Institute** which includes among other ministries a theological education component called Christ Bible Seminary, a church plant movement called All Nations Fellowship, and a downtown outreach to young people called Heart and Soul.

Although Japan is a tough mission field – considered by some missiologists to be the most difficult mission field in the world – we've seen tremendous openness to the Gospel among young people.

We're really just a small ministry, but we're involved in a fairly broad range of ministries from evangelism to discipleship, from counseling to music, from lay training to graduate level theological training.

Our goal has been to set up a ministry that models the whole range of Gospel WITNESS and Gospel IMPACT from a Gospel FOUNDATION

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**And at the very CORE of all these ministries is theological education.**

In missions we are not merely looking for numeric conversions.

We are looking for **sustainable** growth of the church as the instrument of God's work in this world.

It's easy to dismiss theology and theological training - especially in the mission field as we're SOOO busy, so undermanned and so focused on evangelism.

But theology is the foundational discipline for all of ministry.

**Theology must inform our evangelism;**

Theology must inform our discipleship;

Theology must inform our church planting, our counseling, and certainly our theological education.

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After Christ Bible Seminary was established it was a very natural process that led to initiating evangelistic outreach, lay training, church planting and other ministries. These were all natural extensions of theological convictions and sociological opportunities.

**So, please do pray for Japan.** This is an extremely exciting season of fruit bearing. Light has begun to shine especially among young people, and I am very optimistic about the future of that nation and those people, the people that I love.

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**So the theme of my talk today is:**

**Missions as Fasting: The Forsaking of Things Present for the Global Exaltation of Christ**

Now the danger of having such a theme is that it uses as a launching pad a concept and practice (fasting) that is not widely understood nor incorporated into most Christians' lives.

I hope that today's time might encourage you not only towards missions, but also towards the blessing of fasting.

I commend to you Thomas Boston's work on fasting – if you can find it. I'm thankful to Phil Ryken who sent that to me.

**My son commends to you John Piper's A Hunger for God!**

I'm no specialist or anything on fasting, so I'm not going to try to present a long treatise on fasting. You all can read books on fasting and you all have your Bibles.

Fasting has been a regular part of my life for about the last five years. I was skinny back then as well so don't worry too much about me!

I remember as a freshman in college meeting a pastor in the Philippines who fasted one out of every three days both to know God more deeply and also honestly speaking because of poverty. For me that kind of put the phrase "a hunger for God" in a new light.

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So just for the sake of my theme today making ANY sense, let me just talk a little bit about fasting itself.

Fasting, at the very least, is both PRESUMED in the Scriptures (both Old and New Testaments) as well as MODELED.

One pattern of fasting in the Bible is fasting as a part of our repentance before God as we read in Joel 2:12 –

“Even now, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”

Fasting was a response of repentance for IDOLATRY

In 1 Samuel 7:6 it says of Israel that “they fasted and there they confessed, “We have sinned against the LORD.””

Fasting is a response to difficult circumstances and affliction – as with David who said in Psalm 109 - My knees give way from fasting; my body is thin and gaunt.

Besides David, Daniel fasted, Paul fasted, Israel fasted, and Christ Himself fasted.

And Jesus PRESUMES fasting when he instructs us about HOW TO DO IT in Matthew 6.

He says, “WHEN YOU GIVE” do it this way

“WHEN YOU PRAY” do it this way

“WHEN YOU FAST” --- do it this way.

He PRESUMES giving, praying, and fasting.

So I COMMEND fasting to you if:

You feel like in your life you have any good reason to HUMBLE yourself before God

I commend fasting to you if:

You have a need for repentance in your life

I commend fasting to you if:

You have in your heart certain people or things that you know are IDOLS to you.

I commend fasting to you if:

You ever face difficult circumstances

I commend fasting to you if:

**Following the model of David, Daniel, Paul, and Jesus Christ seems of some value to you.**

I think these reasons to fast apply at least as much today as they did in the past – I don't THINK we're less in need to repent of idolatry, to humble ourselves before God, and to ask His help in difficult circumstances. I don't think that's true of you or me; or the people in your congregation.

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**One way to think about FASTING is that it reflects:**

LONGING

URGENCY

And

OPPORTUNITY

Longing in the sense that John Piper explains so well from the Scriptures in this book – A Hunger for God – and here on the back we have this great phrase or prayer –

**“THIS MUCH O GOD, I WANT YOU!”**

**Fasting is a response to a LONGING for GOD!**

A LONGING for the GLORY of GOD!

A LONGING for GOD to be KNOWN AND LOVED AND ADORED AND WORSHIPPED – HERE, THERE, and EVERYWHERE!

A LONGING like Paul when he says in Phil 3 –

Phil. 3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings

It's a LONGING that inspires a forsaking of things present – even food itself.

And this is where the title of my talk comes from based on the words of John Chrysostom who said -

“Fasting is, as much as lies in us, an imitation of the angels, a condemning of things present, a school of prayer, a nourishment of the soul, a bridle of the mouth, an abatement of concupiscence.”

You can all look up concupiscence later when you have Internet access, but what I want to key in on is his phrase, “a condemning of things present.” In my title I substituted the word “Forsaking” for “condemning” both because it is a very Biblical term as well as perhaps being a better fit for our modern ears.

