



## OUR DEVOTION

This devotional guide is designed especially for your use during North Church's Chapter Two – EVERY STORY MATTERS Initiative.



As I look back over the past 6 years, there are two defining catalysts that have always paved the way for every new chapter of God's blessing at North Church—


**Someone stepped out in faith. Someone gave sacrificially.**

Without both, the best we could hope for is *special*. Special communities don't change the world. It's only those fueled by faith and sacrifice who experience the *supernatural*—these are the death-to-life stories where the power of Christ transformed hearts, marriages, pasts, and futures.

Something else happens when we begin to pray, give, and sacrifice—we *grow*. And growth is something EVERYONE can do! This 28-day devotional guide is not about money, but it is about our treasure. It's not about a building, but it will ask us the question "What am I building that will last forever?" It's our prayer that God will use this devotional to guide your journey toward greater growth and intimacy with Him—Ask. Listen. Respond.

You'll see that most days include discussion questions. If you're doing this devotional as a couple or as a family, consider this your springboard to a conversation about what God is teaching you through the scriptures. If you're doing this devotional on your own, use the questions as prompts for personal journaling and reflection.

Bottom line—I'm excited to see how we grow as we journey through Chapter Two together!

Here we go!  


# DAY 1/2

## FAITH IS LIVING BEYOND ROUTINE

# 1/2

The fundamental fact of  
existence is that this trust  
in God, this faith, is the firm  
foundation under everything  
that makes life worth living.  
It's our handle on what we  
can't see.

HEBREWS 11:1 (The Message)

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### FAITH IS THE SECRET TO "RUT-FREE LIVING."

We all know what it's like to live in a rut. Too often what starts with great promise settles into life-long habit of routine. A couple gets married--yet somehow a promise of life-long love turns into habit and routine. A business is started--but before long the dream turns into drudgery. A fresh and real commitment to Christ is made--yet you find yourself settling for the average life rather than the abundant life.

**"We are all wired for significance but our default temperature is set to safety."**

Faith is the difference maker! Faith is the antidote for our ruts and the fuel for two of life's defining moments--

### LIFE'S DISAPPOINTMENTS

Disappointments can make us feel, "I guess that's all there is...I'll have to learn to settle for less." Faith energizes us to look past our disappointments and to see God's promises.

### LIFE'S SUCCESSES

Disappointment can make us bitter, but success can make us self-satisfied. A little success can be a dangerous thing. Faith has the power not only to help us with our struggles, but also our successes. Faith puts success in perspective. It reminds me that I'm not the source of the success--it is God who has given these gifts to me.

It also helps me to see that I'm not the reason for the success. Of course, God is pleased with my happiness. But the ultimate reason for all He does in our lives is to show the world what He is like...to bring glory to Himself.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Is disappointment or success the greater challenge in your life right now?

## DAY 3/4

### THE CHANGE EX-CHANGE

# 3/4

By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a Father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.

HEBREWS 11:11 (NIV)

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Have you made faith's great change exchange? Have you learned to exchange life's pressures for God's promises? We all live in one of two ways, under life's pressure or within God's promises. The secret to promise-living is faith...believing what God has told me about Himself and His world in His word.

When you trust God's promise, you trample life's pressure. When you depend on God's promise, you defeat life's pressure. When you depend on God's promise you defeat life's pressure. When you receive God's promise, you reject life's pressure. Promise and pressure are mutually exclusive. They can't exist together.

**There are two common assumptions that push the promises of God out of our lives as believers.** Watch out for these! (You can see them in the life of Abraham as he struggled with believing God's promise about sending him and Sarah a son.)

**I'LL HAVE TO SETTLE FOR LESS.  
I'LL HAVE TO GET IT MYSELF.**

It's so easy to start to think, "If I don't" then "it won't." Although Abraham struggled with these assumptions, he ended up putting his faith in God and not just his current circumstances or abilities. Just because you struggle does not mean that you cannot end up making the great "change exchange." You can be a person of genuine faith.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTION

- Which of the two common assumptions listed above do you struggle with most when it comes to faith?
- Where do you feel pressured right now? Pray that God's promises will ease your pressures.

