January 3/4, 2015

Risk Management

Proverbs 23:1-8

Pastor Bryan Clark

Well, every day *does* matter. In 2014, we had 365 days that were a gift from God. You may have invested in those days deeply or you may have completely wasted them, but the sobering reality is those days are past. You don't get a second chance; there are no do-over's. So now we face 2015. Nobody knows what 2015 holds. It might be full of the fulfillment of hopes and dreams. It might have tragedies and disappointments and struggles. But there are two things that we know: One, God will be faithful no matter what, and number two, you don't get a second chance. You get one shot at 2015. If you're new with us here at Lincoln Berean, every January we spend a couple of weeks just reminding ourselves of our priorities and our values and what matters, often talking about stewardship and money, with the reminder that money is never just about money. Money is about a value system. Money is about what we think matters. Money is about what we invest our lives into. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, that's where your heart is." There is no more accurate barometer of what you ultimately value than what you do with your money. Jesus also said, "If you don't get the money thing right, it's likely you won't get any other area of your life right." So it's a really important issue to think about and process.

This morning I want to talk about a very foundational issue. If you've been around Lincoln Berean for a period of time, it's something we've talked about many times, but it's at the core of all this discussion. If you don't get this issue right, you really stand no chance of living for the things that ultimately matter. From there, I want to jump to Proverbs 23, and talk about three risks that we have in our culture and do a little risk management. So I want to start by inviting you to turn with us to 1 John, Chapter 2—familiar ground if you've been around Lincoln Berean for a while. Several years ago, when I went through this text, I had a business man in between services say to me, "I wish we would do that text every single January because it's so fundamental, it's so foundational to getting our heads straight and really thinking about what we want to live for." So I don't really think we can go over it too much. We pick it up in 1 John, Chapter 2, verse 15:

> **Do not love the world nor the things in the world.** (*NASB, 1 John 2:15a)

Two things to notice there: **The world** which is referring to the world's operating system, and **the things** which are kind of the expression of the world's operating system. Why is this so important? Because...

> **If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.** (Vs. 15b)

Now I find those to be very sobering words. In essence, what John is saying is you can't have two lovers. You can't love the world and love God. It just simply doesn't work that way. Jesus talked about the fact that you can't serve two masters. James says it this way, "If you make yourself a friend of the world, you've made yourself an enemy of God." You simply can't love both the world and God. I think we all understand this. I've said this before: If I came home today and said to Patti, "Honey, I still really love you but I've decided to try something new in 2015. I've decided to try having two lovers." I can assure you that would not go well for me. There's no way she would put up with that, nor should she. I wouldn't put up with that. You wouldn't put up with that, so why would we think God would put up with that? It's a very clear statement: Either you love Me or you

love the world but you can't love both, which leaves us then with an important question: What does he mean by **the world**? Well, the text defines that for us:

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes... (Vs. 16a)

The lust of the flesh could be thought of as *the* lust. I think there are several places in the New Testament where it's referred to as *the* lust. You also have places like in James 1 where it talks about *the* temptation. All temptation, all lust ultimately flows out of this one core issue: *the* lust that all of us struggle with as people made in the image of God, and that is this lust or this desire to be my own god—to take what we have been given, to be made in the image of God, and rather than using that to celebrate a relationship with God, we're tempted to believe, "I can be my own god." That is *the* lust of the flesh. **The flesh** is simply referring to that which I can do apart from God. It doesn't mean that we're talking about bad things or evil things; it's just what I can do myself. And there's something deep within me that wants to be my own god and wants to run my own life. You think about things that define our culture, things like relativism. That is an outflow of *the* lust. It's a decision that I will decide what's right and wrong by functioning as my own god. Things like pluralism—all roads lead to God—is me saying, "I will be my own god and I will decide who god is and how to get to God." You think about things like atheism and agnosticism. Those are ways of saying, "I will be my own god and I will define what's real and what's true." Ultimately all temptation, all lust flows out of this one central desire.

