

“DON’T MAKE ME COME BACK THERE”

Andy Stanley

I want to talk to just that percentage of you who would say that you really, really, really love your church—you know, if you’re part of one of our churches you really love your church. You love what we’re doing with our students—we’re impacting a generation of high school kids and middle school kids; you love the fact that your husband likes to come here because we get you out on time. Because you know men, as soon as men walk into an event where there are rows, men turn to their wives or their girlfriends or their parents and say *how long is this going to last*. I mean I get that, that’s what I want to know. Anytime I go to a recital—one of our kid’s things, unless it’s a baseball game and I want those to go forever—but it’s like *how long*. So we get you out on time and you love that. You love the quality. You might even love the music. I met a guy the other night at our “Fight Club” thing, our fight event the other night, and he said *Andy, honestly I came here for a while, I couldn’t stand the music and went back to my traditional church and found that to be a little bit too quiet, came back and I have acquired a taste for it*. I said *yeah, it’s like unsweetened iced tea, or in your case beer*. So, you’re even to the point where you like the music, you like the communication, you like the facility, you like the fact that we put it online so you can stay home, you like the volunteer opportunities, you like the people you’ve met, you like your small groups. I mean honestly you’ve gotten to the place where, you know you may not use this word, but you really, really—and I just want to talk to those of you who would say—*I really love my church. I love the baptism videos, I love my church*.

I want to talk to those of you who love your church but you do not have a plan—and this is the key word today—you do not have a plan for financially supporting the church you love. I just want to talk to those of you who say *oh, I love it*. Now if you don’t love it, this isn’t for you. If you’re here for the first time, this is like a first date so you’re not in love, this is like a first date. We hope you fall in love and we’re going to invite you in—which I don’t suggest on a first date. If this is like your first date or second date, this isn’t for you. You can just kind of sit and be comfortable. But if you’ve been coming for a long time, a member or regular attender, and you say, you know, *I love my church, I love my church* but you do not have a plan.

I don’t mean that you don’t put \$5.00 in the bucket—it’s kind of that guilt money as it comes by. Or that when there’s like a hurricane relief, you’re all about that. Be Rich, you’re all about that. And when there’s a tragedy, there’s some special event, and we’re raising money for a special event, you know you’re all about that. But you don’t have a plan. In other words if I were to say to you over coffee or if I were to say to you *hey, what is your plan for financially supporting your local church?* If you don’t have a plan, you’re not a percentage giver, you haven’t decided on an amount of money, you haven’t gone online and signed up for that auto thing where we’ll just take it right out of your checking account... You don’t show up on Sunday with your check written, you don’t go to the ATM and have that cash, there is no plan. You love our church, you know you give every once in a while, but you don’t have a plan. That’s who I want to talk to for just a few minutes. I’m going to ask a few questions because it’s going to get a little tense here for a minute.

What do you call a father who says *I love my children but I don't give them any money? I don't support them. I mean like if they beg me, like okay, if they're down to like a sock. If their hair is just so bad, I mean, if it gets really desperate and I feel like my kids need money and they convince me they need money, then I'll give them some money.* What do you call a father who says *no, no I love my kids, I love my kids, I love my kids, but I only support them financially when they're just desperate.* You call that a “bad dad.” That’s what you call that. Right? He says he loves them but he won’t support them financially. That’s a bad dad. What do you call a Christian who says *I love my church, oh I love my church, I love my church, I love my church, what my church does for me, I love what my church provides for me, I love what my church does for my kids, I love the fact that my wife will come, I love the fact that it's not really Catholic and it's not really Baptist or Presbyterian, it's kind of nothing. My church is kind of nothing so we all fit there. I love my church, but I don't support them financially on a regular basis unless it gets desperate.* What do you call that person? You call them an “average Christian.” Because that’s what average Christians do. They do—I mean this is statistically shown. This isn’t just us. This is all churches. And here’s the thing and you know this, you’ve been coming for a while, I don’t want you to be average. I don’t want you to have average marriages. You know you don’t want to raise average kids. I don’t want you to have average jobs, I don’t want you to have average passion in life about what you do. I don’t even want you to take average vacations. I don’t want you to be average. I want you to be way above average. And you want to be way above average. And I don’t like the fact—and this is going to be hard for you to believe and don’t get suspicious—but about 70%, about 70% of the people who are regular attenders or members of our churches all over the city, about 70% do not support our churches financially on a regular basis.

