

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: ReKindle

Part 3 Rekindling the Sacrifice

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 09.26-27.09

Our series this morning is ReKindle. When we started the series the idea was to create an image in your mind of what it requires to bring something back to life – when you rekindle a fire from embers into a roaring blaze again. And really the back half of the whole message series has been to cause a stirring inside of you to understand that you have been called. You have been given a divine calling. We talked about that the very first week when we looked at Matthew chapter 28 where we read that Jesus calls us not to just as a corporate body of believers but as individual followers to go and to make disciples; to baptize and to teach them all that He has taught us; that we have been called to be disciple makers. That's a calling of ours. We all have different occupations. There are business men, teachers, nurses, carpenters, homemakers. All of us have different occupations but we all have one calling – to be a disciple maker.

And then last week we looked at Ephesians chapter 4 and we had a paradigm shift. We learned that not only are we disciple makers but we're called to be workers of ministry. When I say a paradigm shift that's the idea that our mind set has been changed. Normally, people think workers of ministry are people who get paid for it; pastors and staff members and people who make up those individuals who run the church or part of the ministry of the church. But then we learn something else in Ephesians 4 is that these pastors and staff members are really called to be training us so that we would do the work of the ministry. So, your calling is not only to be disciple makers but to be workers of the ministry.

All of these has been somewhat reminiscent for me – this talk of our calling because these were some of the foundational principles that I used when we first gathered together as a core group to launch Crossroads as a church. I talk to them about their taking on a new understanding about how God has called them to be more than just church attenders but to really put themselves in the place not only where they're responsible but also have a passion for those who are outside the church; those who are part of our mission – the irreligious. Remember we talked about our mission to turn irreligious into fully devoted followers of Christ. But it was also part of that early conversation was to help our core group to understand that they are a part of the work of the ministry themselves.

When we started our church we started it the middle of August, 1996 in a small middle school gymnasium in Ontario. And we started, really, with a single passion that we were going to attempt something so great for God that it was doomed for failure if He wasn't in it. In fact, that was kind of our slogan in those early days. We're going to put ourselves out there. We were going to do something so great, beyond imagination. We were going to push the limits of our faith; test God if you would; trust Him to the extent that by human standards it would look as if it was going to be doomed to failure if God in a miraculous way wasn't in it.

When we launched the very first day that was really a part of our heart. I remember talking to a few core group members and we were talking about how, really, how many

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

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seats should we set up for the first service? There was thirty of us when we started. Well, how much do you trust God on your first day? Do you set up, you know, ten extra seats or twenty extra seats. I think we decided to double our numbers – to go to sixty and then add just a little bit more just to show that we were trusting God. I think we were praying that God would bring about seventy-five people to that very first service. And by the end of that first Sunday seventy-five people had showed up for the first service at Crossroads. We were overwhelmed by that. We couldn't believe that God would actually meet our desires. So we said let's just take it another step. Let's bump it up even more. And the next week we had more people coming and the final week, even more. We finally got to the point where we had set up all the chairs that we could find in the Ontario Middle School that an adult could actually sit in. We had set up all those up that we could find. And it just numbered, I think, somewhere about a hundred, a hundred and twenty and people kept coming and filling those seats to the point then they flooded over into the bleachers. And we just felt like God was doing an amazing thing. We were very excited to be at the beginning of that work.

Then we just thought, let's just bump it up a notch. Our grand opening was supposed to be across the street at the Ontario High School. There auditorium, at that time, I think it sat about seven-hundred people. So, now we're going from this Middle School gymnasium where we felt rather full to this large space. We started to go a week before just so we could get the feel for the place and something was going on in the community. I don't remember what but church attendance on that particular week to an all time low, a dive for us. Wherever we were at in the Middle School, I think we were about half of that in the first service at the auditorium and so imagine that. Here you're already this small, fledgling church and you go into an auditorium that seats seven-hundred. It felt like a cave. There were people here and here and you know, over here and a lot of people were sitting in the back. I don't know why you do that but you sit in the back and it just felt empty. And really, in a humanness kind of, sort of thinking I went home very dejected and I thought I did something wrong. I moved the church too fast. We got ahead of God. I mean, I didn't know. I had all these things that I was just lamented about that. And I just thought well, you know what? We've really, we've destroyed that sense of momentum in the church. And a few core group members got together and we were praying that week and we're reminding ourselves that we were going to attempt something so great for God that it was doomed for failure if He wasn't in it. And we began to pray "God, fill this auditorium." And on that launch day we nearly filled that auditorium. We had over five-hundred people show up for that public launch. And learned something that day. I learned that this was never going to be about me. It was never going to be about us as a core group. It was never going to be about our human intervention in the work of God. It was just going to be about God. And that my call was to be faithful; to trust; to be committed.