**Describing fasting as a “condemning of things present” I think is very well said.** There is certainly nothing more PRESENT than food and hunger. And choosing to NOT EAT really doesn't make much sense. It doesn't make sense to us **today** when

we have INCREDIBLE abundance of food here in the US. So imagine how ridiculous it sounded hundreds or even thousands of years ago.

But there is a LONGING for things SPIRITUAL and HEAVENLY, there is a LONGING for as-of-yet-unknown WORSHIP OF GOD, there is a LONGING for things FUTURE and ETERNAL, there is a LONGING FOR GOD in all His fullness – that makes even the ABSURD idea of not eating – sound PERFECTLY reasonable.

LONGING for such HEAVENLY and FUTURE - BLESSING and WORSHIP of GOD INSPIRES a condemning of things present and in many ways COMPELS such forsaking as a RESPONSE to such LONGING, but also as an assurance that such LONGING will not be DULLED or QUENCHED or SATIATED by food and things that are but temporary.

**And this brings us to the next idea of fasting as a reflection of URGENCY**

ONE LIFE – we each have been given just ONE LIFE – and that LIFE is so SHORT and FRAGILE.

The FRAGILENESS of life became real to me when my uncle who at the time wasn't that much older than I am had a run-in at his store in LA with a young gang member. It wasn't enough for that guy to take things from my uncle's store without paying. He had to also take my uncle's life.

**Life is so incredibly SHORT** – we really have NO IDEA how long the Lord will grant us. And in light of eternity, even 80, 90 years is just a blink of an eye.

And this ONE LIFE that we've been given is also incredibly COSTLY –

Your ONE LIFE was bought at the price of the BLOOD of the son of GOD.

And from that moment on the Lord says to us, "You are not your own; you were bought at a price."

And so we all have a WEIGHTY STEWARDSHIP – such that we ALL MUST BE DEVOTEDLY POURING OURSELVES into our MASTER'S AFFAIRS UNTIL HE COMES! And to know that in fact our MASTER WILL NOT RETURN until His proclamation is made to every people group on earth.

And the urgency of the Master's task and global worship are so great that even the setting aside of FOOD makes sense.

And this brings us back to Chrysostom who goes on to say about fasting that :

it excites reason, it clears the mind... By fasting, a man gets composed behaviour, free utterance of his tongue, right apprehensions of his mind.



In other words, Chrysostom is arguing that FASTING HELPS US TO – THINK ARIGHT!!!

It helps us to THINK ARIGHT about GOD, about LIFE.

And such RIGHT THINKING helps us to have RIGHT PRIORITIES

- to have a GOD-CENTERED LIFE – that (as difficult as it may be) ORIENTS every thought, decision, and FOCUS upon God and NOT the self.
- And again this is what makes such an unreasonable thing as fasting reasonable.
- A God-centered life – orienting everything for Him and His glory
- Not a me-centered life that says to God – SERVE ME! And turns its back on the world as it goes to hell.

### **And then thirdly - OPPORTUNITY – fasting is a response to GLOBAL OPPORTUNITY**

There are more than 2.7 billion people among 6600 unreached people groups in the world who have little or no opportunity to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There are more than 4000 language groups who have no Scripture and no Gospel witness.

Now if you have any sense of JUSTICE or FAIRNESS or COMPASSION AT ALL, that alone should move you to action – whether fasting or more. If you appreciate and understand and know a GOD-GLORY orientation in your Christian life – and have said not only “THIS MUCH O GOD I WANT TO KNOW YOU!” but **“THIS MUCH O GOD I WANT YOU TO BE KNOWN!”** then you should be moved to action. If your heart cries the cry of Scripture “COME LORD JESUS!” then you should be moved to action that will open the door to His return.

Can I ask you to raise your hand if you know what the 10/40 window is?

The 10/40 window includes nations that are 10 degrees north latitude to 40 degrees north latitude stretching from Japan in the east through China and South East Asia through India and then through the Middle East and North Africa.

This fairly small window encompasses nearly 4 billion people.

95% of those who have not heard the Gospel live here

90% of the world's poor live here

The most persecuted nations in the world are here where thousands of Christians are martyred every year.

Less than 10% of the world missionary force ministers here

Less than \$1 of every \$100 of missions giving goes to the 10/40 window

Sometimes it looks like Christians who live safely and comfortably **outside** that window could care less about the billions of people who perish **inside** it.

And how about the God who made them and is worthy to receive their worship and praise?

Do you have a LONGING for the glory of **THAT** God, do you have URGENCY in death and life, and do you see the OPPORTUNITY for Gospel proclamation and God-glorification in the world today?

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And I hope that you all see where this is heading. That if such LONGING and URGENCY and OPPORTUNITY call for the fasting of FOOD – how much more so does it call for a fasting of MUCH MUCH MORE than just FOOD!

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Food is a wonderful thing – **I LIKE food! I'm hungry RIGHT NOW!**

Food is a blessing from God. But sometimes there is enough LONGING and URGENCY and OPPORTUNITY that forsaking even the blessings of God is called for.

This FORSAKING sometimes doesn't make sense to human reason, but in light of HEAVENLY and CHRIST-HONORING LONGINGS, URGENCY, and OPPORTUNITY it makes PERFECT sense. In light of the Gospel it makes perfect sense.