To go back to the beginning is the best way to understand this. In Genesis chapter two we are told that we as people are made in the image of God, and the ultimate celebration of that image is to experience an intimate, personal relationship with God. And it's out of that relationship with God that I find my significance; I find my meaning and purpose; I find my value; I find my safety; I find my security; I find my pleasure. Having found that in God, then I live life out of that. But in Genesis chapter 3 the temptation is, to Adam and Eve, to be your own god and by being your own god you can make life better. Adam and Eve believe the temptation; they give into it; they sin against God and immediately their sin separates them from God. Which then raises the question, "Where do they now find significance? Where do they find value? Where do they find meaning and purpose? Where do they find pleasure? Where do they find safety and security now that they are cut off from a relationship with God? And the only answer left on the table is: they will have to do it themselves. They will now have to, practically speaking, function as their own god. I am now in charge of my own significance; I'm in charge of my own value; I'm in charge of my own safety and security. I'm in charge of defining meaning and purpose. So now, practically speaking, I function as my own god. That ultimately then defines the world system. It is a system that has learned to operate independent from God.

So, how do we define significance? It has to be on the basis of my performance. So I am now what I do. I define myself on the basis of my ability to perform, but that performance has to be measured in some way. So how is performance measured? The only way to measure it is compared to you. So life, now, has become a competition. Life has become a comparison where I am constantly looking at my own performance and I'm measuring it against the performance of those around me. I'm constantly comparing; I'm constantly competing. Now this is very important to understand: There's nothing wrong with performance. As a matter of fact, I think performing at your best level is pleasing to God. There's nothing wrong with that. The problem is when that performance becomes the basis of your significance, the basis of your value, the basis of meaning and purpose, the basis of your security. Now, at that point, you are functioning as your own god and rather than finding those things in God, you are, in essence saying, "I'm now my own god. I will define my own significance.

I will define my own purpose and meaning and value and all that goes with that." The system requires you to be selfish and self-centered. There's no way around that. Every day is about competing and comparing. It's about trying to be significant. It's about trying to find meaning and value and to do that I constantly have to look at myself and constantly assess myself and how I score compared to the people around me. This is why our sense of significance, our sense of self-esteem goes up and down and up and down and up and down. It might do that multiple times a week. It might do that multiple times a day, just simply depending on whom I'm comparing myself with. I compare myself with somebody; I think I compare favorably; I go up a couple notches. An hour later I compare myself with someone and I compare poorly, and it goes down a few notches. And it's this up and down and up and down. There's this relentless pressure with this system because *good enough* is never *good enough*. No matter how good I am today, there's always somebody better. And no matter how good I am today, what about tomorrow? What about the next day? When I'm on top of my game, I can't stay at the top of my game. Someday I'll be yesterday's news and my significance, my value, my safety, my security, my self-esteem all goes in the tanker with it. No matter how good I am today, what about yesterday? There's no way to find peace. There's no way to rest. There's no way to find security in this system. There are no winners.

Now think about this—this is actually very important. The Bible says that every single person in this room is fearfully and wonderfully made by God. If you actually believe that God tells the truth, every day would be a celebration of who you are—who you are as God has made you to be—understanding your talents and your gifts and your opportunities. Each day would be filled with a sense of peace and a sense of security and a sense of joy and an investment deeply in each day, simply living for the things that matter. But that's not how most people live. Most people struggle with a sense of self-esteem, a lack of value, a lack of significance, a lack of security, struggling with meaning and purpose. Most people, when they look in the mirror, they are not satisfied with who they are. When the masks come off at the end of the day, we're disappointed. We wish we were something different; we wish we were something better; we wish we were more significant; we wish we looked differently; we wish we had different skills and talents; we wish our story was different. And at the end of the day, rather than celebrating and being joyful, we're miserable; we're dissatisfied, and we go through day after day after day of this misery being disappointed with who we are with a struggling self-esteem. And all of that is simply based on the fact that we have believed the lies of the world's system, that day after day after day have beat us down and convinced us that we're something less than who God says we are. So it's not a small thing. It affects your experience, your joy, your life—every single day.

The second statement: **the lust of the eyes** is really a reference to how the operating system is scored. In order for me to convince you, in the world's system, that I am performing well, I have significance, I have value, I matter, there has to be some way to score the game. There has to be some way to put points on the scoreboard in order to convince you I'm doing well. That's *the lust of the eyes*. In both the Old and New Testament, the reference to *eyes* is a reference to covetousness. It's the idea of stuff and possessions—that I want what you have; I want your significance; I want your money; I want your position; I want whatever would make me more—would make me more significant, more valuable, more safe, more secure. And so there's this sense in which money and stuff ultimately become the currency by which we score the game. That's how I put points on the board. So we define ourselves by our houses, by our cars, by our stuff, by our jobs, by our roles, by our degrees, by whatever we can accumulate that communicates to the world, "I MATTER". Often this goes back into our story, that maybe growing up I was never good enough for a mom or a dad, or never fit in with a peer group. There's something in my story that defined me early and I'm spending my life trying to convince myself that I matter, that I'm significant, that I have value, that

there's a sense of peace and security. And so if I can accumulate enough wealth or get a certain role or a certain job, buy enough toys, somehow I'm making a statement to the world, "Notice me! I matter!" And it's a system that drives us in this relentless pursuit of something that ultimately we'll never fulfill. There's never a winner in this system.