People will ask me well what do you think it is that caused the growth of Crossroads? I'll always point to God. I say, we really can't explain it because every time we try to come up with a human explanation it fails. I do know this: that when you have a great desire it

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: ReKindle

Part 3 Rekindling the Sacrifice

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Weekend 09.26-27.09

has to be followed by a great commitment to a great God. Those were some of the early foundational principles that started this church and so when we talk about what it means to be a disciple maker and worker of ministry these, in my mind bring back some stirring memories to what laid the foundation of this church. And, what basically, I want to do in this whole series of teaching is rekindle in you a passion of your calling. You may not have been there at the beginning but that doesn't mean you're not now a part of that same thing that we want to do something so great for God that it's doomed to failure unless he be in it. We're still in that mindset. Well, you might be thinking well, what's the table for this morning? Well, the table is our central metaphor. It's really what I want you to remember when you're gone from here this morning. I want you to remember the service where we talked about the dining room table.

You know, it's the same type of illustration I actually used on the core group fourteen years ago. We talked a little bit about what it was like to be at a dining room table. And we all probably have dining room tables. We all understand what that feels like when you sit down with friends or family members and you share a good meal. I was thinking about that this week when I was looking my boyhood dining room table. Michelle and I have that. My parents passed that on to us. It's in our home. I was thinking of how many times I sat down at that table and never really thought anything more about it than the food that was placed before me. Now, I had some great meals and I had some ok meals and I had some meals I had to eat. You know, we all had that kind of thing but here's the thing about the dining room table is that it was always there and always had some food at least on it at our appropriate times and I was always fed. But, I never gave much thought to the commitment it took behind that dining room table.

My dad was an auto worker out at General Motors plant; worked hard, long hours, seven days a week so that we would have a nice home, food on the table. You know, as a boy I never really thought about that. I just came in. I sat down. I ate the food. I got up and I left. But when you start thinking about it, you start processing it you know, it takes quite a bit of commitment to have a dining room table. Someone has to have the financial backings for the table to go in it. Someone had to buy the table and they had to buy the furnishings of the table and the dishes and the plates and the silverware and then there's that daily commitment that someone has to put forth to cook the food for the family. There's a lot of commitment behind the dining room table. Someone has to be a table setter; a table provider.

I remember I used to tell our core group, using imagery and illustration. You know, the church is a lot like a dining room table. There are aspects to it where we come in every week and we sit down at it and we have a spiritual meal. And we get up and we go on our way and we use that meal, that spiritual meal – fuels us throughout the week. But we, many times don't give much thought to what goes behind making that table, that spiritual table. That somewhere someone in the back had to be the giver so that we could be the receiver. You know, what I want you to think about this morning is your place at the

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: ReKindle

Part 3 Rekindling the Sacrifice

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 09.26-27.09

table. Are you a receiver? Are you a giver? Are you involved in the process? Are you a table setter?

You see, one of the things I want you to realize is that you're not only called to be a disciple maker. You're not only called to be a worker of ministry. You're called to be a giver. And specifically – a giver so that the rest of disciple making and working of ministry can go forward. Jesus says this in Luke chapter 6. It's a one word command. In fact, in the original language it's an imperative. I've taught you about an imperative. An imperative basically is a command and so Jesus is commanding this. And He talks to us and He says I want you to be a giver. He says "give". One word. Give. That's now a definition of what you are to do and be. You are a giver. But He doesn't just leave it there. He says when you give watch what happens in return and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap for with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.

