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[*Introductory video*: Christmas bells music chimes at a brisk pace to accompany the bold messages which flash on changing backgrounds of bright green and red in time to the beat of the music:

Christmas is coming

(the focus pans down a long row of stenciled pictures of a Christmas trees)

deck the halls

peace on earth...and all that...good stuff

(stenciled pictures of wrapped gifts multiply until crowding out the words)

Christmas is:

(one by one each word is succeeded by the next to complete the phrase)

family, love, home, joy, wonderful

(**wonderful** remains and these words stack up on top of it one at a time):

cookies, fruitcake, sweaters, crowded malls, this year's iPod, 10 office parties, tacky ornaments, long return lines, credit cards, gifts, gifts, gifts, gifts...

(**gifts** is added uncountable times with increasing speed)

Let's be honest...more stuff

(the word *stuff* is multiplied above and below the word in the sentence)

doesn't make us happy

(again, stenciled pictures of wrapped gifts multiply until crowding out the words)

This Christmas could be different...and not just for you

WORSHIP FULLY

When the lights come back up at the video's end, Lead Pastor Sal Sberna begins.]

Well, good morning, everybody. How are you? How's everybody at our *Cypress Campus*? Let's give a big shout-out at our *Cypress Campus* this morning. You folks had to get up at five a.m. and get out there and set everything up. We're thankful to God for all the labor of love that you do there. If you're joining us via our Smartphone app or the Internet, we welcome you as well.

How many of y'all ate too much? Let me see your hands. Come on, now. Shame the devil; don't lie in church. My wife outdid herself. We had things we have never had before. We had these luscious carrots that were baked in brown sugar with pistachios on them, and I swore I thought I was a rabbit for a while. I ate so much food—I started Thursday morning and I ended somewhere late last night in a small coma.

I got up this morning, and I was frantic—I was literally just) I was freaking out. I tried on four pairs of pants; the fifth one finally buttoned. I'm just saying: *Stay away from me today, because if this [button] flies off, you're going to get hurt.* (All right?) I've gained way too much weight. So if you're thinking about coming by my office dropping off your sin, we don't want to eat your sin anymore. You keep those cookies at your house. Keep those cupcakes at your house. Or just bring them straight to my house so I won't have to share them with anybody there at the office.

Well, Thanksgiving was great, but it seems to me (maybe to you)—but how many of you feel like we went from Halloween to Christmas overnight? (Let me [see your hands.] (Yeah, right?) I just can't believe that (I mean) I'm already just mad at listening to Christmas carols everywhere I go—and it's not even December yet! Let me just tell you how mixed up our world is. We take the beginning of the season of Advent when Jesus—we celebrate Christ's incarnation. The way the world celebrates the Light coming into the world is that we have a *Black Friday* when we say: *Hey! Let's get our Christmas on at four a.m. or midnight. We want you to come out and just immerse yourself in*

- *Avarice*
- *Greed*
- *Want*
- *Plenty*

at the Season's lowest prices. Now, tell the truth: *How many of y'all went to Black Friday?* You all are sick! You're ruining my Christmas. I woke up on Friday morning, and I was going through my emails because I had to see if a video was done, and (I kid you not) I had no less than 30 emails advertising an on-line or get-here-soon-with-this-coupon for Black Friday.

Now all I'm saying, Church, is let's make this year different. Let's try to make it different. Because this is the time that we as God's people celebrate the fact that an eternal God, Who knew no space or time boundaries:

- Placed Himself inside the womb of a virgin
 - Became just like us
 - Shared in our flesh and blood
- So that He might shed His blood so that we would be saved

We ought to be just worshiping God to [our] fullest capacity during this time of the [Advent] season.

But unfortunately, this time of the season doesn't bring tidings of great joy to us:

- It thins our nerves.
- It makes us anxious and worried.
- We begin thinking about: *What are we going to give (fill in the blank) for Christmas?*
- Then we start to equate money with love

A lot of people missed the first advent of Christ. It was only (really) the shepherds and the wise men that (really) celebrated the first coming of our Lord. What's really sad is that if we're not careful (and I think we all—myself included—get tripped up in this), we are going to miss Jesus again this Christmas.

