

Generosity Beyond the Bounds of Reciprocity

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Thank you, Sean. Sorry I'm disentangling from my microphone here. If you would turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 14.

And while you're turning there, I will briefly just bring you greetings from your brothers and sisters at Covenant Fellowship Church out in the Philly suburbs. Sean described it well. I serve on the pastoral team of Covenant Fellowship.

And by God's grace, through the years, we've had the ability at Covenant Fellowship to set different guys apart for different areas of ministry. So I've been set apart as part of the pastoral team to lead a separate nonprofit we established almost 20 years ago called Covenant Mercies, which exists to serve alongside our brothers and sisters in the developing world to care for orphans living in their communities.

And so I will tell you more about Covenant Mercies and our programs on the other side of the sermon this morning. But it is good to be with you. I enjoyed spending time with Sean yesterday. We did a little Fenway tour and got a little taste of Boston. And just really love coming to different places and experiencing the fellowship of the Spirit together.

[1 : 15] Immediately, we're brothers and sisters. I know that I'm among family and it is wonderful to be with you this morning. So if you're with me in Luke chapter 14, I want to begin reading in verse 12.

And just to set the scene, Jesus has been invited to a dinner party. He's at the table of a Pharisee as we arrive at our text this morning. So beginning in verse 12, He, being Jesus, also said to the man who had invited him, When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid.

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

May the Lord bless the preaching of his word. We all know what it feels like to be on the receiving end of a kindness that seems to have strings attached.

A kindness that seems a little more motivated by self-interest than by a true spirit of generosity. The classic example of this for me is what some guys I'll refer to as the squeegee guys in Philadelphia.

[2 : 40] I don't know if you've ever had this phenomenon in Boston as well, but there used to be these intersections in Philadelphia. I think they must have made this illegal now because I don't see it anymore. But you'd pull up to a red light, and immediately the guys would be on top of you with their windshield washers, and they'd start putting the windshield washer on your windshield.

And, you know, if you were from out of town, you might say, Oh, wow, city of brother love. It's really true. The welcoming committee is here, and, you know, these guys are washing my window. Wow. Well, you would learn very quickly that that wasn't the case, that there was an expectation there as well.

And by the way, I don't blame the squeegee guys. They're doing the best they can, and there's something that's commendable about that as well. But you'd learn very quickly, and some of them got very good at kind of halfway doing the job and then finding out whether you had anything for them to determine whether they would finish.

My point is, from the perspective of the recipient of such a gesture, you can almost feel like there are certain types of generosity you need to be on your guard against because they're really no more than a thinly-veiled attempt to obligate you to do something in return.

Well, this reciprocity ethic, the idea that I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine, was very common in the Greco-Roman world that Jesus lived in, very pervasive in Jewish society of that time as well.

[4 : 02] And so as Jesus sits at the table of this Pharisee, he knows well the mindset that he's addressing. One would act in a generous way toward others in order to elicit a similar generosity in return.

And conversely, if someone extended a kindness to you, you'd feel an obligation, even an ethical obligation, to return the favor. So this reciprocity ethic, it's maybe not quite so pronounced in our modern Western societies, in our modern way of thinking, but it's undeniably present in our world today and in our interactions with one another.

If we're honest, we really have to admit that there's very little we do in life that isn't somehow motivated by our own self-interest or influenced by our own self-interest. And on certain levels, that's perfectly okay.

Think about the business context, right? I mean, in the business context, if you provide a product or a service for X number of dollars, and I'm happy to part with X number of dollars in exchange for that product or service, that really defines the ideal business transaction.

And by the way, if that sounds like an endorsement of free market economic principles, it is. But that's not my point. My point is simply to say that it's not inherently wrong or evil to reciprocate in such a way.

[5 : 32] However, as Jesus so often does, he goes down beneath the surface here. He comes to us with questions that probe into the depths of our hearts and our motivations and push us beyond these natural human tendencies.

See, Jesus calls us here to a selfless love that expends itself for others regardless of what they can give us in return. And I probably don't need to tell you that this doesn't come naturally to us.

In our sinful nature, we are bent toward doing things that are in our own self-interest and toward neglecting things that really don't offer any personal benefit to us at all.

And so against the grain of his own ancient culture, against the grain of our cultures of today, against the grain of our natural human tendencies and sinful nature, Jesus teaches us here that true Christian generosity goes beyond the bounds of reciprocity.

In fact, one of the defining characteristics of generosity that is truly Christian, uniquely Christian, and by that I mean not just human generosity, but generosity that is uniquely driven by our faith, is its intentional focus on those who can do nothing to repay it.