**So what is MISSIONS as FASTING?**

It is the FORSAKING OF THINGS PRESENT for the GLOBAL EXALTATION OF JESUS CHRIST.

**What are those THINGS PRESENT beyond food itself that the Lord calls us to FORSAKE and FAST?**

I think in one sense they are the VERY THINGS that we CHERISH and HOLD ONTO MOST TIGHTLY. These are both among our greatest blessings and also among our greatest idols.

These are not ALWAYS things to be FORSAKEN in a throwing away sense. Instead they are to be FORSAKEN in the HEART having proper place well behind our LORD and His GLORY and they are to be **INVESTED and BURNED and CONSUMED in the EFFORTS of seeing the Lord receive such GLOBAL and ETERNAL glory!**

**What are some of these things?**

Well I think three of the most difficult things that missionaries fast are:

COMFORT, RECOGNITION and FAMILY

Imagine suddenly having to walk backwards, say every sentence in reverse order, look at everything through a mirror, and sleep standing up.

That's the kind of disorienting **CULTURAL** discomfort that missionaries experience on the mission field.

Many missionaries face tremendous **PHYSICAL** discomfort.

A friend of mine is in the Congo to translate the Bible for the Vili people . He's there with his wife and children and I always smile and shake my head as he so nonchalantly shares about the "stifling heat and humidity of the Congo" that is relieved occasionally by the "monsoon-like rains". Or that they are all well though one of his daughters has a "touch" of Malaria. He fails to mention that 1 million young children in Africa each year die from Malaria for which there is no vaccine.

Others face great **POLITICAL** discomfort and danger -

My brother-in-law is serving in the Middle East where he has been for nearly 10 years. He's had his apartment ransacked by the police looking for Christian materials.

My cousin was serving as a missionary in China. Friends of hers were captured by police during a training session for pastors from the underground church.

Comfort is something fasted as a daily reality and without much choice for Christians in many parts of the world.

## **Next RECOGNITION -**

There's a well-known story of a missionary couple who after decades of faithful service overseas, were returning back to the States.

They happened to be on the same ship to New York as President Theodore Roosevelt, who was returning from a big game hunt in Africa. As the ship pulled into the dock, huge crowds, the press, and a brass band were gathered to welcome him home.

The old missionary couple, health broken and spent in their service for Christ, walked off the ship and through the crowd, unmet and unknown. As they walked, a tear trickled down the husband's cheek.

"What's wrong?" his wife asked.

"My whole life I've given to serving Christ. We've spent ourselves for Jesus and nobody is here to greet us on our return home.

**His dear wife thought for a minute and said softly, "That's because we're not home yet, dear."**

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I've met lots of wonderfully humble missionaries who don't need awards or standing ovations – but would of course appreciate the encouragement of a simple “thank you”, but most of all in lieu of any recognition we all long for and wait to hear the words, “well done, good and faithful servant.”

For those who fast earthly COMFORTS and RECOGNITION, there is a heavenly COMFORT and RECOGNITION that will leave no one disappointed.

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**The American Dream embodies earthly COMFORT and RECOGNITION – and my family lived out that dream.**

My father is the oldest of 9 children; they lived in great poverty in Korea through World War II and the Korean War.

Defying his circumstances my father studied hard and entered the best medical school in Korea. Defying cultural expectations he left Korea and his family for America with almost no money and almost no English ability.

My father worked full-time at the hospital where he had to redo all of his residency training. To earn enough money to take care of his family my father also worked the graveyard shift 2 out of every 3 nights. Every once in a while when I saw him I had no idea who he was. I would stand in front of my mother doing the “ultraman” pose to protect her from the stranger! (Anyone know who Ultraman is?)

But eventually we got out of the inner city into the suburbs. My sister and I did well in school and were tracking towards lucrative careers. We could have done anything; we could have been incredibly comfortable and recognized.

Between my sister, my two brothers-in-law, my wife and me, we have 15 undergraduate and graduate degrees. 11 of those 15 are from Ivy League schools including Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Cornell, and the University of Pennsylvania.

Now all 5 of us are either missionaries or heading to the mission field.

When some people hear of this they think it's **TRAGIC**.

**But others see it like the pouring of ridiculously expensive and precious perfume upon the feet of Jesus.**

Will those who fast the American Dream regret it in heaven?

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**Now fasting the American dream does not mean neglecting excellence.**

I advocate for excellence in missions –

Somehow over the last few decades the idea has developed that missionaries are people who can't do anything else – or people who couldn't have a successful ministry in their own country.

To those who have received great educations and have every opportunity to live wonderfully comfortable lives Francis Xavier says,

**"Tell the students to give up their small ambitions and come eastward to preach the gospel of Christ."**

This year's conference biography was on George Whitefield who was Oxford educated. He was quite poor though, and in order to receive free tuition he had to be a servant to richer students waking them in the morning, polishing their shoes, carrying their books and even doing their coursework.

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Jonathan Edwards entered Yale University at the age of 12 and later served as president of Princeton University.

**Whitefield and Edwards were also pretty good preachers!**

It's widely thought that Benjamin Franklin was the founder of my alma mater the University of Pennsylvania. But the original charter established in 1740 which the school uses to boast that it is the oldest university in America was originally established by George Whitefield to help care for and educate the poor.