But we're not going to miss:

- Headaches, because we're going to have those.
- Anxiety, because we're going to have that.
- Being with people we don't really love, because we only can love a few people at a time.

What's going to end up happening is:

- We're going to spend more.
- We're going to give less.
- We're going to love fewer people.
- We're going to give less and less of ourselves away

Why don't we (this Christmas) turn that around? Why don't we?—

- Worship more
- Spend less
- Give more
- Love everybody

Rather than worshiping less during the best time of the year to worship when people are going to be coming to our church every Sunday this Christmastime—especially Christmas Eve and Christmas Day—saying: *Hey, tell me about the greatest Gift ever!*

But if we're too wasted (already) because of all that Christmas anxiety, worry and giving gifts that we don't want to give to people we don't like—so that we might get something from them that we can return on the day after Christmas—then we're not going to have anything to give them.

- Why don't we worship more?
- Why don't we spend less?
- Give more?
- Love everybody?

The religion of consumerism says this: *Money equals love*. Isn't that the case? (I mean) look at the commercials. If you really love somebody, what are you going to give them this year?—a big, brand new \$95,000 car with a red bow on it. (I mean) Really? Honestly, if my wife gave me something like that for Christmas, I'd look at her and go: *Who are you? What have you done?* Now we're going to argue for the next 9 years on how we're going to pay this thing off as we get an \$800-a-month car note. No way! That ain't happening at the Sberna household.

If you are planning to do it, stop now! Don't do that. That's not love; that's just greed. That's just a commercial [that] got a hold of your mind. Some slick salesman talked you into something you should never, ever be doing.

Don't let money be the driving force of our giving. Let's let love—during this Christmas season—be the driving force of our giving, because then:

- We can give freely
- We can give with abandon (because)
- We don't have to compare
- We can receive with gratitude
- We can worship God with abandon

...when *money* and giving aren't the issue, but *love* and giving are the issue.

[Do you] remember when you were a little kid, you used to make presents for your parents? What were the presents they were most excited about and the presents that you're most excited about as a parent? You're most excited about what your kid made you. Why?—because that was done out of love. That took time. That took kids trying to do something beyond their ability. I don't care if it was a rock that was painted with: *I love you. Merry Christmas*. That's your favorite Christmas present, and I bet you know where it is today. But how many...

- Pieces of jewelry
- Pieces of clothing
- All the little trinkets
- Lots of little blings
- Stuff that's ended up in the rust pile of every other consumer thing that we have

...has really ever made a difference?

By spending less this Christmas season we—as a church—can do more good than you can ever possibly imagine. Spending less frees us to give more.

- More of our presence
- More of our time
- More of our talent
- More of our money

—to the kingdom of God.

Now, you had that brochure when you came in. I want to show you the pull-out picture in the brochure. (Don't open your brochure, because I'll lose you. Some of you are already reaching for it weren't you?) Now look up here at the screen. You'll see the picture that's in the pull-out.



Let me tell you what spending less last year on ourselves and giving more to the kingdom of God did. Now this is over and above what we did back here for our children's spaces. Last year in a span of a little less than three months, we raised over \$1.5 million; the majority of which stayed here because we had to have the children's spaces. But what went out, look at what it did. Look at those pictures up there on the screen. Do you realize:

- Nearly 384,000 meals were served to nearly 1000 children in Kenya, Uganda and Liberia? Children ate because we spent less last year.
- (Do you know that) literally \$6000 of food was given away from our church here in northwest Houston?
- Over 300,000 teens heard the Gospel in the Philippines, Mexico, Africa and Brazil and over 100,000 of them gave their lives to Christ?—because we spent less and gave more?
- (Do you realize) we planted churches in Brazil and Indonesia?
- We equipped 750 pastors in our ministry efforts in Africa?
- In water, we have put 2 10,000-gallon fresh-water machines in Nairobi, Kenya, which provide thousands of gallons of water to people in need?
- In the village in which our orphanage is located (which I cannot wait to share with you what's going on there) we have drilled and fixed a well for them. The people of that village now—because of what God has given through us—have fresh water that is disease-free, that they can pump for free, right there in their village.