# DAY 5/6

## BECOMING A SIGNIFICANT SERVANT, PART 1

# 5/6

Elijah was a man just like us.  
He prayed earnestly that it  
would not rain, and it did not  
rain on the land for three and a  
half years.  
JAMES 5:17 (NIV)

**How do we live the most significant life possible?** Not the way the world says. In fact the Bible teaches—We **SERVE** our way into significance. For most of us the words “significant” and “servant” do not go together. We’ve bought into the lie that the way to significance is to work our way up the ladder.

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There is a man in the Old Testament book of Kings who can show us the way. His name... Elijah! One of the most significant things about Elijah is that he was like us. He was a man of awesome miracles, of powerful actions, and the book of James reminds us that he was yet just like us. Since he is like us, we can learn from him some lessons about being a significant servant.

### **SERVANT LESSON #1:**

**God is ABLE—He has the power. God is WILLING—He has the love.**

God is willing and able to meet all of my needs. Significant servants make that confidence the launching pad of their lives and ministries.

In 1 Kings 17, Elijah learns this lesson beside a brook in the desolate Kirath Ravine. In order to teach him this lesson, God does for Elijah what He regularly does for his servants. He reduces life to the basics. Elijah certainly was down to basics! All he had was the water the Lord sent and the food that God delivered...via the “Raven Parcel Service.” God used the ravens to bring food to Elijah. God has help where we least expect it! He provides in ways that go beyond our narrow expectations. That’s what we learn when life is reduced to the basics.

### **The “basics” are simply this:**

**A place of complete and total dependence on God.**

In that place God reminds us that we depend on Him alone for all of our needs. Why does God put us in such places? Reducing life to the basics helps to refocus upon God. We recognize again just how dependent upon God we really are. Not our paycheck. Not our homes. Not the microwave or McDonald’s or MasterCard. God is the Father who graciously supplies all of our needs.

### **PRAY THIS SERVANT’S PRAYER**

Everything in my life is there because you bring it to me, Lord. I’m totally dependent on you for everything! It’s all yours. All of it. Every drink of water, every breath, every bite of food.

# DAY 7/8

## BECOMING A SIGNIFICANT SERVANT, PART 2

# 7/8

Read 1 Kings 19:1-18 (NIV)

### SERVANT'S LESSON #2

#### **Outer victories mean nothing if I do not win the inner battle.**

You'd think that chapter 18 of 1 Kings contained the biggest battles of Elijah's life. He battled the powerful King Ahab, he battled 450 false prophets. But in chapter 19, he faces an even bigger battle: the battle within himself. He won the battle of chapter 18 fairly easily, yet almost lost his life in the battle within himself. In 1 Kings 19 Elijah gives clear expression to the kinds of inner battles which God's servants will inevitably have to face. See if you can relate to any of these feelings he expressed:

#### **I WANT TO RUN.**

We often feel like running after a great victory. The combination of physical and emotional fatigue make us feel like escaping when everyone else is celebrating. When we're run down, we want to run away.

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#### **I'VE HAD ENOUGH.**

The feeling is, "I've reached my limit."

#### **I'M ALL ALONE.**

When you decide that you're all alone, the inner battle is lost. When you decide that you're all alone the inner battle is lost.

#### **The inner victory for Elijah was won on 6 different fronts. God told him...**

You need rest! (vs. 7)

You must worship! (vs. 8.)

You can tell someone! (vs. 9-10)

You need a fresh encounter with God! (vs. 11-13)

You are useful! (vs. 15-17)

You aren't alone! (vs. 18)

Let's focus for a moment on the idea of a fresh encounter with God, Elijah, who had always seen God in the fire and the storms, heard God this time in a gentle whisper. You might feel desperate to hear God's voice right now. Keep listening! Elijah didn't hear God the 1st or 2nd or even the 3rd time. But he was faithful to be where God wanted him to be and eventually heard God's still small voice.

You see, we often assume that God is not with us or does not hear us when we're going through difficult things. However, the truth of the Bible is that God is most powerfully present even when he seems to be most apparently absent.