Seventy percent. Now when I look at that I’ve got to tell you, first of all, it hurts my feelings. It does. I’m like *all I do for you and it's like oh I love our church, I'm not going to give any money. What do you think this is?* So it kind of hurts my feelings. Then I move past that and then I think *you know what, I've just been a terrible leader.* Obviously the fact that we are kind of in this 70-30—at least it’s not 80-20, you know, at least we’re 70-30—but there is about 70% of you who are signed up for stuff, come to stuff, you say this is my church, got your kids enrolled, you’re in small group...about 70% of you do not support any of our local churches on any kind of regular basis. Now that just needs to stop because let me tell you: okay look, I know we’re talking about money, it’s okay. And if you invited your friend, you’re like *oh no.* But your friends need to hear this because what I’m about to say in a few minutes is so embarrassing they’re just going to bug you about it maybe the rest of your life. So you deserve that you invited them today, okay? Unless you’re in the 30% club. Here’s the deal, the fact that we’re able to do what we do with just 30% of you being a part financially is really remarkable. Now let me move on.

There is basically—and I’ve been doing this a long, long time so this 70-30 thing isn’t a total shock—but I look at those statistics year after year after year and I go *come on, we're better than that.* Because I know you love our church. I know you do. I mean there are some of you who don’t, but you know you’re here, you keep consuming and consuming and consuming. So

basically there are three reasons why a person who loves their church doesn't have a plan. There is basically three reasons why somebody would say *no I really love my local church, I'm so glad that church is in the community, I'm so glad they're there*—there's only about three reasons a person would say *I love my church* and not, you know, have a plan for supporting them financially.

The first one is simply this: they just haven't thought of it before. They never thought about *oh, I need a plan*. So for some of you we're done. That's it—you've thought of it now. I helped you think of it. Okay let's put a check in that box and your life should be different from this point. *Andy, honestly I just thought, you know, the bucket comes by and I put some money in. I never thought about having a plan*. You need to have a plan. See, this is a very fair question. I wouldn't shrink back, no matter how long you've been a Christian or if you're not even a Christian and you attend a local church, I would look you right in the eye, I wouldn't blink, and I would say *hey this is a fair question, what's your plan for supporting your local church financially?* I'm not embarrassed to ask you that—what your plan is. I'm not asking you how much, I'm not even telling you what to do yet. Okay? I've done that before but that's not what today is about. I wouldn't hesitate at all to say *what is your plan for supporting your local church?* You should have an answer to that question especially if you love your church. You just haven't thought about it before. So that's number one—we've taken care of that.

Number two: they just haven't taken time to create a plan. You know you hear a message like this or you're already sitting here going *yeah, you're right, you know, I do. It's kind of spontaneous, it's however much cash I have, or if I think about it the night before, or at the end of the year I'm feeling kind of generous, or if I get a bonus I write a check. But you're right, Andy, I should have a plan. And I just haven't taken the time to set up a plan*. Now if you have been attending here for any length of time you know how I feel about this and you know what I teach you about this. I don't want you to simply have a plan for giving, I want you to have a triple plan because I care about you. I want you to have a savings plan—and some of you have that built in. Some of you never see money, it just goes away because you know you're not disciplined enough to save it. So you just never see—it just goes right over into your 401(k), your 403(b), or whatever, how your saving thing works. Then I want you to have a spending plan a.k.a. “a budget.” Right? I want you to have a savings plan; I want you to have a spending plan; and because I'm your pastor and love you, I want you to have a giving plan.

Now you know what? A lot of you have one of these [a savings plan]. I hope you do, that's just part of being responsible. Right? And I know all of you have one of these [a spending plan]. It may not be written down but we could look at your credit card stubs, your checking account...you've got some sort of plan. I mean it's going out, right? You have a plan. You need to have a giving plan. You need to sit down and decide *how am I going to support my local church*. It's a fair question. If you don't have the triple plan, here's what is going to happen, here's where some of you are: you're going to save too little, you're going to spend too much, and you're going to give leftovers. Now you know what? If you were going to invite somebody over to your house, you do not serve leftovers (unless you're my wife because they're better than what most people cook—we can do that, but the average cook, you know, I'm just bragging...)