Now I think we all understand this is the way the world system operates. There's a reason why some people get very resentful of people like me when I talk about money because what you hear is: God is asking you to take points off the scoreboard and you feel deep down, "I'm barely keeping up with saying, 'I'm significant; I'm valuable; I matter. I need more stuff; I need a bigger bank account; I need to accumulate more because I'm trying to convince people that I matter.' And you're asking me to take points off the scoreboard and to give them to God? I just can't afford to do that and I resent you even asking." There's a reason why our response is so emotional when we talk about money. It's because it isn't just about money; it's about something much deeper to us. We understand this is the way the system works.

All you have to do is go back to a class reunion and there's this very subtle game of assessing where everybody is in the pecking order. They want to know where you're at; they want to know what you do for a living. Do you think there's a difference if you say, "I stack lumber at Menard's," or, "I'm a cardiologist"? In their eyes, there's a huge difference in the significance of those two roles. Do you think it matters if you pull up to the class reunion in a beat up old minivan or a brand new Lexus? Of course it matters. They're making an assessment. They're figuring out your value and your significance and where they fit in that. This is why people struggle and buy things they can't afford. Why do people buy houses they can't afford and buy vehicles they can't afford and find themselves so deeply in debt? This is not a math problem. You can't spend more than you make. Even a third grader understands that math. It isn't a math problem; it isn't a budgeting problem. It's a core belief problem. My self-esteem is sagging. I don't feel a lot of significance; I don't feel a lot of value; I don't feel worth, and so I go to the mall and I buy a little self-esteem. And I swipe a card, and for a few hours I feel better about myself. And that cycle just continues to get me deeper and deeper in debt because there's something deep and dark that's driving my behavior and you get deeper and deeper into the problem.

Over the holidays I saw a TV commercial and I concluded whoever wrote this commercial understands the world's operating system perfectly and, in order to sell cars, they are appealing to you right at your level of significance and value. Check out this commercial:

[Video]:

> *"Looks like the Garcia's got a new car."*
> *"What'd they get?"*
> *"I don't know, but it's pretty nice. And he got a raise."*
> *"Good for him."*
> *"Good for her."*
>
> *Enclave*—O*ne of five expectation-shattering models from Buick!*

Now this has nothing to do with the car. There isn't a problem with buying a new car—it's not a car problem. It could be jewelry; it could be a boat; it could be a house; it could be anything, but it's a value system. First of all, they're watching the neighbors because it's all about competing and comparing. "Uh oh! They got a new car." "Oh no! What did they get?" "Get out the binoculars.

Check it out." "Wow! That's really nice!" Of course the neighbor waves; he's sticking it to them. "Check me out! I'm significant! I have value! I'm winning!" So her conclusion is, "He must have got a raise." Her husband sheepishly says, "Well, good for him." There's no sincerity in that. It's like, "Oh no,"...and then the dagger in his heart when she says, "Good for *her*!" All of a sudden she's not just dissatisfied with her car; she's dissatisfied with her husband! And when he sheepishly looks at her, clearly that's the message he heard: "If you weren't such a loser husband, you would make more money and you could buy me a vehicle like that." So he's got to work sixty or seventy hours a week to try to earn more money in order to prove to her that he has significance. "I can buy you a car like that." Those are our points on the scoreboard...and then the neighbor will have to fight back again. Now the reality is: if you listen for it, that message is pounded into our heads again and again and again every single day. That's the way the value system of the world works. As long as I buy into that, I'm going to struggle with a sense of significance. I'm going to struggle with my self-esteem. I'm going to struggle with my value. I'm going to struggle with peace. I'm going to struggle with security. I'm just going to struggle and, at the end of the day, there are never winners.