We did that, because we spent less. (We spent less.) When you spend less, you can give more. Christ's birth was Good News for all people—not just us.

Do you realize this? (This blew me away when I read the statistic.)

- The amount of money that is spent every Christmas in America is 45 times the amount it would take to bring fresh water to every person in the world who does not have fresh water right now—45 times as much!
- The average American spends in gifts alone—not including cards, parties, clothing and all that other stuff we do for Christmas—the average American spends between \$850 and \$1200 per family just in gifts (just in gifts).

So during this time, let's change the way we think about Christmas.

- Let's worship God fully this time.
- Let's spend less on ourselves so that we can give more for the reason that Jesus Christ came into this world.

By doing that, let's love everybody. Because isn't that Who Jesus is?

- Somebody Who worshiped fully the Father.
- Somebody Who spent less on Himself. In fact, was rich—but for our sakes became poor so that we might become rich. [2 *Corinthians* 8:9 (paraphrased)]
- Somebody Who gave more than anybody else ever gave. He gave His very life so that we could be free.
- Somebody Who literally does love everybody in the entire world.

God has called us to be just like that.

So I'm going to ask you to do something this Christmas. For the next several weeks that we worship together—all the way through the end of December—I want us to worship fully. I want us to be cognizant of the fact that "God" Immanuel "is with us" [*Matthew* 1:23 (NLT)] and that—

- We're going to find Jesus, not so much at the mall, as we are in the stable.
- We're not going to find Jesus in the big expensive gifts, as we are in the practical gifts of...
 - food
 - water
 - the Gospel
 - equipping and loving people around the world
- We will **worship fully** and try every single day...
 - To understand what the will of God is for us
 - To *celebrate* the birth of Jesus
- We are going to give less in this consumeristic, material-driven world that demands that you go out at 4:00 in the morning and go buy stuff.

We are more obedient to the god of consumerism than (I believe sometimes) we are to the God Who gave His life for us.

- We're going to **spend less** on that stuff.
- We're going to **give more** to what really counts.
 - We're going to give ourselves to people in our neighborhood.
 - We're going to give ourselves to toy drives.
 - We're going to give ourselves to going around the world to loving people. Then finally...

- We are going to **love all**. There is nobody in this world that is not deserving of the love of Jesus Christ. We are the ones that prove that.

If you're with me, say *Amen*. [Congregational response: *Amen*] *Cypress*, [have] you got too much tryptophan [the sleep-inducing amino acid in turkey]? Say it with me. Are you with me, *Cypress*? I heard you. (They couldn't, but I heard you. I know you said *Amen*.)

All right, let's worship fully then.

WORSHIP FULLY

What does that mean to worship fully? When you look in the Bible—you look at some of the characters of Christmas and they tell us how we can worship fully. Let's look at Mary. When we worship fully like Mary, we worship humbly—very humbly.

WORSHIP HUMBLY (LIKE MARY)

⁴⁶ And Mary said: "My soul exalts the Lord,
⁴⁷ And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.
⁴⁸ "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bonds slave;
 For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.
Luke 1:46-48 (NASB)

You remember the story of Mary. She's a teenage girl—a poor teenage girl—engaged to be wed to a poor teenage boy by the name of Joseph.

Then one day the angel of God comes and the Spirit of God speaks to her and says: *Do you know what, Mary? You're highly favored of God. Because you have been chosen to bear Immanuel—God with us—Jesus, Who's going to save people from their sins.*

Then Mary goes: *Well, wait a minute. I'm a virgin. How can this really happen?*

And the angel says: *Look, the Spirit of God is going to overshadow you and you are going to be with child, but besides that, nothing is impossible with God.*

And with that, Mary said: *Let it be to me according to God's word. If nothing is impossible with God, then I humbly accept what God wants to do for me.*

[*Luke 1:30-38 (paraphrased)*]

Mary teaches us that even us right here—us today in our humble circumstances—we can trust God for what nobody else can trust God for; that nothing is impossible with God.