You're just not going to serve people leftovers. And the truth is—and I'm not just getting on your case—I thought we were better than this; we're not yet, we're about to be—is that most Christians—it's not just us, most Christians who say they really love their church give whatever is leftover. [They] look in their wallets *what I got leftover. Looked in the checking account; I can't afford to do anything this month, maybe next month. We ate it all up. We consumed it all. Hey, but the good news is whether we give or not, that church is going to be there; that pastor is going to speak; and they're going to take care of my kids. So I can just give leftovers.*

If you were to ask me, *Andy, give me like the 15-second version of how I should manage my money*, I would give it to you. I would write a book on this but the book would be so short there would be no point in reading it. I can give you the whole plan on a 3 x 5 card. I want you to give, I want you to save, and I want you to live. That's it. This is the way a Christian manages their finances. They give first, they save second, and then you live on what's leftover. Now here's what I know about everybody in the room and everybody watching: if you're 35 years or older—if you're 35 years old or older—you wish you could go back to when you were twenty-something and give first, save second, and live on whatever is leftover. Because you would have more money. You would have more money, you would have wasted less money, you would have spent less money on dumb things. So this isn't just about the church getting your money, it's really not. It's not even about the church needing your money, we'll talk about this in just a second. I want you to be great Christians. And so you need to have an answer to the question, *what's my plan for financially supporting the church that I love?*

A bunch of you—several thousand of you—are using this program that we set up a few years ago because some people asked us to. If you go to NPMgive.org—I really resisted this, I really did; our finance department would come to me and say, *Andy, people want us to do this; I'm like I'm not sure it's a great idea*; so we finally relented about two and a half years ago—NPMgive.org, you can just go up and we'll do what your company does, we'll take the money right out of your checking account every month. Okay? You just tell us how much you want to come out and you'll never see it. And for some people this is the only way they can be disciplined enough to give money to the local church. So we'll do that for you. You just go there, click on that website, and we'll give you all five of our Atlanta-area campuses. You click a campus and give a one-time gift or you can say *hey, every month I want you to take so many dollars out of my checking account*. We'll do that for you. But the thing is, you need to have a plan. You need a savings plan, you need a spending plan, and you need a giving plan. What's your plan for supporting—financially supporting—the local church that you love? That's a fair question. And the rest of you, the other 70%, come on, come up with a plan.

Now here's the one I really want to talk about because this is kind of funny to me—and weird and strange. The other reason that people don't give to a church they love, especially a church like one of our churches is this: number three is, they don't think their church needs the money. Now if you have been daydreaming, I really need your undivided attention. If you're at home watching, put whatever that is away and turn off the television just for a few minutes. This is very important. Now if you're not a Christian, or you're not a church person, or you're kind of new to this, you already think Christians are a little bit irrational. And I understand that. You

think we're a little bit strange. You're not even sure why you're here today. Somebody promised you lunch or you'll meet somebody cute or you just got caught in the traffic. And the whole Christianity thing is a little bit *do-do-do-do* and I understand that because I am one. I've been one a long time. We believe some strange things. But what I'm about to tell you will confirm your suspicions that there is an irrational thread woven throughout Christianity. So here's why I'm setting it up—if you're not a Christian, if you're not a religious person, if you're not a person who would identify with Christianity in any way, all I would ask is that what I'm about to share next, that you not share outside this room. We already look bad enough as it is in some quarters of our culture. What I'm about to share now may just push people over the top in terms of how they view Christians. Okay? So would you do that for me?