I'm always fascinated by the word good measure and then that picture of something being pressed down and shaken together and running over. Have you ever opened up a bag of potato chips? You know and you pick up the bag of potato chips and you think there are some sustenance, there's some food, there's a lot of chips in this bag. And then when you pop it open – pow, you know. All that air goes out and you look in and you think what happened to all the chips? You know, they're all settled down to one-third part of the bag and you're like, and then they give you that common line: Well, you know they have to pack that air in there so the packing keeps the chips, you know, all nice and crisp and doesn't break them up. And I'm like – well, let's try it. Why don't you pack that baby full because I'll eat it in crum version anyways, so it doesn't matter. Let's just try packing that full. And you wonder is this good measure? Well, Jesus says look. When you give I'm going to give back to you but I have the measuring stick. I have the measuring stick of a good measure. I'm going to measure back to you something that has to be pressed down, shaken together to get everything in it. It's going to be running over. It's going to be pouring into your lap. That's the promise that Jesus makes to us when we understand our calling to be givers.

We have some wonderful stories when I get around some of our original core group members. Because I would talk to them about the sacrifice of being a table setter or being a giver. That maybe for years they were going to have to give at the level so that others could receive so eventually those receivers themselves would turn into givers. But that they would have to shoulder the commitment and the responsibility. I said but don't ever forget that God is going to see this commitment and He's going to bless it.

Paul talks about this. The Apostle Paul talks about the idea that when somebody gives they always have a blessing that is received back from the Lord. He takes an incident that is very personal to him in the book of Philippians when the church at Philippi gives to him. And he turns it, like Paul would into a teaching. It's found at the last chapter in

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: ReKindle

Part 3 Rekindling the Sacrifice

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 09.26-27.09

Philippians. Philippians chapter 4 he's ending his letter to this church and he just wants to thank them for their part in giving to his ministry and he reminds them of a time when he was in Thessalonica doing work; doing the Lord's work and he says even in Thessalonica you sent me, verse 16, you sent me help for my needs once again. And he was overwhelmed at their generosity that they had the forethought; that they would not only take up a collection for their own work in their own town but they would send that money forward for work that was outside which gives us idea of how we ought to, as a church be using our money. He says I just want to thank you. Not that I seek the gift but I seek the fruit that increase to your credit. I've received full payment and more. I'm well supplied. I've received from Apaphroditis the gift you send. And then he says this. He says it's a fragrant offering; a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. You ever received a gift like that – where you can just tell this really came from somebody's heart. There was sacrifice behind this gift. It's like a fragrant offering.

But he doesn't leave it there. He turns to verse 19 and he produces a teaching event out of it. He says and my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus. Now, they just gave to him and what does he do? He turns it around and says I'm so blessed by your giving but I just want you to know that God is going to meet every single one of your needs because of your generosity; because you gave.

Do you believe in your personal life that He'll do that? Do you have just this sense of settled conviction that when you let go of your treasures that God sees that and that He's going to bless you return? A startling passage is in the Old Testament. Malachi 3:10. It says something like this. Let me paraphrase. It goes like this. If you bring the tithe into the storehouse God says I will throw open the flood gates. Then He says something remarkable. He says test me in this. Now, we're not supposed to test God on anything. We're supposed to be people of faith but I think he sees this is an area that's difficult for us so He tells us test me in this. I've called you to be a giver. Test me to see if I will not overcome your giving. You'll give with a little shovel. I'll give back to you with a big shovel. Just test me and I will throw open the gates of heaven and I'll pour out so much blessing you'll not be able to contain it.

You know, many of us have come for a long time and we've sat at this spiritual table where we've received the spiritual food from the teachers of this church. Well, let me ask you have you ever seen yourself as table setter? You say, well what do you mean? How do I do that? In other words, have you ever seen yourself as part of the people who are responsible for this ministry to move forward? Or, have you been just a receiver of the meals? So you come in, eat and leave? Or is there something that's inside of you that says no. I also have to be a giver; a preparer; a part of the financial scheme so that the ministry of Christ moves forward at Crossroads?

Now, let me just say parenthetically; just as an aside. Some of you, I know are already thinking, you're thinking something's going on financially with the church because he's

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: ReKindle

Part 3 Rekindling the Sacrifice

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 09.26-27.09

never been this bold or forthright. Well, I tell you what. I have been. If you were part of the core group you would have heard me be even more bold because I believe in the mission that we have at this church and therefore I'm calling you to it and I'm asking you to join it. There's nothing going on financially at the church. In fact, I just checked with Wendell on Friday. We had a team meeting and I said give me the details of the finances. Right now, as of Friday, not including this weekend we are 1.2 percent behind our budget. That's it. He said and that fluctuates in any given week to one or two percent above to one or two percent behind. In other words, we are right on budget as a church which is absolutely amazing in consideration of what's going on financially in our community and in our country. I have friends in ministry who are cutting their church budgets by forty, fifty, some of them sixty percent; losing staff members left and right. And I don't want even to breath a word that we're basically right on budget. Now, admittedly, we run a very tight ship. We always have. We've a church of approximately two-thousand people. You go to any other church in the country of about two-thousand they'll likely have a budget about three times our size. They'll also probably have a staff of about three times our size. We've always had this mindset of running lean. And we've always also, by the way, had a commitment to have a lean staff. Why? Because the staff sees themselves as trainers not the worker of ministry and we want to train you to do the work of ministry. And so that's always been the mindset.