Do you realize right now—if you're sitting in this room, or you're listening to my voice via the Internet, or at our *Cypress Campus*—that you may be thinking in your mind: *I am so wicked, I am so bad, surely it is impossible for God to love me.* But yet the Bible says: "For God so loved the

world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever..." [John 3:16 (KJV)] That means you—

- Whatever you've done
- No matter what crime you've committed
- How heinous you think your background might be

I'm telling you, it is not impossible for God to love you because the Bible says God loves you. It's not impossible. Say with Mary: *I humbly accept the fact that what's impossible with man is not impossible with You, God.*

Do you know that there is no burden that God cannot bear and lift for you? No matter where you find yourself:

- In your marriage
- In your household
- With your family

You're coming up on the holidays. You're already getting gloomy and dark. Don't go there. Do you know the God of all the ages has said to you (that): *Your little burden is not impossible for Me.* (That) *All of you who are heavy-laden and burdened, I want you to come with Me and I want you to take My yoke upon you because My yoke is easy and My burden is light.* [Matthew 11:28-30 (paraphrased)] Do not go gloomy and depressed this holiday season. What has been impossible for you is now possible with God. Do you know:

- There's not one anxiety that God cannot make lighter when you ask Him to?
- There is not a financial need in your life that would be impossible for God because He has promised to meet every one of our needs through His riches and glory in Christ Jesus. [Philippians 4:19 (paraphrased)]

Nothing is impossible with God if you simply, humbly worship God.

Do you know what's not impossible this year? It's not impossible for you to give the way that God wants you to give to the *Big Give*. You say: *Well, you just don't understand my financial situation.* I may not, but God does.

God understood the financial situation of Mary and Joseph. They were both poor. He said: *I want to give you the greatest Gift ever if you just trust Me. I'm going to allow you to give what nobody else in this world is ever going to give.*

And God can do that through you if you'll just sit back and say: *God, everything I have is Yours. What do you want me to do with what I have? I humbly give everything back to You.* Nothing is impossible for God, even if what He is asking you to do seems to be impossible to you.

Second thing that she says is:

⁵² "He has brought down the rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble.

⁵³ "HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; And sent away the rich empty-handed.

Luke 1:52-53 (NASB)

Now, here's a poor little girl engaged to a poor little boy who now says in her poverty: *You have filled me with good things.*

Here's the difference between true and false worship (is): How we respond to those who are:

- Poor and have nothing
- Neglected
- Abandoned
- The least of these

Isn't that what Jesus told us? *Whenever you do this to the least of these, you do it to Me?* [Matthew 25:40 (paraphrased)] Didn't He say (in the book of James): *When you see a brother or a sister without food and clothing and you tell them be warm and fed and send them away with nothing, is that true religion?* [James 2:15-16 (paraphrased)] No! Jesus came into a poor family. He lived as a poor person so that we could understand the riches that are ours in Christ; and then begin to share those things.

Do you realize, still—even in global economic crisis—we are the richest people in the world? We are. Even if you're on poverty level in this country, you are richer than any other country that we preach the Gospel in. You are a rich person. And whom does He promise to fill? The poor. (The poor.)

So what is He asking us to do (those of us who are rich)?—is:

- To go to those who are in need
- To humble ourselves
- To go to those that Mary is singing about
- Fully worship Jesus beyond the walls of this church right here
- To go to the Africas
- To go to the Koreas
- To go to the South Americas
- To go to the Philippines and other Asian countries...

where we can go and bring them the very life of Christ that we, through the riches of our giving, can meet the needs of the least of these in this world. Worship humbly.

WORSHIP FOOLISHLY (LIKE JOSEPH)

In *Matthew chapter 1*:

²⁴ And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, took Mary as his wife, ²⁵ but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son and called His name Jesus.

Matthew 1:24-25 (NASB)

Do you remember the story of Joseph? He was going to marry Mary, but she was found to be with child.