Now, here is the problem with this; some of you who don't have a plan for supporting the church you love used to go to a different church. And at that different church, that church needed your money. And the way you know that they needed your money is because what do they talk about all the time? What did they talk about all the time? Money. It's like every time they take the offering, it's like the pastor would do a mini sermon. And some of you went to churches and they took up two offerings, and then it's pastor appreciation month, and then it's the pastor's birthday, and then it's this thing, and it's that thing, and then *we got to buy a new roof, and we're going to need this, and the carpet...* and it looked like they were always looking for an excuse to have a special offering. There were envelopes and, you know, they just talked about money all the time. And do you know what you did in those churches? You gave and you gave because you kind of felt guilty. And it's like they would call you and you had pledge cards every year about how much are you going to give. I mean they just talked about money every Sunday just about and you got tired of it. Now you gave. But you weren't a happy giver; you weren't a cheerful giver; you were a *here we go again* giver, you know. And so you attended that church and you just didn't like it. And it was very clear *this church needs money, this church needs my money.*

Then you got sick of it. It's like *I'm not doing that anymore*—especially your husband—*it's like all they want is our money.* That's all they talk about and they're always manipulating and praying, and then *if you give God one, he'll give you ten.* Have you ever been to one of those churches? That's just so silly. If you really believe, you can go ahead and give God ten. And ask the pastor how many did you give God to get ten? The whole thing is just so silly. So there is all kinds of weird stuff in church about money and so you kind of got tired of that whole thing. So you left the church that needed your money and you came to one of our churches. And it's like *wow, they don't need my money obviously—they never talk about it.* I mean it's just so weird the way we do it. It's like we sing these songs, have a baptism video, talk about small group— it's so emotional—and then the worship leader, who you don't know, gets up and says “and our guest services folks are going to come and take the offering” and say a little prayer. The next thing you know it's like *what did he say, I don't even know,* and then there's a bucket going through, and it's over, and then we're on with the show and you're like *wow, you know.* Or, you know, the real hardcore press around here—I mean this is tough—the lead pastor gets up and he comes out and he says *hey, did you see that amazing baptism video? I just want you to know, thank you for your generosity.* And you're sitting there going *well I haven't given a dime, he ain't talking to*

me. So there must be a whole bunch of generous people around here and everything seems to be working fine. They don't need my money.

And then we take up the offering, this is the best part. And this thing comes around, right? And they hand it to you, and you look in there, and you go—and you're like, *well that's gross*—and you look at the \$8.92 [in the bucket]. And then you look at all of our lights and cameras and the facility, and you look at all the hallways and what we're doing with kids, and you're looking at this bucket and here's what you're thinking—I understand this—you're going *okay, there is something going on here because there ain't no way that this pays for all of this.* Have you ever had that thought? Don't raise your hand. I have it every single week. I'm like...I understand that. You kind of look in there, and you kind of put your \$5.00 in there, and it doubles the money, and it's like *I don't know how they do this.* So you're smart —so come on, come on—you are smart people, you're smart. Here's what happens—I understand this—so you assume, you assume, you know, that *there's something I don't know. Because that ain't paying for it, and yet the lights are always on, everything is fun, and good grief, they give out more t-shirts than Gap.* So it's like what you know. *Obviously there's a lot of money flowing around here; and it's coming from somewhere; and it ain't coming from those silly buckets. I know that. So this church doesn't need my money to the point where I'm not even sure why they take an offering. It's just loud and there's no money in there.*

So you just assume and you just confirm your suspicion *I don't need to have a giving plan for this church. This church doesn't need my money.* Now here's the irrational part that I hope doesn't leave the room. Do I have everybody's attention? Okay, this isn't much of a sermon, but it's interesting. Okay, so here's how all this comes together. So here we go: you don't want to attend a church that needs your money—you don't because it's just awful. It's like everything is breaking, and they're negative, and *oh we're not going to do this* and *oh we're not going to do that*, and the thing is you are smart people. You're business people. You know if a church or any organization is constantly on the edge of going out of business, they're just being managed poorly. That's it—it's bad leadership. You know that, that's why you...you really don't even if you've never thought about it before—you do not want to attend a church that constantly needs your money. So you don't and so you came to one of ours. And you won't give to a church that *doesn't* need your money—which means you never plan to give to a church you actually attend.