#### **PRAY THIS SERVANT'S PRAYER**

Lord, I want to serve you for the rest of my life. I pray that you would give to me the wisdom to rest when it's needed, the desire to place a priority on worship, the courage to tell you about the problems I face, the inner confidence that I am useful to you and the assurance that I am never alone in serving you. I pray that I would regularly hear you speaking to me in fresh, new ways.

## DAY 9/10

### I CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

# 9/10

I am the vine: you are the  
branches. If a man remains in  
me and I in him, he will bear  
much fruit: apart from me you  
can do nothing.

JOHN 15:5 (NIV)

**We can't be satisfied with just making a living.  
We must feel that we're making a difference!**

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Try it—just bring home a paycheck. Nothing else—nothing more. Even if the paycheck is \$100,000 a month, it won't satisfy (Right now, you're thinking, "I'd like to try!") But the truth is, we need to make a difference. Jesus gives us a promise that tells us the secret to really making a difference in this world. The secret is "abiding in Christ." What does that mean?

**There are 4 aspects of abiding in John 15...**

1. **BE AWARE** of how much you need Him.  
*Don't miss this: "Apart from Me, you can do nothing!"*
2. Allow **HIS WORD** to mold your life.
3. Seek to **PLEASE GOD**.
4. Ask for His help through **PRAYER**.

Significance is not a contest. You don't win it in a competition with others. Importance is a wonderful gift given by God's love. People who make a difference in this life are people who live the joy of being chosen by God—of being important to God Himself. You are Jesus' friend.

Jesus starts John 15 calling us branches and ends up calling us friends. When you see Jesus as a friend, it turns your thinking upside down. It's much easier to face trouble when you have a friend beside you.

You're likely to stay attached to someone you know is your friend. And, when it comes to asking, it's always easier to ask a friend. Your life is meant to count! You are chosen to be significant: to bear "fruit that will last." Lasting fruit means changed lives, new hope, real impact upon people's hurts. It is drawing people's attention to the eternal love of God, changing someone's eternal destiny by introducing them to the opportunity we all have to place faith in Jesus Christ.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTION

- Is there anything in your life you're trying to accomplish "apart" from Christ?
- What steps can you take to make sure you are remaining in the vine?

## DAY 11/12

### KEEPING YOUR PURPOSE ALIVE

# 11/12

And you, Solomon my son, get  
to know well your father's God;  
serve him with a whole heart and  
eager mind, for God examines  
every heart and sees through  
every motive.

1 CHRONICLES 28:9 (The Message)

#### **A burned out light bulb, an empty toothpaste tube, a broken record.**

That's not ...you! People never outlive their usefulness! True, we do feel burned out and empty and even broken at times, but don't let that fool you. You've got more to offer than a toothpaste tube! You cannot outlast your usefulness. One of the major causes of a lack of drive is a lack of purpose. Life seems empty when it is without purpose. Sometimes we run out of purpose long before we run out of energy.

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How can I renew the sense of purpose in my life? In 1 Chronicles 28, David shows us how to refresh our purpose when we come to a crossroads.

#### **INVOLVE YOUR HEART (1 CHRONICLES 28:9)**

Real purpose has to involve more than the merely routine—you have to have your heart in it! If the purpose is being imposed from the outside, it has the feel of pressure. If the purpose is welling up from inside, it has the feel of real promise and enthusiasm. Some of you are caught in the Twilight Zone between wanting and willing. You've got a case of the "should." Give God a willing heart.

#### **INSPECT YOUR PLAN (1 CHRONICLES 28:19)**

Ask yourself: are my plans big enough? Are they bigger than your comfort? David's plan for his life went beyond comfort in his life. I talk to a lot of people whose greatest plan is personal comfort. That's not big enough! Are your plans bigger than your desires? Have you discovered the surprising fact that even if you got everything you desired, it wouldn't be big enough?