Here's a statue of Whitefield preaching which is located in the freshman quad at the University of Pennsylvania.

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**One Sunday during my senior year I had lunch with my father and told him that I wanted to be a missionary.**

My father's response? "No."

Then he said, "Michael. I want you to stay in America. And I want to see you at church every Sunday with your children and have lunch together like this."

But then I said to him, "Dad, I appreciate everything that you have done for me. That's why I can be where I am today.

**But I refuse to live my life just to try to get into a good college, so I can get a good job and make lots of money so that my kids can have every opportunity to get into a good college and get a good job and make lots of money so that their**

**kids can have every opportunity to get into a good college and get a good job and make lots of money!**

**I REFUSE to live my life like that.**

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**But I ask you, is that why Jesus died?** So that we can get a good job and make lots of money so that our kids can have every opportunity to get into a good college and get a good job and make lots of money?

Did Jesus die so that we could be comfortable?

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### **COMFORT, RECOGNITION...**

These are both “**things present**” that missionaries fast for the global exaltation of Christ, but for most the greatest heartache is separation from family.

My parents are getting older, and they deserve to have me by their side helping and supporting them. I should be shoveling their snow, treating them to dinner, and sending them money. They should feel the warmth and joy of holding their grandkids.

My kids too are missing out on the special love of grandparents - being spoiled, doted upon, and loved. My wife and I miss our parents as well. But we'll have an eternity together talking about how it was **all** worth it – even the fasting of family.

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**In wartime the most moving scenes are fathers leaving behind their wife and children; the kissing of babies, the tears of goodbye;**

In mission we have the blessing of having our families by our side - until you get a glimpse of the spiritual battle you face and ask yourself how in the world you could have brought your wife and kids into enemy territory.

And sometimes they can become casualties in the conflict of missions (with children or wives neglected and incredibly hurt);

And I think it's crucial to remind ourselves that fasting of things present does not mean giving anything less than your whole heart and passion to your family on the field - that our families never become collateral damage in our pursuit of spiritual victory – and certainly that is no less true for pastors on the homefront.

A FASTING of family is not a neglect of family – neither the family that you leave behind in America nor the family that you bring with you to the mission field. Instead it involves a mourning over lost time with extended family and some lonely

holidays; it involves a fasting of financial and physical comfort and educational opportunity for your children; you're not going to find an SAT prep class or after school violin lessons for your kids in the Congo. And it involves an exposure of your family to some potentially dangerous and scary circumstances in enemy territory.

**It sounds funny to talk about dangers in Japan which is one of the safest countries in the world;** but that depends on how you define safe; I have 5 children and we live in a country that has an alarmingly high rate of child molestation and was the number one provider of child pornography on the Internet.

I think Japan could have the most **densely concentrated demonic population** in the world. This is a nation that worships 8 million gods. There are 183,000 cult groups registered with the government. And in almost every single house and apartment in the most densely packed nation in the world there is incense burned, food offered, and prayers prayed to idols which Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10 are offered to demons.

**No, Japan is not a place to casually bring your children - it is a battlefield.**

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Such fasting of the blessings of LIFE is difficult, but it comes with an encouragement from Scripture that it is the RIGHT THING to do and with a promise –

Isaiah 58 -

Is. 58:6 “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

Is. 58:7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Is. 58:8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

The Lord has CHOSEN FASTING to:

LOOSE the chains of injustice

To set the oppressed FREE

To share food with the HUNGRY

And as we engage in such food and LIFE fasting our light will BREAK FORTH like the dawn – righteousness will go before us and the glory of the LORD will be our guard.

If we will spend ourselves on behalf of the hungry and the lost, then our LIGHT will rise in the DARKNESS; the Lord will guide us, satisfy us, and strengthen us, like a well-watered garden and spring whose waters never fail.

**That PROMISE is good enough for me! How about you?**

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**Now FASTING of things present is not just for missionaries!**

And that is because God's MISSION in this world is for **ALL who are a part of the church.**

It's for EVERY Christian who has a LONGING for the glory of Christ to be known in all the world.

And here I'm going to **HAVE** to quote John Piper who says that Christians have only **THREE** choices - go, send, or disobey!

So many times I've had conversations with my wife about various friends of ours who are trying to get to the mission field but are struggling so much because of not being able to raise enough financial support.

What my wife sometimes says is "Boy, you know if Christians won't go into the mission field they can at least send others!"

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**But I think there are two recent trends that pose a problem to GOING and SENDING**

I recently met a stranger who when I told her that I was a missionary in Japan, said, "Oh! I'm a missionary too! I'm a missionary in my neighborhood in America."

This reflects the first recent idea which is that "**we're all missionaries**". Now there's something very commendable about the notion and I had to smile a bit when the lady said to me, "I'm a missionary!" with such enthusiasm.

But there's also something flawed and problematic with this idea.

Missions has historically been defined as **CROSSING GEOGRAPHIC BOUNDARIES** and **CROSSING CULTURAL BOUNDARIES** to bring the GOSPEL to those who haven't heard, in nations or areas where there is no or only a very weak indigenous Gospel witness.

The kind of ministry that the Christian lady is doing in reaching out to her friends and neighbors is what we would call **evangelism** – which is a wonderful and very proper thing to be doing – but it's distinct from missions.