[6 : 55] Jesus says, you want to know whether your love is truly Christian love? Love those who have no capacity to love you in return. You want to know whether your generosity is like that of your Father in heaven?

Give toward those who can do nothing to repay you. This is generosity in its purest form, and Jesus wants to be sure that it's a present and visible trait in the life of his disciples.

And so in the balance of our time in the word, I just want to make two observations about this generosity that Jesus commends to us. Just two points. Number one, it takes selfless, Christ-like initiative.

This generosity that Jesus commends to us takes selfless, Christ-like initiative. Now, contrary to the way that Jesus' words may sound to us on face value, he's not forbidding us from having our friends over, from being generous toward our families and our loved ones, those we might enjoy hanging out with.

In fact, if he was commending that to us, he would be commanding us to violate other scriptures. So he's certainly not saying that. Remember, Jesus is at the table of a Pharisee here.

[8 : 07] He knows what their practices are. He knows what our human tendencies are, as we've just been reflecting on. And so he's using some hyperbole here. He's using some intentionally strong language to jar us out of our complacency, to jar us out of our comfort zones, and to make a point.

And so what point is Jesus making? Well, he's saying that as God's people, our generosity shouldn't be limited to that which is normal.

It's normal to be generous toward those who can return the favor to us somehow. As disciples of Christ, we're called to take generous initiative toward those who can't repay us, and listen, I love this, precisely because they can't repay us.

I just love the way Jesus explains the reason why we shouldn't invite our friends, our family, the rich, who we might want to hang out with to our little dinner party.

He almost as if it should be intuitive to us. He says, no, don't do that. Don't invite them, lest they also invite you and you be repaid. I just want to say, oh yeah, what a tragedy that would be, right? [9 : 15] I mean, let's say I invite Elon Musk and his wife to my home, and we have a nice dinner together, and then I get invited to their presumably palatial estate, and maybe Elon says, hey, let's go up in SpaceX.

This one's on me. Jesus is not suggesting that that would be a tragedy. What he's saying is, that's the way the world thinks.

That's the way the world operates. If your generosity remains only within those bounds, what difference really has the grace of God made?

Read with me again in verses 13 and 14. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Why will you be blessed?

Because they cannot repay you. Notice that. He doesn't say you'll be blessed even though they can't repay you, or despite the fact that they can't repay you. No, you will be blessed because they cannot repay you.

[10 : 15] There's a cause-effect relationship here. The blessing for you is the direct result of the fact that you have selected, as the object of your generosity, those who cannot return the favor.

And as you take initiative toward those who can't repay you, fully aware that they can't repay you, God promises that he will repay you for that very same reason.

And this, Jesus says, is one of the things that ought to characterize us as Christians and distinguish us from the world. This is a characteristic that differentiates Christian love from love that we might think of as natural and normal even apart from Christ.

Earlier in Luke's gospel, Jesus spoke in similar terms when calling us to love even our enemies. I think we have a slide of the verses in Luke 6, so you don't have to turn back there in your Bibles, but beginning in Luke 6, verse 32, Jesus says, if you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you?

For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you?

[11 : 35] Even sinners lend to sinners to get back the same amount. But love your enemies and do good and lend expecting nothing in return and your reward will be great and you will be sons of the Most High.

For He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful even as your Father is merciful. Now did you note the similar logic there?

How do we demonstrate that we are sons and daughters of the Most High? Well it's not by merely doing the same things that are possible and even normal apart from faith.

As Jesus might say, what credit is that to you? How does that distinguish you from the world? The world neglects to show kindness toward those who can do nothing to repay that kindness.

But Jesus says, not so with you. It shall not be so for us as His disciples. We demonstrate that we are children of the Most High and disciples of His Son Jesus by taking initiative toward where it wouldn't be natural, where it wouldn't be normal for us to do so.

[12 : 47] By loving even our enemies. I think sometimes we get so familiar with those words rolling off of Jesus' tongue that it doesn't jar us the way that it should.

Loving our enemies. These are the people that we would naturally hate. and in a similar way by intentionally ensuring that our generosity extends to those who can do nothing to repay it.

Now let's bring the scene back to our Pharisees' table because a most profound accent is placed on Jesus' exhortation to us here in this simple fact.

And it's a simple fact that goes right over the head of His original hearers as they sit around this table. We should see that it doesn't go over our heads this morning. It's even a rich reflection for this Advent season.

That simple fact is this. The one who is sitting there with them at this table is Himself God incarnate. He's sitting there with Him because He didn't consider equality with God a thing to be grasped but humbled Himself, made Himself nothing, took the very nature of a servant and took initiative toward those who could do nothing to repay Him.

[14 : 04] Soon He'll turn His attention toward Calvary. He will move toward the cross and He will endure death on a cross for those who could do nothing to repay Him for His sacrifice.