But I tell you this because we could do so much more. If you were looking at some of the statistics on the video before we started the message you probably were overwhelmed with those; that the church, any given church in America runs at about one-tenth it's potential financially. There is so much more that we could be doing as a church if we rise to the level of trusting God and seeing ourselves as givers. Now, I haven't had you turn in any particular passage yet but I'm going to ask you to take your bibles and I want you to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 16. Because if you have any question in your mind that we're called to give or we're called as a part of the followers of Christ to be involved in giving that will quickly fade away when you look at 1 Corinthians chapter 16 because you start right away and Paul says, now concerning the collections for the saints. He starts right off by making it clear this is what I'm going to be teaching about and he actually gives us three things to consider about giving.

Now, you might want to write them in the margin of your bibles. I'm going to be actually having you circle a few words. I have them written in the margins of my bible just so that when I read this text I'll remember what I've learned. But he teaches us how to give. Now, let me just read a good portion of it in context and then we're going to zero in on one verse. Beginning in verse one. Now concerning the collection for the saints. As I directed the churches of Galatia, which means that he's teaching this same thing to some other churches which means collectively we're all involved with this. As I directed the churches of Galatia so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up as he may prosper so that there will be no collection when I come. He says when I arrive I'll send those whom you were accredited

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: ReKindle

Part 3 Rekindling the Sacrifice

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 09.26-27.09

by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. So again, we see another example of a church not only taking care of its own ministry needs but often sending money so that other ministry needs could be met. Verse 4. So, if it seems advisable that I should go also that they will accompany me. So he gives a standard, basically in these passages of what it is to be a giver. But, he teaches us about giving specifically in verse 2. So let's zero in on verse 2.

Three things that we can learn about giving. Number one: giving is something that is done weekly. We do it weekly. He says on the first day of every week. Now, I want you to circle the word first day. We come on the first day to do what of every week? To worship. It's the same thing here for the Corinthians. This was their worship gathering and so what do you do at a worship gathering? Paul says you give. In other words, giving now is a part of your worship. It's just what Proverbs says. Honor the Lord by giving Him the first part of your income. So we bring the first part of our income on the first day which makes that a part of worship. Which means that if you're coming to worship and at least giving is not at some point a part of it you're missing out on a aspect of worshipping God. So number one giving is weekly.

Number two: giving is something that is planned. We see this in the text as well. In other words, it's not spontaneous. It's not what I have in my pocket at the time. It's something I've thought about carefully with forethought because I want to be a part of the ministry. Think about it this way. I would imagine that you've never just showed up at a table and food just spontaneously appeared. As nice as that would be that's not how tables work. Somebody has to prepare the food and bring it to the table. For about the past ten years Michelle and I have some friends who have been ministering to us on Sunday night. They invite us to their home and we share a meal together. And every Sunday goes without fail, I can tell there's been preparation involved in this meal. In fact, our host who this is just a part of her spiritual gift, she'll sometimes call me on Sunday and she'll say I'm at the grocery. What would you like to have for dinner tonight. And sometimes I'll say, well I'm kind of in the mood for a cheeseburger or we've doing it so long she actually encourages me to tell her what I'm hungry for. You know, barbequed chicken on the grill or something like that. And she'll spend the rest of the Sunday afternoon preparing that meal. And then when we come down to sit, to get ready to sit down at that meal I can tell her heart has been totally invested in this. Think about that. Remember that. I'm going to bring it back to your remembrance in a moment. Her heart is totally involved in this. But it was planned. And that's exactly what Paul says. He says first, it's on the first day of the week and then it's planned. Circle the words put something aside. You see ministry happens when it's planned. Ministry giving happens when it's planned.