He said: *Man! you know what?* (Rather than making a public issue of it, you know what Joseph did? Joseph said:) *I'm just going to put her aside quietly and act like this never happened and go on with my life...until God spoke to him.*

God said: *Look, that Child—that's no man's Child; that's God's Child. You need to take her as your wife and keep her a virgin until she gives birth to this Son.*

And do you know what he did? He did exactly as God told him to do. He became a fool in the eyes (I'm sure) of his family, (I'm sure) in the eyes of his friends. When they found out: *She's pregnant? It's not your child, and you readily admit that? And now you're trying to tell us she got pregnant by God? Yeah, you're a fool, Joseph.*

That's right. But he's a fool for the right Person; he's a fool for God. And when we worship foolishly:

- Some of the things that we will do
- Some of the things that we say
- What we do with our money and our time
- What we do with our presence

...will seem to be foolish to family members and others. They'll say: *Man, you've just gone off of your rocker. You're half a bubble off level. Why are you doing all that you're doing for people that you don't know?*

Because long before I knew God, God knew me and did for me what I could never do for myself. [He] foolishly poured His life out on a cross for me. Therefore, I can foolishly pour my life out for whatever it is that He wants to do with my life.

We have to worship God foolishly

- When people think it's crazy
- When we don't know how it's going to happen

God has called us, and all He's asking us to do now is to obey Him. When we act in obedience—no matter what the social cause—we help God's "will be done on this earth as it is in Heaven," [Matthew 6:10 (NIV, 1984 edition)] just like Joseph did.

So maybe we're not going to spend thousands of dollars on needless gifts for people (that) we feel like (that) we've got to make an impression on. But rather, we're going to come to our Jesus and we're going to say: *Here's all that we were going to spend. Where would you like this spent, Lord?* I'll guarantee you He'll start pointing to a lot of places that people are going to think: *You're crazy!*

- *Why don't you spend that on your kids?*
- *Why don't you spend that on family members?*
- *Why don't you impress your boss?*
- *Why don't you get a leg-up on your neighbors by giving them something nice?*

WORSHIP SPONTANEOUSLY (LIKE THE SHEPHERDS)

¹⁵ When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to

Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger.
Luke 2:15-16 (NASB)

[Removing his jacket:] I feel a sermon coming on. I've got to preach a little bit here! If somebody'd just give me a white towel, we'd get going. **Worship spontaneously.** [Responding to an *Amen* from the congregation:] Thank you, brother. I need a few more votes than that, though. What does that mean? That means as soon as God spoke, the shepherds went.

Why the shepherds? (Again) look how God does this thing. You know, I looked up online *advent*, which means (you know—primarily) the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Go to a modern dictionary and here's what it says: (You ready?)

The coming or arrival, especially of something extremely important: { i.e. }
the advent of the computer.

www.thefreedictionary.com/advent

Now, have we gone off-base, or what? We're saying the most important advent in our lifetime is the computer! And we will rush to the mall to get them, because we believe that.

But here are people rushing to a stable. What I love about the shepherds is: They were nobodies. Their testimony couldn't even be used in a court of law. Nobody trusted them. They usually were illiterate and could not read. They didn't smell real well; they hung around with sheep all the time. They were on the lower social end economically. But God comes to them and says: *Hey, My Son is born. Why don't you go and worship Him?*

Do you know what that tells me? God does not overlook the overlooked. God looks into the heart and not the social position of anybody. When God looks in our hearts, will He find a heart that is ready to abandon whatever we are doing to follow Him and doing whatever God wants us to do?

Shepherds lead their sheep. They say to themselves: *Let's go right now and do this thing. Let's go see this marvelous miracle that we've heard about.* They go and there's Jesus.

Do you know God is going to speak to you this Christmas season? God is speaking to you already. Let me ask you as a family to do this:

- When you gather as a family around your meals, **would you pray?**
- Maybe at night, as you are praying, with your children
- Spouses praying together

Would you say: *God would You speak to us? We humbly will do whatever foolishness that You put into our heart—immediately and spontaneously—when it comes to the Big Give?* Would you do that? Would you be that bold? I promise you this, God will speak to you.

We can experience—do you think those shepherds were changed after that? I believe so. Do you think that's the only time they worshiped? Huh-uh [no]. But because they spontaneously worshiped at the Advent of Jesus Christ, their worship went on and on and on and on and on.

When we worship Jesus properly at this Advent—celebrating His incarnation, as a church—our worship will go on and on and on and on through the lives of other people, because Christmas is relational—not consumer-[based]. Christmas is about Christ coming...

- To us to save us
- To put us in a relationship with God.

His giving was relational; our giving should be relational and spontaneous.