We sang about it this morning. Mild He lays His glory by, born that man no more may die. He left the glory and riches of heaven to seek and save lost sinners like you and me.

Who could do nothing to repay Him? Now if you're here today and you're not a Christian or maybe you're exploring what the claims of the Christian faith are all about, I want to be abundantly clear about one thing right here.

There is nothing you can do to repay God. You don't come to Jesus as a way of repaying God for the wrongs that you've done or repaying Him for the kindness that He's shown you.

You come to Jesus as an act of faith, believing that His death and resurrection are sufficient to cover the penalty for your sins and restore your relationship to God.

[15:09] So we need to see that we don't get this backwards. But for those of us who are already in a position of faith this morning, I trust you see the rich gospel truth that's bound up in Jesus' calling to us here.

Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful. Take initiative toward those who can do nothing to repay you. Lavish them with love and generosity and kindness.

Why? Because that's exactly what Jesus did when He left behind the riches of heaven to come to earth and seek and save lost sinners like you and me.

The generosity that Jesus commends to us here takes selfless Christ-like initiative toward those who can do nothing to repay it. Well, second observation about this generosity is simply that it's driven by faith.

This generosity is driven by faith. Even as Jesus calls us to a generosity that's not self-interested, He simultaneously lifts our eyes to a reward that can only be seen through the eyes of faith.

[16:21] Again, reading verses 13 and 14. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed because they cannot repay you.

For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just. Amazingly, as we put off this normal human tendency to be motivated by the things of this world and take initiative instead toward those who can do nothing to repay us in this world's terms, Jesus promises us that we will be repaid in eternity. Now, we embrace this reward by faith, by simply trusting, by believing that what Jesus says to us here is rock-solid truth even though we can't see it and grasp it in the here and now.

that what we sacrifice in this life will accrue to our credit in eternity. And this, brothers and sisters, is the great paradox of giving in the kingdom of God.

It is a sacrifice to give toward those who can do nothing to repay us. We shouldn't pretend that it's not a sacrifice. It is. It will cost you something. It will cost you the ability to use those same funds toward some other purpose that might benefit you more in the here and now.

[17:44] But, when we consider that sacrifice in light of the eternal reward Jesus promises us here, it really is no sacrifice at all.

It's better thought of as an investment. And this is about the most secure investment that you could possibly make. If you think about it, there are many sacrifices that we make in life in the short term for a result that we expect to receive in the long term, right?

I happen to be someone who loves gardening. Sean was asking me yesterday, what do you enjoy doing? Well, I love getting out on my day off, especially in the springtime, get some dirt under my fingernails, and I love planting those vegetables in the spring and just enjoying the fruit of it all summer long.

A few years ago, I began to really get into planting and cultivating perennial fruit-bearing bushes, especially blueberries. And so when I, we've got about an acre, sorry, I know that's a little weird for city dwellers, I guess, but we've got a whole acre and I love, I got 11 blueberry bushes of different varieties and got them spread around different places in our yard.

And I just love getting out there and cultivating these bushes and you've got to do a little research to do blueberries right. So I did my research up front. I had to amend our soil. The blueberries like a more acidic soil, so I had to put the right kind of components into the soil so that they would thrive.

[19:11] They have very shallow root systems, so you want to, you know, mulch heavily around them and keep them kind of wet. But the third thing that I learned, and this is what I want to focus on here, is that when you plant baby blueberry bushes, you need to pinch the blossoms for the first three seasons.

That's the advice that you're given. So plant it from a little baby, little stick, basically. It takes root. It begins to leaf out in the spring and blossoms come out. And then they tell you, pinch the blossoms

those first three seasons because what you're doing is you're telling the plant, don't focus any of your energies on producing fruit.

Those blossoms, I'm guessing you know, are what become the berries after the bees do their miraculous work. So you pinch the blossoms and you're saying, don't spend your energy producing fruit.

Spend your energy developing a strong root system. And then if you get a good solid blueberry bush, it might produce fruit for you for 75 years. So I followed that advice.

I remember the first two seasons, it wasn't too difficult. There's only a few blossoms. That third season, it was a little harder because, all right, we've been at this for a while now. I'd like to taste the fruit of my labors. And the blossoms are a little more plentiful.

[20 : 24] But I remember being very intentional and saying, no, I could taste these blueberries now, but I'm going to do what I've been told. I'm going to pinch these blossoms and I will trust that that will produce more fruit for me in the long run.

Well, last year, we got 72 pints of blueberries, by the way. So it's working out pretty well so far, although I think we're only scratching the surface. But my point is, what Jesus is saying to us here is, do you want to be satisfied with a couple of handfuls of blueberries now?