The "we're all missionaries" trend is dangerous to the church because:



First of all it ignores the **injustice** of billions who have little or no opportunity to hear the Gospel while we in America have more Christian pastors and schools and media and resources and finances than any nation ever in the history of mankind.

**As Oswald J. Smith said, "We talk of the Second Coming; half the world has never heard of the first."**

Someone asked Charles Spurgeon, "*Will the heathen who have never heard the Gospel be saved?*" *Spurgeon replied, "It is more a question with me whether we -- who have the Gospel and fail to give it to those who have not -- can be saved."*

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**Have you ever thought about the wonderful MERCY of God that you were born into your circumstances?** Most of you were born into relative comfort and tremendous CHRISTIAN opportunity here in America.

From a HUMAN standpoint – I think it's perhaps FAIR to say that it's NOT FAIR – how blessed and privileged we are!

Think about it – you could JUST AS EASILY have been born in the slums of New Delhi or as the son of a Shinto priest. If you had, knowing what you know today, would you not have wanted someone to cross oceans, lands, and cultures to bring YOU the Gospel?

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Secondly it IGNORES the PRIVILEGE and OBLIGATION for every Christian to be a SENDER

**Because** the Great Commission was given to the CHURCH, all who are a part of the CHURCH are a part of that commission that we see from Genesis to Revelation.

As John Stott said, **"We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God."**

The second trend is the abduction of "mission" language by non-missional missional catch-phrasing.

I won't dwell long on this, but let me just say that the recent popular adoption and re-defining of the term "mission" or "missional" especially among the emergent church is first of all understandable – mission is a rhetorically powerful word; but secondly it seems that there are SOOO many aspects and ideas involved in their definition of "missional" that it's honestly very difficult to even grasp with any coherence what they mean, and then finally what IS clear is that most post-modern takes on "mission" or "missional" have very little to do with the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

This lulls us into thinking that we don't need to bring the Gospel anywhere! We just need to be "missional" right here!

If that were truly the case then someone should have told all of these missionaries before they dragged their families half-way around the world.

Imagine Paul and Barnabas being told by some leader in the church at Antioch – you don't have to go Cyprus, Galatia, or Macedonia, you can be a missionary right where you are! **And Paul says, "Why didn't I think of that!"**

So between these two trends of "we're all missionaries" and the emergent church's abduction of missional language we're seeing on rhetorical, conceptual, and practical levels tremendous decaying and misunderstanding of Biblical and historical missions.

On that topic of the Biblical theme of God's mission I commend to you Chris Wright's book "The Mission of God" which takes a look at the grand narrative of God's mission throughout the Scripture.

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**So, what are some ways that SENDERS can fast in response to LONGING, URGENCY, and OPPORTUNITY?**

How can you personally as a pastor, and how can your congregation forsake things present for the global exaltation of Christ?

First of all I want to thank you. THANK YOU for your service for the church. THANK YOU for your sacrifices. THANK YOU for the impact that your church is making in the world already. Even though I pastor a church plant in addition to my work at the seminary, I don't think I could imagine being a full-time pastor. So thank you for all your labor. Surely your reward will be great in heaven.

**But**, and this may sound very greedy – **I want to humbly ask for more.**

**Your role in the GLOBAL EXALTATION of CHRIST is CRUCIAL and STRATEGIC.** In addition you have a grave stewardship. Your congregations follow your lead. And practically speaking the extent to which YOUR HEART is passionate for and your life is actively engaged in global missions is the extent to which your church will be globally missional.

A missionary like me can go to your church and share our lives and our experiences – but YOU are the one who is there week after week and day after day. They follow YOUR leadership. A globally hearted and oriented church is usually led by a globally hearted leader.

So I want to invite you not to create or improve a missions program or committee – but first and foremost to REALLY GET ON BOARD with the Lord and His GLOBAL GOSPEL AGENDA!

**To get on board with the Lord, with His MISSION, with a PASSION for His GLORY, with a BURDEN for the WORLD,**

**with a WILLINGNESS to SACRIFICE and SUFFER, with ETERNAL perspective,**

**with HUMILITY about your own weakness, self-centeredness, and parochialism,**

**with CONFIDENCE in the ABSOLUTELY CERTAINTY of the VICTORY that Christ has won and will be seen and known GLOBALLY,**

**and with EAGERNESS to be an active part of the winning side.**

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**Recognize the enormity and glory of the task, the certainty of its fulfillment... and the enormity of our present resources.**

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Coca-Cola had a well-publicized goal to place "a Coke in the hand of every person on the earth by the year 2000."

Their most recent business plan has the goal of having a **COLD** Coke within one mile of every person on earth by the year 2020."

These are quite bold and ambitious plans – but I'd say don't count them out.

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Coca Cola has changed the world in many ways. They are a more globally recognized product and ICON than I dare say Christianity.

The yearly revenue is \$29 billion; they have \$43 billion in assets. They have more than 90,000 employees around the world.

So is the church then a small little kid who should be intimidated by this big BULLY drinking a coke?

No the CHURCH is the big BULLY that is intimidated by the little kid drinking a coke.

American Evangelical Christians earn more than \$2.5 trillion per year. Almost 100 times more than Coca-cola.