Now what am I supposed to do with that? I mean I only have a couple of options. I can get all the lead pastors together and say *okay, guys, we need to create a crisis. Forget your budget and just spend all the money. Let's be irresponsible. Let's spend us into oblivion. And then we can get up on Sundays and go "Now folks, folks, friends," and we can get up and tell you some sad stories. "Do you want us to be able to change diapers or do you want to smell poop in the hall? Don't you care about children and babies? Don't you want us to be able to mow the lawn? Don't you want to be able to pay the pastor and the staff?"* I mean we could create an artificial crisis. But the thing is, after a few weeks of that, you would go to another church that doesn't need your money where you don't give.

So you have a real dilemma. If you're going to attend a church that doesn't "need your money" then you've got to come up with a giving plan to support the church that doesn't need your money. Now here's the other thing that's just crazy about this. Let me ask you a question. Do you do business with companies that need your money or provide great goods and services? Do you do business with companies that need your money or companies that provide quality goods and services? When you heard years ago that Circuit City was going out of business, and Circuit City was bankrupt, and they were having trouble, did you call your friends and family together and say *okay, don't go to Best Buy, don't go to Frye's and don't go to Amazon. We're buying all of our electronics from Circuit City.* No, you went *huh, it sucks to be them.* You didn't feel like *oh, we have got to spend our money with companies that need our money.* So here's my question, why would you treat Disney and Starbucks better than your church? Let me ask you a question: if your marriage hits a bump, you need help, are you going to call Mickey? Your middle schooler gets in trouble, your middle schooler won't listen to mom, your middle schooler won't listen to dad, you need another adult pouring into the life of your middle schooler—are you going to call Howard? Are you going to call Cupertino, California and ask for Tim on your iPhone? Uh-uh, you're going to show up at the church you love. And here's something that's pretty cool—when you show up at the church you love and you're in need, and you have a crisis, we do not check your giving record. Because it's irrelevant—because we're the church.

Why would anyone who loves their church give more money to Disney—and I'm not against Disney—or to anything? Or to give money to all those companies that provide wonderful goods and services and then you come to a church you love and say *well since they don't need it I'm not going to give it.* That's just irrational. I mean that's crazy. So stop it. Or if you're a Christian, go to a church that needs your money until you're so tired of it you come back and say *I just can't stand it anymore.*

Now here's the surprise, we actually do need the other 70% of you to come up with a giving plan to support the church you love. We do need your money, but we don't need your money to pay the power bill—the other 30% covered that. We don't need your money to pay the staff—the other 30% covered that. We don't need your money just to do what you see being done on your campus—we have never been a church that's all about a piece of real estate or a campus. We are committed to creating churches unchurched people love to attend, so that in the United States of America, when people think "church," they think "yes" rather than "no." When people think church, they think "they're for us," rather than "they want something from us." We are on a mission to change the way Americans view church so that we can change the way Europeans view church, the way Canadians view church, the way the world views the church. And in order to do that, we've got to have everybody who loves their church engage with their body and engage with their money. Not so we can pay the electric bill—plus you don't want to give money to pay the electric bill anyway. Some of you told me that—*well I just don't like to give money to just keep things going, I like to give to special things.* To which, you know, I don't say it, but I would like to look at you and go *that's because you think you're special. You think your money is more important than my money.* (I don't say that.)

Now here's the thing since I'm on a rant—it's not much of a sermon, but it's interesting isn't it? Okay. Let me show you something [references photo]. Look at this. Do you know what this is? This is a piece of property we own in Gwinnett County. We're under construction for the first phase of the Gwinnett Church. It's going to cost millions of dollars. And did you know we won't have to borrow a dime if the rest of you...(applause)...wait, wait, wait, don't clap yet, Mom. If the rest of you—listen to me, come on, come on, you trust me, I'm not asking for anything, I'm good—if the other 70% of you would just come up with a plan, just decide we're going to give \$5.00 every week. Hey, there's a plan. It's pathetic but it's a plan. I'd rather you have a pathetic plan than no plan. Okay? Look, we're going to create a church unchurched people [love]...listen—Jeff Henderson and his team, listen, do you know what they're all about? They named it Gwinnett Church. They didn't name it Peachtree Industrial Church. [They named it] Gwinnett Church. Why? Because they want to reach the *whole county*. Do you want to help Jeff Henderson and Gwinnett Church reach the whole county? Good news, you don't even have to go there. You don't even have to be able to find this piece of property. But we need you to engage financially to help us get it done. We need that money that you're like *they don't need my money*.