I challenge you: Let God speak, and when He speaks don't be encumbered by *what ifs* and *how comes*. Nothing is impossible with God. It may sound foolish, but spontaneously respond to Him, and we will make a difference in the world with people's relationship with God.

Then finally:

WORSHIP SACRIFICIALLY (LIKE THE WISE MEN)

¹⁰ When they saw the star, {Matthew tells us} they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:10-11 (NASB)

Now who were these guys? We don't know. Astrologers: people who look at the stars. All of a sudden—boom! *What's going on here? This is special. I'll bet you. You know what? Look it up; let's figure out what it says.* They found the teachings of the Jews:

- *This is the coming of the Messiah*
- *The King of the Jews*
- *Ultimately the King of the world*

Let's go where that leads. For two years they followed that star.

Do you know how much it cost to travel back then? (I mean) not only that, but they brought treasures to give to the newborn King and they had to protect that. So there was an entourage that they had to hold up, too. They kept following and following and following, (and finally) until they finally come to the place where Jesus was born. They asked the people back then—they go to another king, by the name of Herod, and asked him: *What about this?*

Really the wise men is a tale of *two* kings. They brought all of these gifts. I'm sure Herod saw those gifts. I bet you his heart got puffed up and his head got big: *Oh, these have got to be for me; I'm the king of the Jews.* They said: *No. Where is He, born King of the Jews?*

1. Herod was a king, but:
 - He stole his position.
 - He murdered family members and friends.
 - He held it by military power.
 - He had financial ability:
 - Taxing people
 - Doing whatever he wanted to do

2. But Jesus—He had none of that—Jesus came [into this world] and:
 - He was very vulnerable
 - He identified with the poor, not the mighty and the haughty
 - He was more about self-sacrifice rather than what He could gain

What did the wise men do? Did they give their gifts to Herod? No. Huh-uh. They didn't give their gifts to a system of:

- Greed
- Avarice
- Shame
- Power

They went to the humble King of the Jews, Jesus. They laid their gifts at His feet.

Now let me ask us as a church: *Who is worthy of worship this Advent?*

- The mall?
 - Or the Master?
- Lexus?
 - Or the Lord?
- New clothes?
 - Or Him Who had no clothes when He came into this world?
- This world system and materialism?
 - Or the world that is to come and the Kingdom of God in which we celebrate (beginning now) during this Advent season?

I'm telling you: *The wisest investment that we can make is investing in the Kingdom of God* [so] that [His] Kingdom goes forth (not our kingdom going forth). That requires *adjustment*.

What would happen if we as a church moved across the globe with our...

- Time
- Attention
- Money

...loving Jesus?

We would change people's lives.

I want to challenge you. Say *no* to this world, that starts around Halloween, tapping you on the shoulder and [saying]:

- *Hey, give me your money.*
- *Do what we're telling you to do.*
- *Bow down to the religion of materialism and consumerism.*
- *Buy yourself stuff you don't need and won't make you happy.*

It'll last for that one big moment—for about 30 minutes—when everyone's around the tree, and the paper is being ripped, and everyone finally gets what they thought they really wanted.

Why are we so empty? Because it doesn't fulfill. It's like eating rice cakes. It just doesn't work, folks. You might as well take that wrapping paper and eat it for all the good that gift is going to do you.

What does fulfill? Worshiping God Fully...

- Humbly
- Foolishly
- Spontaneously
- Sacrificially

I love what David says: *I will not give to God that which cost me nothing.* [II Samuel 24:24 (paraphrased)]

Let me challenge you to consider the things that we are going to be looking at over the next several weeks.

Is there a part of your life right now that needs to be surrendered to God for you to WORSHIP FULLY? Are you one of those that I was speaking to a moment ago when I said: *Oh, I am just too bad. I can never really worship God because I've sinned so much.* No you haven't. You can never sin so much that God doesn't love you. You could only sin till the day that you die without Christ. That would be a tragedy. But today—if you hear His voice—He wants to save you. Maybe you need to make that adjustment to worship Him fully.

Church, can we SPEND LESS? In fact (all right) just open up your [Big Give] brochure again. This time open it up to the last page—right where the envelope is, but to the left of it. Let's go through these together.