US Evangelical's hold upwards of \$5 trillion in assets and that's NOT including the value of their homes!

80% of the world's evangelical wealth is in North America!!!

**Oh GOD help us to be good stewards of such WEALTH!!!**

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There's a famous saying in Japan, "**Boys be ambitious**"

This is the quote from William Clark who in the late 1800's was president of what is today the Univ. of Massachusetts. For 8 months during his presidency he taught in Japan where he led most of his students to Christ. Today in some Japanese restaurants you can even see that phrase in the windows, "Boys be ambitious!"

This saying though is incomplete. As Clark gave his farewell to his students he turned to them saying, "Boys, be ambitious for Christ."

**Oh! That the American church would have GLOBAL AMBITION for Christ!**

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In the 1980's some experts believed that Coca cola's business had run dry with a saturated North American market. But the company turned its eyes to the rest of the world and by the mid 90's was serving up more than 1 billion drinks every day.

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Today there are more than 6,000 unreached people groups in the world – 2.7 billion people. Japan happens to be the largest at 128 million.

There are more than 4000 languages where there is no Scripture available.

**And you can make a difference.**

Ralph Winter once said to a group of pastors, "Don't go! Send 100!"

And I think that for many of you, the greatest impact you can make for the global glory of God is as a true sending pastor of a truly sending church. And I want to ask and encourage and challenge you all to **BE THE MOST EFFECTIVE , GOD-HONORING, EARTH IMPACTING senders that history has EVER known!!!**

**How can that happen?** Well, one crucial and indispensable area is finances.

I actually though want to encourage you - **Don't GIVE** to missions either as an individual or as a church. "Giving" assumes ownership – and honestly we don't own anything! (In both the OT and the NT we are reminded - The earth is the Lord and all that is in it....)

**Instead I encourage you to INVEST God's resources for God's kingdom work.**

My friend KC works in investment. He was the youngest fund manager on Wall Street. When people put him in charge of their money – he never GIVES any of it away. He doesn't GIVE that money to Apple Computer or Nike. He INVESTS it. And he does so PURPOSEFULLY.

There are 300,000 pastors in America. And I think pastors sometimes think that we don't have to invest in missions or even give to the church. Our time, our efforts are our tithe and offerings. And I think in one sense that's true. In another sense it completely misses the point.

Neither for us nor for your congregation is giving a compelled tax. It's not a question of whether we are exempt from that tax whether in our own consciences or in Biblical justification. That completely misses the point. Both for our congregations and for ourselves – it is **HIGH PRIVILEGE** to be able to invest in God's kingdom work – it is **HIGH PRIVILEGE** to take the whole of our God given resources (whether talents, time, physical energy or finances) and see them invested in **God-glorifying, eternity altering, globally blessing endeavors.**

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If all the pastors in America gave \$100 per month to missions (and I'm sure many of you already do that and much more) that would infuse \$360 million dollars per year into the MISSION ECONOMY. We've heard so much over the past year about economic stimulus packages and the like. **\$360 million dollars!!! What a tremendously powerful MISSION stimulus package!**

How about a **tithe** to missions (on top of church giving) from pastors alone? It could infuse upwards of \$1.8 billion dollars per year into MISSIONS!!! WOW! That could be used to send an additional 90,000 full time missionaries into the world.

**Don't underestimate the impact that you and your family and your modest salary can make in global missions.**

We recently started to run into financial challenges to our ministry and our family support accounts both because of global recession and also a loss of 25% of the value of the dollar versus the yen in Japan. We put out an urgent request for prayer and support – and what happens?

**5 missionaries email us telling us they're sending money.** These are not missionaries with large trust funds. These are missionaries with large trust in God. These are widows mailing in two copper coins and in the process reaping incalculable heavenly treasure.

The biggest mission givers that I know are missionaries - many missionaries who give a tithe or more to reaching the global unreached.

But that is our privilege that being a missionary cannot steal from us.

And that is just one more small way that every pastor can both make global and eternal impact and be a **model** for his congregation.

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If American Evangelicals would INVEST a tithe to global missions that would mobilize \$250 billion per year making the goal of establishing Gospel witness to every nation and people group on earth very much within reach.

There would also need though to be those willing to GO – though I THINK that this would be less of a problem if there were an ARMY of senders.

A tithing to global missions by American evangelicals would fund 10 million missionaries – more than 100 times the number of Coca Cola employees. Don't expect CEO bonuses though – at least not here on earth.

**So I want to call us all to GLOBAL AMBITION for CHRIST!**

That we would forsake things present for the GLOBAL EXALTATION of JESUS CHRIST.

What are some other ways that can happen in your churches?

Number one - Fast – simple, Biblical fasting of FOOD

For all the reasons we talked about 30 minutes ago

I think we've abandoned fasting at the very time and circumstance that we need fasting MOST.

My wife weighs like 100 pounds and has a bad back. If she fasts food there's no way she's going to be able to carry our 20 pound son up the stairs let alone herself! So she's exploring other ways to fast.

But no matter what you fast - because of the overwhelming influence of the consumer mentality and lifestyle that faces us today there is a greater urgency to return to the discipline of fasting.

Fasting helps to sharpen our spiritual senses so dulled by materialism and worldly comfort and success – but instead fasting has been lost in our generation and in our nation.

