

“Faith Living”

Hebrews 11:1, 6; Philippians 4:14-17

Randy Pope

Well, it is a treat to be with you always is. Love this place and love so many of you. And I always look forward to getting to know more and more of you when I'm here. But for time's sake, less greetings. I'm going to move right into the preaching of God's Word. So let me ask you a question to kind of get us thinking in the right direction.

In addition to giving your heart to God, if you had to pick one other gift that you could give to him, what do you think you'd give him-- Lord, here's my heart and ... a lot of right answers to that - no wrong answer, I do not believe. But I think from my vantage point, I would say I would want to give him faith.

I'd want to give him my trust, that I would place my life in trusting him by faith. Well, we should understand, of course, the Bible certainly speaks to the importance of it when it says in Hebrews 11 very clearly, without faith, it's impossible to please God. So, you can imagine what pleasure comes to God when his people offer that gift of faith in the way they live.

Well, I realize that trusting God is not always easy, and sometimes it seems impossible. And the reason is because the things that we're to put our faith and trust in, in the Lord to do or to obey or whatever we go, that's impossible. I don't see how I could ever do that. There are things that God has promised, and he says, Trust me for this. And then we face an encounter of maybe losing something very precious to us, or even harder, someone very precious to us. And in that moment, we know the word of God says all things work together for good to those who love him, called according to his purpose. That's the way it is. And we say, I know it's true. I just don't know how I could have faith such as that to believe it. It's hard.

And that just deals with the things that God has promised. What about the things He's revealed to us? Things He said, You must. Thanks. He said, No, no, no, no, not that. Do not do that. Things that are revealed to us, maybe through the word of God, such as Love your enemies. I don't know how many of you have some true enemies. Most people would. And now you think, okay, God, you're telling me to love that person after what they did to me? Wronged me so intentionally. And you say love them? I don't know if I can do that. That seems impossible. Well, it is without faith,

Well, it's not just the things he reveals in the word. He reveals things to be his will through God given authorities, perhaps are young people. They realize that their parents are telling them to do things and not to do things. You say That's not fair. I don't like that. I don't believe that's the judgment that I would make. And I don't want to do that. And whatever it may be. And we're told, honor your parents. We're told children, obey your parents. This is the will of God. Well, God, that's impossible. I just don't see how that's possible.

But then there's a third category of God revealing his will, and it's through the conscience. I think this one sometimes is the hardest of all to deal with. What happens when God says, okay, there's something you're doing that's not wrong. It's not it's not forbidden in the word of God. But I want you not to do that. I can remember being told by the Lord in my heart in a worship service I was attending sitting in the back and I knew God was saying, I want you to stop a particular activity that was a sport with Christians and I was spending time and it was a reason, he says, I don't want you to do that.

I remember how sad that seemed Impossible. This is something I love to do. It's my friends, it's Christians, It's good. But I know. God, you're saying no, You need to stop.

I think about our moved to Atlanta. We moved to Atlanta, and I knew that God wanted us to go to Atlanta. Carol believed God wanted us to go to Atlanta. There's nothing revealed in God's Word. No authority said, you need to do it or you've got to do it. But there was a sense of call and God was saying, Go. Now here was the problem. We didn't have any money. I mean, no money. So when it came time to go to Atlanta, we had already secured an apartment – the down payment at least, but we didn't have any money and we weren't going to get paid until we'd been working for one month as a planter in the PCA. I don't know a soul in Atlanta. Carol doesn't know a soul. We don't have any friends. How is this going to work? We just had a sense God says, Go. But we had only \$10 for a month. How are we going to do that? Do you do it or do you not?

I remember when we were in the midst of a pledge time like this. And I was away speaking. While speaking God, just in my conscience - I just sensed the Lord, saying, take your life savings and give it to the cause. And I thought, Lord, we don't have much money. We've got kids who are in high school that are going to be going to college, and we've got weddings coming up it just seemed impossible. How do you do that? Well, the truth of it is God calls us and he calls us through the conscience.