The third thing that we see is that it's proportional. It's proportional to what the Lord has given to us that particular week. Let me read it again. On the first day of the week each of you is to put something aside and store it up as he may prosper. Well, you may be thinking what does that mean, he may prosper? Well, I have it also in the Living Bible. It

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: ReKindle

Part 3 Rekindling the Sacrifice

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 09.26-27.09

says it this way. The amount depends on how much the Lord has helped you earn. I want you to circle the words he may prosper. Giving is weekly, it's planned, it's proportional. In other words, it goes something like this. That if the Lord helps you in your job to make a thousand dollars in a week then you give proportionally to that thousand dollars. If He helps you make five hundred dollars you give proportionally to that five hundred dollars. If make a hundred dollars, proportionally to the hundred dollars. Now, we practice the tithe here at the church so what that means is that we feel that God is calling us to give a tenth of whatever that proportion might be for that given week or if you receive your paycheck bimonthly or monthly it's proportional to that in size. So, if I make a thousand dollars this week then as tither I'm going to give a hundred dollars back to God. That's part of what I bring. That's what it means to be a giver.

Now, why is it that God wants us to do this? Why is it that He wants us to give? Is it so that the ministry can move forward? Well, yes. I think so. But I don't think that's the key reason. See, I think the main reason is so that our hearts will stay invested in the mission of the church. Remember a moment ago I told you that my friend's heart was in the meal. You can see that when you set down at the table. Jesus said it this way in Matthew 6. He says for where your treasure is there your heart will be also. What does that tell you? That your heart follows your treasure.

I had an illustration of this this week. I was, I had an appointment in Columbus and Michelle and I decided that we were going to stop on the way back at Easton. We were going to stop at the Apple Computer Store. Now, I don't own an Apple computer but my daughter had been saving money for an Ipod and so I wanted to stop and I picked it up for her so that when she came home from school it would be there. I don't really know that much about computers in general and I don't really know that much about Apple computers but when I walked into that store I got a sense that I was walking in the midst of a group of fanatics about Apple computers. Now, there's nothing against that. I could just tell they were really into their computers because there were all these stations and they're all hovering around these stations and they're talking to the people with the little Apple badges and they're training and teaching people and it was really almost like an event you were walking into. And all these people, you know they had their Apple computers and then they had their Ipods and their iPhones and their I this and their I that and they were totally ingrained into the whole Apple philosophy. Now, how did it get that way for them? They bought an Apple computer. And that's suddenly you start getting involved in that.

You know what? It's like that with anything. If you have a sport or a hobby or something that you're really involved with it's starts small but before long what happens? Your whole heart gets invested in it and then that's where your treasures go. That's just how it works. But I want to ask you this morning. Think about it. Where is your heart? Where's your heart? Is your heart with your calling? You see, don't forget. God has called you to Himself; giving you a sense of new life, forgiveness, mercy and then He said we're going

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: ReKindle

Part 3 Rekindling the Sacrifice

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 09.26-27.09

to take that old way of thinking and we're going to replace it with something new. I'm going to give you new purpose for life. I'm going to call you my disciple makers so that others can understand this grace. You're going to get involved and you're going to get your hands dirty. You're going to get involved in the ministry. But I'm also calling you to be givers, table setters.

Now, if you trusted Me enough to hand over your schedule and your checkbook I could tell an awful lot about you because I would know where you're spending your time, spending your money. But I'd also understand something about your heart. Look into your heart. Is your treasures following your heart? Yes. But is your heart in your calling? Now, I realize that for some of you this is a huge step because it's hard to release our treasure and we want to hang on to it and so you know what I tell people. And you know what will happen? I guarantee something will happen to your heart when you start giving just even small ways you'll start saying I want to give more. My heart's not invested in this mission and in the work of this ministry and you're going to find that it will grow over time and so that's perfectly fine. Start small.

But others of you, you might have a different issue to jump over. It might be much more of a heart issue. And maybe your prayer needs to be Lord, I hear the calling. I see it in scripture. Will you break through my fears, my doubts, my personal concerns about this. Maybe your prayer will be God, I want to be the type of man, woman, Christ follower that you would want me to be but I'm having a hard time with this. Would you break through?

See, when you put yourself out there, I just want to tell you what you're in for. You're in for the work of the Holy Spirit in not only convincing you that you're a disciple maker for Christ and a worker of ministry but that you too have been called to be a table setter. Let's ask God to break through into our hearts so that our treasure will follow our hearts.