#### **INVEST YOUR RESOURCES**

When a purpose catches a hold of your heart and life you become willing to invest yourself in it! David invested his own resources! About \$87 million in gold and \$12.5 million in silver — no small investment. It's one thing to use someone else's resources, quite another thing to invest your own. Purpose has a personal price!

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

- What's the biggest plan you feel God has for your life?
- From the three challenges above, what chapter is in need of the most attention to take God's plan for your life to the next level?
- What's your next move?

# DAY 13/14

## GOD'S PROMISE OF DIRECTION

# 13/14

Trust in the LORD with all your  
heart and lean not on your own  
understanding: in all your ways  
acknowledge him, and he will  
make your paths straight.  
PROVERBS 3:5-6 (NIV)

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God's purpose must be built into the direction and decisions of everyday life. Here in Proverbs there are four commitments that ready you for the decisions of life. They build a lifestyle that enjoys God's daily direction.

### **DETERMINE YOUR DIRECTOR**

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart." This simple phrase encourages us to ask two of life's most important questions. First, who am I trusting? Is it myself, my fears, my friends? Or...is it the Lord? Second, how am I trusting? We're encouraged to trust with all our hearts. Half-hearted trust is no trust at all.

### **DETECT YOUR DETRACTOR**

"Lean not on your own understanding." Leaning on your own understanding is a major reason for directionless living. How do you avoid the temptation to lean on only yourself? A few suggestions. Take time with your decision. Rollo May said, "It is an old and ironic habit of human beings to run faster when we have lost our way" Talk to God about your decisions. Here's the acid test of determining which way you're leaning: how often do you talk to God?

### **DECLARE YOUR DELIGHT**

"In all your ways acknowledge Him." Acknowledge means to let others know. Declare your delight. Personally...in your devotional life take time to tell the Lord you appreciate Him. Publicly...in your witnessing life tell others you appreciate the Lord.

### **ACKNOWLEDGE HIM!**

And the promise is, God will direct your paths. Not might, or could...but will. How can I know God's will for my life? How can I know what decision God would have me to make? If you'll work on determining and detecting and declaring, God will do the directing!

### **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

- Complete this statement, "The decision that I'm facing right now that I would most like to have God's direction in is..."
- Which of the challenges from Proverbs 3 do you struggle with the most?
- What's your next move?



DAY 15/16

WHERE  
COMMITMENT LEADS

15/16

Where did the commitment  
that Mary and Joseph made  
take this young couple?

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**THEIR COMMITMENT LED THEM TO EGYPT - MATTHEW 2:13-23**

Because King Herod was trying to kill their baby, they had to flee their homeland. It wasn't always convenient; it wasn't all fun and games to have Jesus as their son. Hollywood would have Mary saying, "I don't feel like cooking tonight, Jesus, here's some bread and fish. Could you whip something up?" or "One of the kids is sick, could you heal them?" The truth is, their commitments made their lives better, but not easy.

**TRUTH— Commitments are not always convenient.**

**THEIR COMMITMENT LED THEM TO A TEMPLE - LUKE 2:41-52**

The temple where they lost Jesus when he was 12 years old. They lost the Son of God. (Or they at least thought they had!) Their great commitment led to a tremendous feeling of having let God down. Some people are afraid to make commitments because they feel they won't be able to keep them perfectly. Let me set your mind at ease...you're right, you won't!

**TRUTH— those who are afraid of stumbling never get in the race.**

**HER COMMITMENT LED TO THE FOOT OF A CROSS - JOHN 9:25-27**

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was there at the cross. Can you imagine the emotions that must have nearly burst her heart? She knew that Jesus was God's son. But Jesus was also her son. She had nursed and cared for him as a baby, and now he was being tortured on a cross. Her heart, now broken over our own sin—broken for those who reject Christ.

**TRUTH—Trust sometimes leads to a broken heart**

**HER COMMITMENT LED TO THE UPPER ROOM - ACTS 1:12-15**

In Acts, we're told of the new church starting in an upper room. Not many people realize that Mary was there when that new church started. She saw the resurrected Jesus. She witnessed the beginning of His church that would change the world. In the end, her life of commitment led to a fulfillment of God's promise that she could have never imagined.