Well, you know, today is faith promise Sunday here. There's nothing in the Bible outside of tithing but faith promise is where you're promising your intention that if God provides this kind of money or he's already provided it, and I sense God wants me to give it that I will give it. And at the same time, knowing that if God doesn't provide it, you don't have it. You don't owe anything to the Lord or anybody else. That's perfectly understandable. But sometimes we say, God, that's just impossible. I don't know how I could give that.

Well, one of the reasons that we could go to Atlanta and know that we were going to park our car at an apartment that we had put a down payment on, had not even given our first month's rent yet. But we knew we should do it. Why would we do that? Because I was in a church, Presbyterian PCA church when I was in seminary, and for the first time I sat there as a new student at in Jackson, Mississippi, at Reform Theological Seminary, at First Presbyterian Church. And the pastor preached at their mission's Conference on Faith Promise. I'd never heard of that idea. That was beyond me. And I said, Lord, I don't have much, but I'll pledge \$1,000 if you

provide it, I'll give it to you. If you don't provide it, I'm not going to feel that I've done something wrong. But at the same time, if you do, I feel like I've got to give it to you. And I saw God that first time provide \$1,000 in a way I could have never anticipated. I thought, my goodness, Lord, you just gave this to me to, to pass on to the conference and I remember that was the beginning of a journey, learning this thing called faith promise. It's faith intention. It's a promise that if you provide it, I'll give it. And I remember that that built a foundation in my life of faith where I found myself willing, ready and capable of doing things that otherwise I thought I can't do that, I can't do that. I can't do that. But God, I know I since you're saying it, but I can't do that. But I said, I've seen you do it. I know how you do that. So okay, let's take this step. Let's see how this thing is going to go. Well, J.I. Packer has a great statement. I love it. It goes like this.

God made us thinking beings and he guides our minds when we think things out in his presence.

And I learned that little understanding through a man named Dr. John Edmond Haggai. And Dr. Haggai challenged me to go into a particular work with him - to do a certain job that I was interested in but had a sense that this is not what God wants us to do. We didn't know what God wanted to do with our lives. And I remember him saying to me – Dr. Haggai it's not that I don't want to go with you - I don't know where I'm going. I don't know what God wants me to do. I'm just so unsure. And he looked at me and he said, Randy, you're thinking wrong. I said, How is that? He said, it doesn't matter what you do. Then what matters? He said, I'll tell you what matters. What matters is that *whatever* you do, which doesn't matter, that you attempt something so great for God, it's doomed to failure unless God be in it. Now, if you hear that and think it has to be something huge and gigantic and amazing, no, you think about loving your neighbor. Think about saying yes to the Lord when he calls you to stop doing an activity. Think about it when it's time to make gifts to God that he's asked for and put something on your heart, your conscience. most important thing in the world. That's a long introduction to a very important text that's going to be brief, though, but this is the word of God.

I want you to listen to Philippians 4: 14 – 17

Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. You yourselves also know, Philippians, that in the first preaching the gospel after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone. For even in Thessalonica, you sent a gift more than once for my needs. Listen to verse 17, which is where we're going to focus very briefly. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. Wait, what? What is he saying?

I'm going to pause here and just say, I don't know how many of you know this church that well. You may be relatively new to this church. I know many of you don't know me, but I will tell you this. I know this church and I tell you this is true of this church. It's true of my life in terms of what I'm doing right here, preaching to you. And that is that neither this church nor I am asking or seeking something **from** you if you are sitting there thinking they're just going for the money.

Now they are trying to get us to give them money, just trying to get our hip pocket - **wrong**. That is not true. I can tell you the heart of this church and this is church is saying we want something **for** you. It's going to bless you guys greatly in the kingdom work you're doing. But my goodness, what is it going to do for you?

Learning faith. My personal experience. There's been nothing that God has used like money and the giving of money and listening to the Lord and trying to figure out what we do with that built my faith early on that I would have never done things that I did. I would have never gone to Atlanta without money. I would have never done several things. It all started right here when somebody said, have you ever made a faith promise to your God?

So, in light of that I have three very brief insights from our text to focus on before you make your pledge of intention if you choose to do so. Here they are...