The third element of the world's system, *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes,* **the boastful pride of life** is, in essence saying, "Nobody wins!" At best, I'm on top for a moment and the only thing that defines me at the top is, "I've compared myself to you and I think I'm superior." And that ultimately destroys my life. Most people don't feel like they measure up and so they struggle. They give up; they're dissatisfied; they're disappointed; they're miserable in their situation in life. At the end of the day it is not possible to be a winner in that system. And that's why John says, "*This is not from God."* This is not the way God intended for us to live. What is the alternative? The alternative is everything that we've been talking about in the book of Ephesians—of understanding it is possible to go back to Genesis chapter two. Because of Jesus and His finished work on the cross He offers salvation freely as a gift on the basis of His grace, not on the basis of my performance. Having received His gift, I now am rightly related to God and now can find my significance, can find my value, can find my meaning and purpose, can find my safety and my security and my pleasure and my peace, rooted in a relationship with God, anchored in a relationship with God. And because it's on the basis of His grace, not on the basis of my performance, it is safe and secure, locked up every day, which finally sets me free. I don't have to go through life competing and comparing. I don't have to be selfish and self-centered every day. I don't have to be desperately trying to convince the world that I matter. I'm set free to think of others as more important than myself. I'm free to be generous. I'm free to steward my resources in a way that matters and is pleasing to God.

All of this, then, creates a foundation. If I buy into the world's operating system, I put myself at risk every day. With that, then, I want to invite you to flip over to Proverbs, Chapter 23. We want to do just a little risk management real quick. Proverbs 23 talks about three specific areas of risk, and how I would describe them is: you are at risk if you have bought into the world's operating system. The only way to minimize the risk is to root and anchor yourself in a relationship with God and find your significance, value, purpose— those things—in Him. So the first risk is in verses 1 through 3:

> **When you sit down to dine with a ruler,**
> **Consider carefully what is before you,**
> **And put a knife to your throat**
> **If you are a man of *great* appetite.**
> **Do not desire his delicacies,**
> **For it is deceptive food.** (Proverbs 23:1-3)

The **ruler** is a mover and a shaker. He's someone with position; he's someone with power; he's someone that, in the world's system, can give you what you need to be significant, to give you more of a sense of value. The language in verse two is extremely graphic. Basically it's hyperbole, but the idea of putting a knife to your throat is saying, "You'd be better off dead than sitting down at the table with this ruler as a man with an appetite." It's a metaphor saying that if you are hungry, if you are hungry for significance, if you are hungry for value, if you are hungry for meaning and purpose, if you are hungry to belong, if you are hungry for people to think you're somebody and you sit down at the table with this person, this ruler, this mover/shaker, you are at risk. He is going to use you, and abuse you, and toss you aside. The text says, **Do not desire his delicacies, for it is deceptive food.** It's the whole idea that if you are hungry, if you are hungry for significance and value and meaning and purpose, you are at risk for people using you, and abusing you, for you to believe lies, and for you to spend your life pursuing that which ultimately, at the end of the day, can never satisfy.

Now there are lots of ways to be hungry. I think about a teenager that maybe is coming from a home environment where things are not stable and doesn't feel a sense of safety and security and connection. So they seek to find that in a peer group and they look for a peer group that will accept them and love them and invite them in. That teenager is at great risk because he or she is hungry for something and is going to end up believing some lies and end up with a group of people that will use and abuse and toss aside. I, as a dad, have raised three girls. I have a real heart for this, for daddies and their girls and a need for a strong sense of connection. But if you have a teenage girl that has not experienced that with her daddy, it makes her extremely vulnerable to the guys in her world who will meet that daddy-need that was never met. And there is no shortage of teenage boys willing to use and abuse and throw them aside. She is extremely at risk because of this hunger, this appetite. You step out into the marketplace and you have this hunger for significance or value to be somebody, to show the world that I matter. You're extremely vulnerable to people using and abusing and taking advantage of you and then tossing you aside—to invite you into a value system that ultimately can never satisfy. Risk number one is if you're coming to the table hungry. Risk number two, verses 4 and 5"

> **Do not weary yourself to gain wealth,**
> **Cease from your consideration *of it.***
> **When you set your eyes on it, it is gone.**
> **For *wealth* certainly makes itself wings**
> **Like an eagle that flies *toward* the heavens.**

Risk number two is that you give your life; you become weary; you become busy pursuing that which, at the end of your story, you simply cannot keep. It's kind of this imagery, this metaphor—that I set my eyes on something that ultimately takes wings and flies away and I lose it at the end. Jim Elliott was certainly right when he said, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep in order to gain what he can never lose." Over the years I've talked to so many people who get to the end of their life; it was a life full of busyness and accumulation of money and stuff and now, all of a sudden, their story is coming to an end and they look back and they're asking the question, "What was I doing? What was it all for? This stuff has come and gone. I'm at the end of my story, and I don't understand what it all amounted to." I can't imagine a more terrible feeling than to get to the end of my story and look back and realize, "I've totally missed it. I was really busy to the point of exhaustion, but at the end of the day, what was it for?"