**TRUTH—A lifetime of commitment to Christ leads to a life unimagined.**

**DISCUSSION QUESTION**

- Where is your commitment leading you right now?

DAY 17/18

**SACRIFICING  
TO CHANGE**

17/18

He said, "Take your dear son Isaac whom you love and go to the land of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I'll point out to you."

GENESIS 22:2 ( THE MESSAGE)

**WE ALL HAVE SOMETHING WE'D LIKE TO CHANGE IN OUR LIVES.**

It might be our schedule or our habits, our words or our weight. Many of us struggle with making those changes. Instead of telling yourself you cannot change, why not discover the secret of lasting change?

**THE SECRET OF LASTING CHANGE IS SACRIFICE.**

In the give and take of life, what you give, you keep and what you take, you end up losing.

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Any talk about change must include an honest look at sacrifices. Lasting change is built on real sacrifices. Your attitude towards sacrifice can be a grumbled, "We all have to make sacrifices," or a faith-filled, "God asks us all to make sacrifices." The sacrifices God asks of us always build towards the blessings God wants to give to us.

**ABRAHAM UNDERSTOOD SACRIFICE.**

He sacrificed his former life and people when he moved to the Promised Land. And then, when it seemed that all the sacrifices had been made and he could coast for the rest of his life, God asked for the biggest sacrifice of all. He told Abraham to sacrifice his son. How could God ask that of Abraham? How could God ask so much of us? You've got it all wrong! It's not as if He takes and we give. It's more that He teaches us how to give so that He can give us even more. The bottom line is God will strip you of anything that comes in between you and Him.

We read this story and the tension builds—would God really let Abraham go through with it? There is a sigh of relief in us all when God stops Abraham at the end—when He provides the ram in the thicket. Hebrews 11 tells us that Abraham trusted God to resurrect his son even if he had completed the sacrifice.

In New Testament days this scene is replayed. Once again, it's an only son ready to be sacrificed. But this time it is Jesus, God's son, on the cross. But this time, no voice calls out, no ram in the thicket. What He would not allow Abraham to do, God him-self did. Jesus sacrificed his life! The sacrifice that Abraham did not have to make changed him. The sacrifice that Jesus did make, changed us. There is no change without sacrifice.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION**

- What would you like to change?
- Do you think there's anything you might have to sacrifice to see that change happen?
- What's your next move?

DAY 19/20

SACRIFICING  
TO GROW

19/20

Do you not know that in a race  
all the runners run, but only one  
gets the prize? Run in such a way  
as to get the prize.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24 (NIV)

**The truth is, our biggest hurdle in making the sacrificial commitments we'd like to make for Christ is often ourselves!** We don't always feel like doing what we know is right to do! Sometimes we feel like doing what we know is the worst thing to do. Wouldn't it be great if they made a TV remote control for people?!

Circumstances become overwhelming—click—change channels.  
Can't wait patiently—click—fast forward.  
Afraid of the future click—pause.  
Want to make up for a mistake—click—rewind.  
Wouldn't it be great if they made a remote control for self-control?

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Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "I make myself." How do you do that? The key to self-control is Christ-control. In other words you can't bring about the change, but Christ can. The Bible says it is a fruit that God's spirit wants to bear in our lives. Paul talks about three areas of life that we need to make a commitment to if we are to follow his leadership in our lives in this area of a new sense of self-control.

#### **RUN FOR THE PRIZE: EXCELLENCE**

Don't run at the back, don't run with the pack, run for the prize. In a world where many think it's enough to have simply participated, we are challenged to strive for excellence.

#### **TRAIN FOR THE CROWN: ETERNITY**

If the relatively small promise of a reward like a gold medal can motivate us to such great heights even on a human level—just think of what a focus on eternity could do!

#### **AIM FOR THE GOAL: ENERGY**

If you're running a race, it's good to have your eye on the finish line. Paul reminded us that those who reach the finish are those who make sacrifices. He said he "disciplined his body!" We have a choice. We become a slave to our passions or we live for Christ with passion. trusted God to resurrect his son even if he had completed the sacrifice.