Let me show you another picture. Do you know what this is [references photo]? This is in Woodstock. We got a beautiful piece of property in Woodstock. Now right now while we're sitting here—and let's give it up for Watermark Church, you guys give yourself a big shout out. We can't hear you but okay. Here's the deal, today while we're meeting, over 2,200 or 2,300 people are in a school that we're renting and we have got to build them a building. And you already bought the property. Or let me be accurate, 30% of us bought the land. Okay? I'm not bitter. Okay, 30% of us bought the land. We need to build them a building. Now let me tell you what, we're a big church. We could go out and we could borrow a boat load of money and I'm telling you, banks love us. They love us—*please take money*. But we don't need to do that if the rest of you just come up with a plan, any plan.

Now let me show you something even cooler than that. Do you know what this is a picture of? If you're sitting here with me in Alpharetta that was what we looked like 15 years ago—a cup of dirt. Aren't you glad, aren't you glad—those of you who have come back to faith, those of you whose husbands are like *I can go to that church*, those of you whose kids are like *Mommy and Daddy, I don't want to miss KidStuf*—aren't you glad some people decided Atlanta doesn't need another church; Atlanta needs a different kind of church. And we bought 80 acres and people looked at me like *what are you going to do with 80 acres*. I said *I don't know it was just the biggest piece we could afford. Are you sure it's going to be that big, are you going to need all that land?* I said *yeah, because we're going to create a church unchurched people love to attend and there's way more unchurched people than church people. All the other churches, they're fighting over the church people. We're going after a completely different market. We need a big piece of land*. And some people you've never met—some of them aren't even with us anymore—gave a whole lot of money. Not because *oh they need*...uh-uh, they had vision. They wanted to do something no one in this part of the country had ever done before.

If you go to Buckhead Church check this out [references photo]. That's where Buckhead Church is. You know what's cool about this—if you go to Buckhead Church, all of my Buckhead Church friends? People say all the time *well what was this building being used for before you bought it?* I said *it wasn't a building, it was a piece of dirt.* God preserved 2 ½ acres in the middle of Buckhead all these years for Buckhead Church. Because God knew Atlanta doesn't need another church; Atlanta needs a different kind of church. And a whole bunch of people weren't caught up in *well does the church need the money?* They said *no, we're going to give because God is going to do something new and unique and I want to be a part of it.* And a lot of you right now are sitting in Buckhead Church. I'm just going to be honest—it's easy because I'm 20 miles away—you don't give to Buckhead Church. You're nice, a lot of you serve, but about 70% of you have no plan to support your local church. Come on, come on, aren't you glad somebody decided to put a church in your backyard? I know you are. You love Buckhead Church. So, come on.

And, Browns Bridge, I'm not done. Do you know what this is [references photo]? This is what Browns Bridge looked like a few years ago. And a group of people who attended North Point Community Church said *you know what, we're too full—we've got east and west auditoriums, let's do something.* I mean talk about an experiment. *Let's do something no one has done before. Let's buy property twenty-something miles from here and let's put a church out there* (that seemed like the middle of nowhere—no offense but if you haven't been out there, I mean there's not a lot around you out there yet). Talk about a chance and a risk. And do you know why people gave? They didn't give because *oh, does the church need our money? Andy, does the church [need our money]?* No. If you ever attend any of our campuses and you feel like your local church needs your money, it's poor leadership not poor giving. Listen, we're so committed to people walking into our churches and going *wow*, we will give up salaries before we allow these campuses to begin to erode and to feel like *wow, that church needs my money.*

I want to show you one other church building—this is a little emotional for me but hey, bear with me. Anybody know what this is [references photo]? This is the First Baptist Church of Atlanta, Georgia that use to be down on Peachtree Street. This building was completed in 1930 and they had a loan on it. Anybody remember what kicked off about 1930? I'll give you a hint, it starts with “the great.” Not Gatsby. The Great Depression. And they paid their staff, and they kept the lights on, and they preserved that building, and then about 1958 two little babies were born, Louie Giglio and Andy Stanley. And Louie Giglio grew up in this church. About 1969, I showed up. This is where we learned the scripture. This is where we had our youth group experience with Mary Gellerstedt—who is 80-something years old and still around. This is where God called us to preach. I'm so grateful for a group of people who had a vision for brick and mortar in the City of Atlanta and kept that building going—kept that church going, not because *oh, the church needs it.* And I bet during the depression that church did need money. But people somehow gave anyway. I'm so grateful for the generations that came along from this building—that created the environment for what I heard when I was raised in that church through elementary, middle school, high school, and college—and so is Louie.