1. **Every believer has a heavenly bank account.** Now, come on. Now you are bringing earthly stuff into heaven> No. This is what the Bible teaches. It really does. Look at verse 17. There are two financial terms. One is profit and the other is account. Profit refers to dividends or interest - account refers to credit. These are financial terms. Literally, this is what it means, the interest which is accruing to your account. What? Yeah, when we make investments not just of money, but we make investments in eternity. Let me tell you, there's a savings account there. God is saying this is going to be stored up for you. That's point one. My points are really brief here.

2. Deposits are placed into that account each time we give to God's kingdom with good motives. You can give money to the kingdom and it not have any bearing on you. But if you do it with good motives. So the best investments we can make are the investments we make in eternity, spiritually, investments before the Lord. So Matthew 6:19 -20 says *do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.* There is a savings and loan of heaven. Do you put your money there? And it's making dividends on our behalf. Really? Well, listen to this one, Matthew 19:21. Jesus says this after he said, Honor your father and mother. *You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The young man said to him, All these things I've kept, what am I still lacking?* And what did Jesus say? *If you wish to be complete, don't we want to be complete? Go and sell your possessions. Give to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven and come follow me.* Very interesting. What was God telling us? To give away everything you've got? No, he's not saying that in this story. Nor is he saying it to us. God says, Listen to your heart. I give and I give abundance. But I'm telling you, I'm just saying this is what you do from a good heart and you're going to get royally paid back. Not really the heart reason that we necessarily do it, but that's going to be one of the byproducts. You say we can have bad motives that invalidate everything we do in giving. We give, give, give, but bad motives. We can have motives impure to earn the favor of God. Well, that's

not what we're doing. We don't earn any favors the work of Christ on our behalf. He's already brought us into favor with him. Nothing's going to change that. Or it could be to impress other people by our gifts. Let me tell you how much I gave. Could be for the fact that you're looking for, you know, to feel good about being generous and doing this good thing. There are a lot of motives and we have to constantly just look at our heart, say, Lord, forgive me. Yeah, I've got bad motives. Cleanse me, God, forgive me for this, but I want to give I want to do this. I want faith, I want to build faith and so forth.

3. **God pays excessively high dividends on every deposit we make.** And we've all looked at verse 17 – the word profit and then the word increase. Our text there is saying to accrue excessively to reach overflowing proportion. And we go, really? I mean, do you really believe this? Well, you listen to what God says in his Holy word and you tell me what God is saying. Listen to this verses. This is what God says.

II Corinthians 9:6 He who sows bountifully will reap, bountifully.

Luke 6:38 Give, and it shall be given to you. They will pour into your lap, a good measure pressed down, shaken together, running over for by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you in return.

Proverbs 3: 9-10. Honor the Lord with your wealth, and from the first of all your produce. So your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine.

Matthew 19:29 Everyone who has left his houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for my namesake, will receive many times as much and will inherit eternal life.

Malachi 3:10 Bring the whole tithed into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house and test me now. And this says the Lord of hosts, If I will not open for you the windows of Heaven and pour out for you blessing until it overflows.

Now, I know you've got to be hearing this and saying this is borderline. Maybe it's dipped into the reality of what we call prosperity theology. Randy is telling us, you give a dollar, you get \$10 back. That is not what Randy's saying and that's certainly not what the Bible say.

So you see that you've got to make a distinction between two types of theology, as it has to do with with money and offerings and so forth. One is called prosperity theology. We're familiar with that. When we scroll the television and hear a preacher talking about give, give, give, and this what's going to happen to you and give give... that's prosperity theology, but it's the wrong kind. It's life style, prosperity, lifestyle, prosperity. The Bible never teaches that.