Here's what we're asking us [individually] to do before God—I believe God is asking us this: *Are we going to spend less? Can you say: God, I'm going to make my Christmas list. Could You make my list with me? And watch my spending not only now, but throughout the year? Redirect Your provision for me.*

As a starting point:

- Could you consider buying one less gift? (If you were going to buy me the Lexus, I give you permission not to do it and to put it in the *Big Give*. Or maybe...)
- Could you take everything that you're going to spend on family and friends for Christmas and [make] an equal gift to the *Big Give*? (Or maybe...)
- You could just get everybody around and say: *Hey, we are going to get each other one gift and everything else that we were going to do, we're going to give it to people that we will never see until we get to heaven one day.*

We are never going to know what bellies that we filled, and what child we kept alive until they came to the point [when] they understood the love of Christ and were saved. We have orphans right now, one of which—the infant (you'll hear his story in the weeks to come) was born with HIV and abandoned, but is a fat happy little baby right now. Until the day that disease finally takes his life:

- He will be loved.
- He will be nurtured.
- He will hear about Jesus.
- When he dies:
 - He'll get a brand-new body.

- He will have a forgiven soul.
- He will live forever in eternity.

And one day when you see him in heaven, he will come to you and he will throw his arms around your neck and say: *Thank you for picking me up off the ground, putting me in that orphanage, and feeding me and telling me about the love of Jesus.* His life would be short and miserable if it [were] not for you spending less this year.

Can you LOVE ALL? (You know what?) It's hard when you look at the Christmas tree and realize: *All that's our stuff and it just keeps growing and growing and growing.* Can we say this year: *Lord, all this is Your stuff. Where do You want Your stuff to go?* Can we really, really, really love everybody by sharing the gifts that He's given us?

Can we GIVE MORE? Maybe it's your turn this year to do more than just write a check. Go on a mission trip. It's easy to go to anything that we do locally in Houston. Maybe you need to go get your passport updated—get ready—because:

- You're going to go to Africa with us.
- You are going to go to South America with us.
- You're going to go over to the Philippines with us.

Prepare yourself: *God, how do you want to use me?*

You need to read the stories of the people that are in here [*Big Give* brochure]. Click on the QR code [the square matrix *Quick Response* barcodes, accessed with an *iPhone* app] and hear the rest of the story—how it's affected their family.

Finally, can we...

- WORSHIP FULLY
- SPEND LESS
- LOVE ALL
- GIVE MORE

...as a church? Everybody has a part; everybody does. On our *Cypress Campus*, right here on our *Jones Road Campus*, and those of you that are listening by Internet: *Very easy.* Click on that website that you see. You can give right over the Internet. All that money will go to those things that are listed there that you'll see when you [click] onto those QR codes.

Let's bow our heads at our *Cypress Campus* and here on our *Jones Road Campus*. Let me ask you a question: *Do you need to worship God fully by giving your life to Christ today?* That's where it begins. You worship by giving Him what you have. You have a soul. You need to give it to Him so it can be redeemed. If you need to give your life to Christ this morning, I am going to lead us in a simple prayer and you repeat the prayer after me. It goes like this:

Dear Jesus, I want to worship You fully. I give You my heart—as sinful as it is—and I ask You to forgive me, to cleanse me, and give me a new heart.

And for the rest of us including those who just prayed:

Lord, teach us what it means to *worship You fully* this Advent (this Christmas) as we celebrate the fact that You came among us. Lord, speak to

us about our spending so that we would *spend less* on ourselves so that we could *give more* to those who actually need it, and by doing so, we would *love the world* the way that You came at Christmas to love the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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¹⁹ ...I couldn't just walk away from a vision like that! I became an obedient believer on the spot. ²⁰ I started preaching this life-change—this radical turn to God and everything it meant in everyday life—right there...and from there to the whole world.

Acts 26:19b-20 (The Message)

Legend:

(**words in parentheses**) = spoken by the preacher *but unnecessary* to the core sentence idea

[**words in square brackets**] = additional explanation for clarity *not spoken* by the preacher

{**words in curly brackets within indented quote**} = spoken explanation *not part of the quote*