Do you know what that means? It means if you love this church, if you love this church—the church you’re in today—did you know that the generations that gave to that church [First Baptist] have impacted your church? So why in the world would you not have a plan for supporting your local church financially? It’s baffling to me. I don’t have any verses today and I’ll tell you why. I had some but I felt like I was going to manipulate you. I could show you the verse, *God said* and *Jesus said* and *if you do this*—and I believe all that. We preach all that. But here’s the thing, this is just kind of common sense, isn’t it? Do we really need a verse to go *oh yeah, I should financially support the church I love. It’s in the Word of God.* Do you really need that or can we all just be grateful and do what we know in our heart we need to do? So, here’s the deal and then I’m done. If you don’t, if you don’t—if it continues to just be the 30%, if you are not willing—this is a fair question—if you are not willing to sit down and come up with a plan of how you’re going to financially support the church you love, here’s what I will be forced to do. Number one, I’m going to continue giving up my Saturday nights so that on Sunday morning I’m prepared to preach God’s word in such a way that it’s engaging for you and your guests. Number two, I’m going to continue hiring staff to create the most extraordinary children’s environment on the planet so that your children grow up with a positive attitude toward church and fall in love with Jesus when they’re young—so that the anchor is set so deep in their heart that when they begin to drift they can only drift so far. Number three, we’re going to continue to create student environments that engage the hearts of teenagers in a culture that’s committed to squashing the God and the conscience out of their hearts. Number four, I promise that our campuses will always look great, so that when you bring a friend you’re proud to say *that’s where I attend church.* Number five, I’m going to ensure that when you have a need, we’re going to meet it regardless of whether you ever give a dime to your local church. Number six, we’re going to continue to broadcast all of our messages for free, forever. Number seven, I’m going to do everything in my power to raise the money one way or another to continue to create new churches that unchurched people love to attend. And number eight, Sandra and I will always give a minimum of 10% of everything we make from every source of income to our local church.

Because the church is the hope of the world. Because the church carries the message that revolutionizes lives. And the church is the presence of Jesus on the planet. You will miss money that you mispend; you’ll miss money that you’ll gamble away; you’ll miss money that you lose; you’ll miss money that you waste; but you will never miss the money that you give to a local church that’s in sync with the will of God on the planet. Because it is a gift that gives generation, after generation, after generation, after generation, after generation. So if you don’t have a plan, I want you to go home and come up with a plan. I don’t care what it looks like. I’m not going to ask. There is no *fill out a card*, there is just a *come on, you are smart people who love your local church.* So I want you to give, because we need to continue what a handful of people started eighteen years ago when we launched a church that unchurched people would love to attend.

Let me pray for you.

Heavenly Father, thank you for Mary Gellerstedt. She saw me and Louie and said *there’s something there worth investing in* and we’re so grateful for her. Thanks for my dad, who created a church that was so engaging—even before people began thinking about church being engaging.

Thank you for the dear people who through the depression kept that church going and kept it alive when it must have been so difficult. Thank you, Father, for the men and women in our churches who have given sacrificially—the college students, the high school students, the jars of change that people have brought us when we were building new facilities. And, Father, thank you for the people here today who haven't given anything yet. They just didn't know until today what it was about. And would you stir their hearts not so that you will bless us—we're so blessed. We're so far ahead even on our darkest nights, even in our most difficult times when we look around at what's going on in the world we're so grateful. So, Father, just open our eyes, open our hearts, and open our hands to be a part of what you're doing in our city, in our country, and in our world. And, Father, I pray that we would be the most generous church in the country. And that it would just motivate churches all over our country.