**We are horders & consumers - we horde & consume and horde & consume**

**When Jesus calls us to receive and give and receive and give.**

Heavenly economic principles CLASH with the economics of consumption and greed

**Should Christians living in POVERTY around the world FAST and we KMART and COSTCO Christians of America should not fast?**

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Number two – Fast COMFORT

The American Dream embodies earthly COMFORT and RECOGNITION and GLORY

These are powerful motivations – because we are HUMAN and were CREATED for comfort. But not an earthly one. Not one of down pillows and retirement funds. Not one based on bank accounts and safe zip codes. That day of comfort is ours now in some measure – because Christ left His Spirit as our wonderful counselor, but that day of comfort will be ours in perfection and for eternity - when this life shall pass.

### **Would you trade 50 years of earthly comfort for an eternity of glory?**

Jesus says in Matt. 19 “everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”

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Would you do that as a missionary? Would you do that as a sender? How different the world will look if every congregation represented in this room were to fast the greatest earthly blessings of life for even greater future heavenly joy!

So practically speaking I'd like to call American Christians to invest a tithe (or more) to bringing the Gospel to the 2.7 billion unreached people of the world - that we would mobilize God's resources for God's mission.

As the church invests money more faithfully and more globally I can almost **GUARANTEE** that it will inspire MORE giving in your church – not less.

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In the past decade of unprecedented economic prosperity, giving to the church was significantly less than even during the Great Depression. If it takes our global recession becoming a global depression to help wake up the church in America, then I say, **BRING IT ON! Global Depression – bring it on!**

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### **So what else can be fasted and forsaken for the global exaltation of Christ?**

Your time – invest time and heart and tears in prayer for the world and for the Lord's glory around the world! Invest time to read and learn and grow your mind and heart for the world.

Operation World is a must have book for every Christian so that our prayers for the nations of the world can go beyond, “Lord bless the missionaries. God bless those global Christian... people.”

If you want to learn more about the challenges and opportunities facing the global church and how global leaders are responding, I would encourage you to get to know the work of the Lausanne Movement.

As you hopefully know the Lausanne Movement began in 1974 under the leadership of Billy Graham and John Stott. Lausanne was used by the Lord to help stem the tide of liberalism in the 1970's, and the Lausanne Covenant is used by more churches and

organizations as their statement of faith and vision than any almost any other document in the world.

The Lausanne Movement has a unique ministry and role in the global church being a broker of trust, unity, and vision for global evangelicals.

**Today I can tell you that there is in and through the Lausanne Movement powerful and fresh momentum globally.** In October 2010 Cape Town South Africa will play host to the third major Lausanne Congress, gathering 4000 global church leaders and tens of thousands more through the internet and satellite. The leadership of Lausanne has emphasized that such an event is only necessary when, like in 1974, there are both exceptional internal problems and external pressures upon the global church. And today that is the situation we face.

**Internally** we face once again theological challenges that threaten to undermine the faith and mission of the church. These include questions regarding the uniqueness of and salvation in Jesus Christ alone and the urgency of the church's response to the prosperity Gospel and to prosperity itself.

**Externally** the Church faces the pressures of the powerful influence and growth of Islam and the remaining task of bringing the Gospel and proclaiming Christ to the whole world. There is a need for global theological and strategic discussion as well as greater global partnerships and authentic Christian living.

Lausanne III will focus on highlighting these challenges of our generation, creating a forum for prayer and discussion, building up of global networks, and strategizing towards God-honoring engagement with and the fulfilling of the Lord's Great Commission mandate.

I'm happy to introduce to you Blair Carlson the conference director for Lausanne III.

Lausanne is in the process of publishing a series of booklets called "The Didasko Files" that address some foundational issues of the church today both theologically and strategically. This growing set of booklets include topics such as the Gospel, leadership, and giving. Information is available on the information table in the exhibitor's hall that also has information about our ministry in Japan.

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**I also ask that you fast the very best and brightest of your church.**

Yes, send 100, but don't send us the 100 biggest headaches of your church! Send us your sons and daughters – (unless of course they are among the biggest headaches!)

**Send us your right hand man. Send us the people who will leave the BIGGEST gaps in your ministry!**



**Send us Paul and Barnabas – and SEE if God does not BLESS YOU by raising up another DOZEN Pauls and Barnabas'!!!**

Number three – surrender your heart and agenda and life to the Lordship of Christ

You may be thinking – well of course we do that. We're Christian. Or of course we do that. I'm a PASTOR!

**I say to you, "Well of course we don't do that – we're sinners!"**

I know my own heart that FIGHTS with the Lord over who is in control and that shuns suffering.

**And so many Christians are living life - SO AS TO AVOID SUFFERING!!!**

Living life - SO AS TO NOT NEED FAITH OR GOD!!!

LIVING LIFE – with the ULTIMATE GOAL - TO BE COMFORTABLE

physically, emotionally, financially, spiritually comfortable

If this were Jesus' goal - to be physically, emotionally, financially, spiritually comfortable,

HE WOULD HAVE STAYED IN HEAVEN!!!

And I think it's time for us to forsake our own agenda of comfort, to repent of it, and to confess again and submit again to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

And in light of Biblical teaching and in light of global realities and in light of the Lordship of Jesus Christ I believe that every Christian should be able to say,

I have reason enough in the Gospel of Jesus Christ alone that should Christ call me, I would leave everything behind to follow Him even to the ends of the earth.