I think we grossly overestimate the value of money and what I mean by that is that, at the end of the day, the only thing money can do is buy stuff and pay bills. People in our culture will give their entire lives—50, 60, 70 hours a week—they will exhaust themselves and at the end of the day, all they've done is bought stuff and paid bills and you have to ask, "What was the point of that? Is that really the reason that God gave you life?" Money, at the end of the day, cannot make your marriage work. Money cannot bring home a rebellious teenager. Money cannot make the cancer go away. Money does not protect you against tragedy. At the end of the day, money does very little for you. It's a lie of our culture that somehow that is the magic bullet that will make everything okay.

I sometimes refer to the funeral perspective: Over the years I've done a lot of funerals and I always gather with people after someone has passed and we always talk about, "Tell me about your loved one. Tell me about what mattered." I have never, not one single time, ever had someone say, "Make sure you mention he had a big house. Make sure you mention he had a brand new Buick. Make sure you mention that he made lots of money. Make sure you mention he had a really impressive title." I've never had somebody say that because in that moment there's a sense in which none of that really matters does it? There's this uncanny sense in that moment of what does matter. It's about people; it's about relationships; it's about the stuff that ultimately lasts forever. And in that moment, people understand that. It seems to me, if that's what matters in that moment, that's what matters. The third risk is in verses 6, 7, and 8:

> **Do not eat the bread of a selfish man,**
> **Or desire his delicacies;**
> **For as he thinks within himself, so he is.**
> **He says to you, "Eat and drink!"**
> **But his heart is not with you.**
> **You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten,**
> **And waste your compliments.**

You have to put this in a little bit of a context for the ancient Near East. In the ancient world they didn't have hotels and motels, and travel was very dangerous. So it was just expected that you would be hospitable, that you would take someone in, that you would house them, that you would feed them, and send them on their way. What the text is talking about is somebody who is willing to fulfill the letter of the law. In other words, they take you in; they'll feed you; they'll take care of you; but he resents every single moment of it because he's selfish and greedy and he doesn't really want to do it. So the text says, "You know, why don't you stay somewhere else? You'll probably vomit up his food and, no matter how much you compliment him, he's not going to listen." Hard to figure out how to distill this down into a simple risk, but I'm going to say the risk is that misery is contagious. Now I want you to stop and think about this: misery is contagious. If people buy into the world's operating system, it is full of futility; it is full of emptiness; it is full of this desperate pursuit of significance and value and pleasure and meaning and purpose. But the system isn't working, and they become more desperate and more futile and more disappointed, which makes people miserable day after day after day. And for whatever reason, these people find great delight in making the people around them miserable too. Misery is contagious.

Think about this: If you work for a business owner who buys into the world's operating system, that owner sees you as a pawn in order to do your job, in order for him to accumulate wealth so he can be significant, so he can have value, so he can have purpose, so he can be somebody. But what if the system isn't working? Then it's your fault, and there's a trickle down to everybody that works for that person because the system isn't working and he or she is becoming more futile as every day

goes by. So they become miserable; they make the people around them miserable, and what happens is you go home and you make your spouse miserable; you make your children miserable; you make the people in your life miserable. Misery is contagious and if people are buying into the world's operating system, there's going to be misery all around us.

And part of what the text is saying is: when I ground myself in my relationship with God, I have secured my significance and value and purpose and all that in a relationship with God, then I'm well-equipped to deal with the misery. This is the key: it is *your* life. It's not your boss's life; it's not your neighbor's life—it's *your* life. You have to own it and say, "I'm going to live for the things that matter. I'm going to live for the things that I value." You need to do whatever is necessary to live out your value system. You can't waste your life away and blame somebody else for it. You can decide: I'm not going to be miserable; I'm not going to get the disease. I choose, as an act of my will, to say, "I'm going to celebrate today. I'm going to find the joy today. I'm going to find the peace today. I'm going to rest in my security in God. I am not going to waste my life being miserable day after day after day." You cannot let the people around you affect you to the degree that you lose sight that life is a gift from God and it is to be celebrated and find your significance and your joy and your peace, and your meaning and purpose in being rightly rooted with God.