In New Testament days this scene is replayed. Once again, it's an only son ready to be sacrificed. But this time it is Jesus, God's son, on the cross. But this time, no voice calls out, no ram in the thicket. What He would not allow Abraham to do, God him-self did. Jesus sacrificed his life! The sacrifice that Abraham did not have to make changed him. The sacrifice that Jesus did make, changed us. There is no change without sacrifice.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

- Excellence—Eternity—Energy...a life in Christ requires a right perspective on all three. Which of the three needs the most tuning in your life right now—Why?
- What's your next move?

DAY 21/22

SACRIFICING  
TO LIVE

21/22

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel  
of wheat falls to the ground and  
dies, it remains only a single  
seed. But if it dies, it produces  
many seeds.

JOHN 12:24 (NIV)

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Now we all know this is impossible, except for in Disney movies, but imagine a grain of wheat talking to itself, admiring itself, noticing how round and brown and fully packed it is. Imagine it thinking about that physiology and psychology of falling into the cold, dark ground. The grain of wheat might say, "I'm feeling a little uncomfortable with this concept. I like myself as I am and think that falling into the ground would be a waste of my life." Jesus is not talking about wheat in this verse. He is talking to us! He's reminding us that a sacrifice given out of a loving heart for Him always results in new life for ourselves and for others. Yet most of us have felt like the mythical grain of wheat. Sacrifice is a great idea...for other people or for some other time.

We all want to do something great with our lives. We think, "I'll finish those goals and then I'll have time to make the sacrifices." Jesus says to us, "Sacrifice comes first!" Jesus led the way for us. He sacrificed His life, literally, so that we could be forgiven. The most significant sacrifice in history brought about the most significant impact upon history.

**This sacrifice is not a simplistic "no pain, no gain" philosophy.**

We're not talking about working hard. (Although there's nothing wrong with hard work.) Nor is this an invitation to a "martyr complex" faith. We're talking about true sacrifice: giving up that which is most important to you. Jesus could not have been more clear. Losing your life comes before finding your life.

And find it you will! Someone once said to a group of missionaries serving in a remote area, "You have certainly buried yourselves here." One of the missionaries replied, "We're not buried here, we were planted here."

#### DISCUSSION QUESTION

- Revisit John 12:24. What truth from this parable does God want you to hear and apply today?
- How do we get past the "I'm not sure I really want to do this" feeling that goes along with all genuine sacrifices?
- What truth did God want you to hear and apply today?

DAY 23/24

SACRIFICING  
TO GIVE

23/24

Those who planted their crops  
in despair will shout hurrahs at  
the harvest, So those who went  
off with heavy hearts will come  
home laughing, with armloads of  
blessing.

PSALMS 126:5-6 (The MESSAGE)

A missionary tells about understanding the significance of this verse for the first time. During a time of drought the tribe with which he was working saw their supplies of corn stretched to the limit. He recalled seeing a father take one of the last bags of dried corn out of his family's storeroom. This corn could have been pounded into meal to make the cakes that were the staple of the family's diet. But, instead, he took the corn to the field where he sowed the

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seed into the ground. The missionary saw tears flowing down the man's cheeks, and he understood. It hurt to put into the ground what might be his family's last meal. Yet he knew that without sowing that seed his family would certainly starve the next year. So he sowed with tears knowing that he would one day reap with joy.

What's the lesson? That we should give away our last meal? Of course not!  
**The lesson is this—It's not always easy to "generate generosity."**

When we talk about "giving cheerfully" it can sound as if giving is always an easy thing to do. That simply is not true. For those who give there is often the strange mixture of sacrifice and joy. You know that you're doing what is right and yet it is often hard to let go. That's true when we give our time, our money, our talents or ourselves.

But the truth is...there is an inevitable law of sowing and reaping at work. It's a natural law. It's a spiritual law. Those who sow in tears WILL reap with joy. The result of our sacrificing to meet others' needs is not just a feeling of satisfaction, well-being or having done the right thing. It's JOY! It is an overwhelming sense of God's perspective on life, an overwhelming experience of God's presence in life and an overarching knowledge of God's security for life.