That is as true for you and me as it is for John Piper or anyone else who calls Christ Lord.

What is it about our understanding of Lordship that allows us to think that we can set parameters on what we will and will not do and where we will and will not go for Christ?

Or is our understanding and appreciation of the Gospel and our desire for the glory of God so tepid and tempered that the Gospel alone is not motivation enough to pursue the proclamation of the Gospel among the least reached peoples of the world?

So again for many of you the call is to STAY and send 100! BUT – as someone once said, "Unless you are WILLING to GO, you're not qualified to SEND!"

So with that all in mind, I want to encourage you to pray about and consider giving God a tithe of your life for missions. Investing 10% of your ministry life – let's say 5 years – to the proclamation of the Gospel among the 6,000 unreached people groups of the world.

**Now I know that some of you here are VERY important people** – in many respects it may seem that your church cannot EXIST without you – but maybe that's just what your church needs - to learn that it can exist without you; and maybe the Lord would have you pastor and encourage a congregation of Fulani in Africa or Mappila in India for 5 years or to teach at an overseas seminary for a month out of every year?

300,000 American pastors giving a tithe of their ministry lives to global missions would add 30,000 **very well** trained missionaries and leaders to the cause of Christ globally. That kind of contribution would change the entire landscape of missions.

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So investing a tithe of the finances that God has entrusted to us & investing a tithe of the LIFE that God has entrusted to us for the GLOBAL EXALTATION of Christ.

Something to think and prayer about.

For many as they feel conviction for investing life and finances and their futures either as those who go or those who send they ask themselves and God -

**Why me?! Why not someone else?!**

And then after experiencing both the painful starvation of fasting earthly blessing in the forsaking of brother and sister and father and mother and fields and finances for the sake of Christ AND the incredible blessing of feasting and leaning upon Christ and Christ alone ask themselves and God – **O Lord! Why me? Why me to receive such favor and grace!!!**

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**Well, it's about time for me to wrap things up.**

**Again I want to thank you for your graciousness in even listening to me.**

Let me close with two passages of Scripture. These are wonderful examples of the forsaking of things present for the global exaltation of the Lord.

In Exodus 36 we read this about the building of the **tabernacle** –

Ex. 36:2 ¶ Then Moses summoned Bezalel and Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the LORD had given ability and who was willing to come and do the work.

Ex. 36:3 They received from Moses all the offerings the Israelites had brought to carry out the work of constructing the sanctuary. And the people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning.

Ex. 36:4 So all the skilled craftsmen who were doing all the work on the sanctuary left their work

Ex. 36:5 and said to Moses, “The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the LORD commanded to be done.”

Ex. 36:6 ¶ Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: “No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.” And so the people were restrained from bringing more,

Ex. 36:7 because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.

And then we read in 1 Chronicles 29 about the building of the **Temple** of God –

1Chr. 29:1 ¶ Then King David said to the whole assembly: “My son Solomon, the one whom God has chosen, is young and inexperienced. The task is great, because this palatial structure is not for man but for the LORD God.

1Chr. 29:2 With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God — gold for the gold work, silver for the silver, bronze for the bronze, iron for the iron and wood for the wood, as well as onyx for the settings, turquoise, stones of various colors, and all kinds of fine stone and marble — all of these in large quantities.

1Chr. 29:3 Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple:

1Chr. 29:4 three thousand talents of gold (gold of Ophir) and seven thousand talents of refined silver, for the overlaying of the walls of the buildings,

1Chr. 29:5 for the gold work and the silver work, and for all the work to be done by the craftsmen. Now, who is willing to consecrate himself today to the LORD?”

1Chr. 29:6 ¶ Then the leaders of families, the officers of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of the king’s work gave willingly.

1Chr. 29:7 They gave toward the work on the temple of God five thousand talents and ten thousand darics of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of bronze and a hundred thousand talents of iron.

1Chr. 29:8 Any who had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the temple of the LORD in the custody of Jehiel the Gershonite.

1Chr. 29:9 The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the LORD.

**In these Scripture we read about the OVERWHELMING response of God's people to the building of the Tabernacle and the building of the Temple of God.**

This is before the people knew that Christ Himself would tabernacle among us.

This is before the cross of Jesus – who Himself was the greater Temple – destroyed and rebuilt in three days.

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The Church of Jesus Christ – and we all as leaders – have the tremendous privilege of being a part of the building of the **KINGDOM** of God. It is ours to receive; it is ours to enter;

**It is ours to preach, it is ours to proclaim.**

**It is ours to seek, and it is ours – it is ours.**

**Fellow workers of the Kingdom of God, could it be said of us, could it be said of our churches, could it be said of our nation, could it be said of our generation -**

**That every skilled person to whom the LORD had given ability and who was willing – went and did God's work impacting even to the very ends of the earth.**

**That the people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the LORD commanded to be done in the building of His KINGDOM among every tribe, language, people, and nation.**

**And may the prayers of our heart be like that of David which I now pray to close our time and ask you to join by standing and agreeing in your hearts -**

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours.  
Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.

Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.

But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope.

O LORD our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you.

AMEN.