Now I understand it's very easy to, at the end of a message like this, to say, "Okay, I've heard this before. I get it. Let's move on. What's next week?" Okay, fine. But I do want to say this. If God doesn't have your money, you don't get it...you don't get it. Let's not play pretend. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, that's where your heart is." And if God doesn't have your money, you don't get it. You're still caught up in the world's operating system and you need to back up and rethink some things. I think one of the benefits of giving and being a generous giver is there's always this struggle to it. I'm struggling to really think about: what do I value? What matters to me? What do I want to live for? It isn't a case where that doesn't matter. There's this struggle. There's a reality, "I could do a lot of other things with this money," so it causes me to back up and rethink my value system and what matters and what I want to live for and what is the basis of my significance?

To me, it's a lot like our brothers and sisters that are in recovery, that go over the same information again and again and again to remind themselves of what is true and what I want to live for and how I want to live my life. They rehearse it over and over again in order to live that way. When we give, that's the same thing we're doing. I'm constantly faced with: this is the value system. These are my choices; what matters to me? What do I value? What do I want to live for? And as long as I'm thinking that way as a habit, as a behavior, then it causes me not only to think that way, but to act that way, to live that way, to behave that way. That's why it's true. "Where your treasure is, that's where your heart is also." To think that way every day is important because *every day matters.*

> *Father, this morning we celebrate that You have made a way, an alternative to the relentless, disappointing operating system of the world. Lord, it's very difficult in a world that bombards us every day with messages that simply aren't true. It's very difficult to think differently. Lord, my prayer would be for each of us, that You would give us the strength, that You would give us the wisdom and the discernment to remember daily what's true, what we want to live for, what matters forever, and, Lord, that we wouldn't try to have two lovers, but that we would find our love and our life in our relationship with You. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

[Video]:

Jason: It was very early in our relationship after we got married, that we began to talk about giving because it was something that we had both actually even had as a part of our own lives before we were married. So it was an important piece for us.

Melinda: We developed a time where we would sit down every month and we would try to talk and pray about: what is God putting on your heart as far as where you'd like to give, maybe how God wants you to give, and seeing it as something that felt exciting, like, "Wow! God has given us this privilege to kind of adventure with Him."

Jason: I think it's brought up a lot of really great conversations, even for our own relationship and that whole thing of: what is on your heart, who is on your heart, who do you think God would want us to give to and working through even how much and those kinds of things has really been a lot of fun.

Melinda: I would say that giving as a couple and making that part of our family structure has really helped me when I'm tempted sometimes to view money in a way that is crazy, you know, it's kind of helped refocus me back to the way that you know was created by God to spread the joy in my own heart and in others' hearts.

Jason: Yeah, to say it's not just about us, it's about: we've been given these things and there's a lot of blessing that comes with this personally but how can we give this away for what God is doing in other places? But there is that struggle of, "Man, can we really afford to do this and it is going to hurt?" And I would say for us it was during seminary that we struggled the most. I was going full-time; Melinda was working two different jobs to get us through that period of time and even right now it's kind of another moment because we're about ready to think about buying a house and that's a huge investment in that, at least for me. I struggle with, "Man, it'd be nice to hang on to this," and yet there is the joy and the beauty of giving it away and we know that it's definitely what we want to do and what we will do.

Melinda: I've felt that challenge sometimes to kind of dig deep inside my heart and say, "Is it really worth it? Does God really want me to give up this money?" and stuff like that. And I think through my struggles with that I've kind of come to a place where I realize, "You know, it's a matter of just trusting God with what He's given you."

Jason: There's a pull, that selfish side of me that just wants things or whatever it is. And I almost feel like I have to wrestle with that almost every time I give. And yet I think that's why, part of the reason He asks us to give, to keep that stuff in check and say that's not the most important thing, that's not the way to live—to be me-centered and self-centered. It's all about me. But when you give away it makes you, forces you to think about others.

Melinda: It has brought us joy to feel connected to what God is doing in other places besides just where we are.

Jason: As we give, we think about those places; we pray for those places. It keeps our heart connected to those places so I think that's another piece that has brought some things into our life

through giving that brings connection to the ministry that's going on out there. I've come to where I feel mostly peace and joy but there always is that little bit of anxiety.

Melinda: Yeah, sometimes maybe it feels like jumping into a cold pool or a cold ocean or something. You get used to it and you feel great after you've done it but sometimes it's painful.

Jason: I like that metaphor.

(End)

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