You know I've never once missed the money I've invested in the church or in missions or in people around me. That money is gone and given freely. The money I worry about is money I try to keep and invest and spend on myself.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTION

- What experience from your past makes the idea of sacrificial giving extra challenging?
- We often say at North Church that Stewardship means leveraging my gifts, calling, and resources for the sake of the Kingdom and those around me. Which of those three is easiest for you to steward? Most difficult to steward?
- What lesson my God be teaching you through your struggles?

DAY 25/26

TWO COINS

25/26

Read the story of the widow.

LUKE 21:1-4 (NIV)

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**Two very small coins. Two mites, two 1/8ths of a penny.**

What could such a small amount buy? How could such a pittance be of any value to even a poor widow? It wasn't enough to make a difference; to buy a meal or rent a room or purchase a robe. It was seemingly only enough to remind her of all this widow had lost, all that her life now lacked. Yet, they were all that she had. She lived in a society in which a woman without a husband was not allowed to provide for herself. These two coins had become her only security: they were all she had left.

Two very large coins! Two of the most talked-about, most adored pieces of money in all of human history. More valuable than the crown jewels of England for their impact. More rare than the rarest of coins for their teaching! What could these two coins buy? They earned the highest praise of Jesus. Jesus looked at this woman and saw not a poor widow, but a woman of wonderful faith. These two coins became her lasting legacy, summing up all that she had done right.

**There is a hidden fear for many of us in the reading of this story.**

If Jesus commended this woman for giving all that she had, might he also ask the same of us? The truth of the matter is: He does! He asks us to be willing to trust Him with our all. And if He ever challenged us to actually give it all away, be assured that He would not stop meeting our needs. Can you imagine the reward of that kind of genuine generosity?

Jesus is teaching his disciples, then and now, an important lesson as he points to this widow. We tend to be impressed with the amounts that people gave. God is impressed with the heart that we give it with. Let's remember that as we go through our Chapter 2 emphasis. **It's not equal gifts but equal sacrifice.**

**DISCUSSION QUESTION**

- What recent stories of generosity have challenged, inspired, or encouraged you lately, whether through Chapter Two or other?
- Have you ever had to sacrifice something really important to you?
- What did you learn through the experience?

DAY 27/28

THE JOY OF  
SACRIFICE

27/28

Remember: A stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop. I want each of you to take plenty of time to think it over, and make up your own mind what you will give. That will protect you against sob stories and arm-twisting. God loves it when the giver delights in the giving.

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-7  
(THE MESSAGE)

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Few things are more fun, yet equally nerve-racking than watching my 9-year-old daughter Zoë's team play basketball. You know, basketball can be one disorganized looking sport! Everyone runs up and down the court with no apparent plan. Surprisingly, they do have plays in the game! One of her favorite plays is called the "give and go." You give somebody else the ball and then you go towards the basket. They give the ball back to you and you score. It seems like there might be a lesson for us to learn from basketball on what giving is supposed to look like.

Paul's advice to us is simple, found in a two-word command and a two-word promise— **The command? Plant much! The promise? Reap much!**

It's the simplest addition: few=small, much=much. It's the simplest agriculture: if you plant a lot of seed, you can expect a large harvest.

**How do we sow with our lives?**

We can give ourselves in hospitality, opening our home in order to meet people's needs. Or how about ministry? Going out from your home to meet people's needs. Or what about stewardship? Using the resources God has given to us to bless others. The challenge is clear. We need to plant our lives.

Paul says that we are made rich so that we can be generous. That's an eye-opener! Our riches are given not primarily to encourage our luxury, but our generosity. God's riches are not an invitation to luxury, they are an opportunity for generosity. We should all carry around stickers that say "opportunity" Stick them on everything that God places into our hands: our paycheck, our car, our house. Each of them is an opportunity to praise God, love people and express our faith.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION**

- What do you need to put an "opportunity" sticker on in your mind?
- What's been off-limits in the past?
- What fresh message from God is reshaping your perspective on giving?