The Bible teaches **life, prosperity**. You give and I'm going to bless your life. It may be in ways that have nothing to do with what you've given in terms of money or whatever you've given. You never know. God says, You know what I'm going to do? Watch your children walk with. The Lord will bless you. Watch this, watch that. But he says, you're going to be blessed in your life. And you know, one of the ways he blesses us the most, he doesn't give us things we want and

he takes away things we have. And he says, you know what - made it very clear in Proverbs - you know, give me neither poverty nor riches, Both of them will just destroy you. Give me just what I need. And we say, Lord, here, I'm giving you this. I'm giving you that. Now what? What are you going to do to bless me and says, Well, I'm just going to strip you of finances you think you have to have in order to make it, I'm going to do this. I'm going to do that. Who knows? But he says your life is going to be blessed. Your lifestyle all may go down, but let me tell you, you will be blessed. Keep that in mind.

So Carol, and I go to Atlanta with a two month old and ten bucks. We're going to need around \$600 to get us through that month. But we found out the PCA is just starting church planting. They don't have money to pay until after you've worked a month and then you get your money. Well, we didn't have any money but we move on. We find an apartment, we put a deposit down while we could, and then we end up going -- packing our few little goods and pull it behind our car. And here we go. And we get there and we don't know anybody. To our surprise, we find out that we have to pay our first month's rent that Friday. We move in mid midweek. We can't even get utilities. It's the middle of June, hot as it can be. We don't have electricity, but we're there. I said, Lord, this is what you want us to do and okay, now what do we do? Well, we find out that we have to pay our first month's rent that Friday. And so I have to go down and talk to the manager. And Carol says, What are you going to tell the manager? I said, Well, I just have to give them our story. And she says, What's our story? I said, Well, our story is we follow the Lord -- the Lord provides. I don't know what I'm going to say. I delay as long as I can and then I go see the manager and I say, I guess you need our money now. The manager says, I'm so sorry, but I can't take your money now because I've already gone to the bank. I forgot about yours and can't go back until Monday. Could you do us a favor? Come on Monday to pay? I said, if that helps you, I'll be happy to help. And then I come rushing back to Carol. I said, Carol, you know, God waits to the very last minute the bill Faith, he stretches us. And so the last minute is not today like we thought. And so we have Saturday and we don't know anybody in Atlanta. But I know this we've given our mailing address to a lot of loved ones and friends, and that's how God will work. You watch he's going to send it through the mail. I was so confident that next morning we had one agenda for the day and that was to meet our mailman and our mailman did not stop to say hello and was gone. And I'm telling you, no faith. I get up in the middle of the night and I am crying and I don't weep enough. And I'm saying, God, we got a baby. I came here because I thought, You wanted us to. What do we do now?

We go to church on Sunday at First Baptist Church -- it is a huge church. We're walking into the service after we had put our child in the nursery -- we were walking in and who is walking and out of the service? An old friend of mine from college, a Briarwood man. He had given money to us in seminary to help us. He sent money to us however I'd given that back to him and told him to use it for somebody with a greater need. And so, I'm logically thinking as I see him, he's got some of my money, doesn't it? 😊 He asked me what I was doing in Atlanta and I told him I was starting a church. He said, I want to hear about it. And I was so excited. I said, Lord, thank you.

You've delivered the lamb to be slaughtered. I am going to talk to him and he will give us money. We're in a good place. And you know what God does? He talks to you in your heart, conscience. And God made it real clear as we're walking to our seats, *Don't you mention money*. Don't you mention need? I said God please...but I sit down and never said a word. The offering came. He pulls out his checkbook and he writes a check. He's holding it, like to put in the offering plate. The plate comes to me and I hand it to him to give to the usher. And he didn't put the check in the tray. Instead, he pushed it into my shirt pocket and he says, I hope you'll accept this. I said, I will. 😊 This one not going back for sure. Well, we open it up and there is \$600. Was that a coincidence? No! Nobody will convince me of that. God moved in his own way to do what he planned to do. Was there a connection with faith that preceded it? They said, Let's go because God's calling. Yes, but you got to hear this too or you don't know the rest of the story and that's this that you can do that which you are convinced is the will of God. You can do it with good motives and you can still fail. But you got to know this. When you fail at what you attempted, you'll be better off because of your failure. And I could sit here and wear you out with stories of failure, but always works together for good.

You know, when I came home from speaking and told Carol about my sense that God is saying, let's give her let's give our savings away, she looked at me and she started crying and she said, I knew you do something like this. No, no, no, no, no. I want to right you if you agree. I mean, we're a team. And by the way, as you make your pledges, if you're married, you got a one that thinks this much, the other thinks a lower amount. Give a lower amount. God can always move you and get more later. But just so anyway, I said, Well, Carol, I'm just know you'd have to agree with this. Let me go pray. Let me go think about this. So she takes a walk, a beautiful afternoon and she comes back in and she says, Randy, I'm all right with this. I think it's the right thing to do. But you won't believe what happened to me. So what happened? Well, the birds started talking to me, so I did push her too far on this one. 😊

So as the birds were singing all around me I remembered a poem that I had memorized –

"The Robin and the Sparrow"
Said the robin to the sparrow,
"I should really like to know,
Why these anxious human beings
Rush about and worry so."
Said the sparrow to the robin,
"Friend I think that it must be,
That they have no Heavenly Father,
Such as cares for you and me."

— Elizabeth Cheney

Carol went on to say -- Yes, I was mad at God because he took our daughter overseas for missions out of high school for a year and we weren't going to get to see her. All these things

were going to happen and now she says, God, I'm just mad. You ask for everything! You just want everything, don't you? And then she said, it was like God's speaking to me. He said, Of course it's all mine. I want you to give it!

I can't tell you the story of how it ended, but let me tell you when God, talking about opening up the windows of heaven and pouring out blessing, it was totally related to that. It was no doubt in our mind God provided everything we needed.

Luke 12: 33 sell your possessions, give to charity, make yourselves money belts which do not wear out and unfailing treasure in heaven where no thief comes near nor moth destroys

A few verses later, after that, Jesus said this: *to whom much has been given, much has been required.*

And I'm not going to give you the spiel about look how much you've got, look how much money you have and look at your home ...no. God leads different ways for different people. But I will say this. This takes us to the gospel because the gospel tells us that our Savior, Jesus, gave everything -- his own life on the cross of Calvary so that we could know life abundant, so we could live by faith. That's the good news of the gospel. I mean, the gospel tells us that he's spared not his own son but delivered him up for us all and he gives us all the things we need. That's the good news. I mean, faith is all about the gospel, and the gospel is about Jesus and what he did. And when we see that we think well you did that for me so I've got to do this....no... if we knew, God wouldn't do one thing for us but we realize this is Almighty God, our father. He's not going to win anything because I give money. We want to say yes, Lord, because of what He has done.

In light of that -- one last illustration. I was a sixth grader and a classmate of mine collected baseball cards and he was selling some of his cards. I could care less about these, I didn't understand why anybody collected cards -- it was just a picture. He said he had some really good cards. He was selling one of them for 25 bucks and he asked if I wanted to buy it. I said, 25 bucks? Are you kidding me? Not I don't buy any card --a piece of paper for 25 bucks. No way.

Well, in 2022, that little card sold for seven and a quarter million dollars. It happened to be a baseball player called Honus Wagner. Some of you are familiar. Do you think today that I regret that decision?

Well, if it were a true story, I definitely would. But fortunately, it's a make believe story to illustrate a very important point and that is -- one day, as we give by faith, we'll stand before our Lord and we won't be disappointed. And we'll say what a good move. And some of us will say, I regret it, but the love of God will never change. He'll embrace us all the same and he'll say, I was just sorry for you. I wasn't trying to get you just to give something. I was trying to *give you* something.

So keep in mind, faith promise is your friend. Follow Jesus. Go to the cross. Listen to him carefully. And then ask God to give you faith to believe.

Let's pray together. Father in Heaven bless us to the end that we might see your hand move worldwide and even through how you'll lead us. Let's be very careful to hear you whatever you want to say and make us obedient and to trust you to that degree. Thank you for the cross and Father. I pray for seekers that may be among us seeking answers to questions of the faith that they may not see this as, the money race. But no, we truly get to receive from you because of what you tell us to do. Bless that we pray. In Jesus name Amen.