Or will you believe me that by sacrificing that small pleasure now, you will receive an abundant harvest that you cannot even fathom in this moment?

Well, this is a reward that can only be seen by faith. And I believe God is glorified, even uniquely glorified in a way, when we simply take him at his word.

Even though we can't grasp it right now, we take him at his word. We say, yes, Jesus, I'm going to live my life in light of that reality. When we fix our eyes, not on the things that are seen, but on the things that are unseen.

[21 : 32] Because the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. So Jesus is lifting our eyes to that unseen reward, which, though unseen, is every bit as real as the tangible sacrifice, only far more lasting.

Several years ago, I became aware of a couple in my home church who were sponsoring seven children through our orphan sponsorship program. In a few minutes, I'll tell you more about our orphan sponsorship program.

But this couple was sponsoring seven children. And by the way, I don't look through our database to find out how many children my friends are sponsoring. I just stumbled upon this information. And it was notable to me, not just by the number seven, which is very nice, but frankly, we have people who are sponsoring more.

What was notable to me is that I know this couple very well, and I know their standard of living.

They're just a very normal, I would even say, solidly middle class, working class family.

And it was notable to me that they were sponsoring seven children. So once I became aware of that, I just said, I got to drop them a note in the mail, let them know how much I'm, how grateful I am that they're giving sacrificially like that toward our children.

[22 : 46] So I dropped a note in the mail. Sometime later, we bumped into each other, and they referenced the note, so we had a little conversation about it. And I came to learn that this couple, just like most of us, when we launched the sponsorship program way back in 2003, they started by sponsoring one or maybe two children.

And then each year, as the husband, as the breadwinner of that home, would receive a raise, they would just add one more sponsored child. Just kind of based on the premise that the Lord provided well for us last year with the income that we had.

Now he's given us an increase. Let's share a little bit of that increase with a child in need. And I was just blown away by this. In fact, because I was bringing this message again, I checked in our database again, and sure enough, this couple's up to 13 sponsored children now.

So they're investing in a major way in our ministry, even though they're just living a very normal American lifestyle. My point in bringing up their example is not to say that we should all be sponsoring 13 kids, or we should all follow that practice of adding one new child each year.

My point is simply to say this is a family not of significant means. The sacrifice they're making is real. They could be using those funds for some other purpose to enhance their own standard of living.

[24 : 11] And you know what? None of us would even take notice. None of us would say, wow, they're living high on the hog, or that's self-indulgent. We would never know the difference. But this

couple is not living in accordance with the things of this world.

This is a couple whose eyes are fixed not on the things that are unseen, but on the things, not on the things that are seen, but on the things that are unseen. They are sacrificing in the here and now for a reward that's being kept in heaven for them where moth and rust will not destroy, and where thieves will not break in and steal.

Well, I don't know about you, but I want to live my life in light of that reality as well. And when I think of our, when I think of Jesus' exhortation here in Luke 14 to be generous toward those who can do nothing to repay us, I really can't help but think of the children who are growing up sponsored in our orphan sponsorship program.

If you are sponsoring children through our program, it is virtually impossible that they will ever be able to give back to you, to do anything to repay you for your sacrifice.

Well, that is exactly the kind of giving that Jesus is commending to us in this passage. It's precisely this kind of generosity that he promises to repay at the resurrection of the just.

[25 : 39] And his use of that phrase, the resurrection of the just, immediately puts me in mind of Matthew 25 where Jesus talks about the final day and he talks about saying to us that enter into your reward for when I was hungry you fed me, when I was thirsty you gave me something to drink, when I was in prison you visited me, and we'll say, Jesus, when did we do all these things?

And he'll say, even as you've done it to the least of these, my brethren, you've done it unto me.

Now, I just imagine, this is my imagination now, we're outside of Matthew 25, but I just imagine that Jesus might in that moment pull up a young lady by his side and say, this is Kalkidan.

I want you to know Kalkidan. She was born with HIV in Ethiopia, both of her parents had lost their lives to AIDS, she was on a trajectory to die of AIDS as well, but because you gave to her when there was nothing she could give you in return, she was restored to good health.

And this also brought a lady named Helena into her life, and Helena shared the gospel with her and led her to faith. Kalkidan is here today because you gave when there was nothing she could give you in return.

Or maybe he'll pull up a young man by his side and say, this is Charles, you should know Charles. Charles was born in Zambia, he was able to go to school because you invested in Lighthouse Christian School, he was able to get a quality education, he even gave his life to Jesus as a young boy because of a VBS they did on a school break at Lighthouse Christian School.

[27 : 07] Later he was able to access a scholarship program and go off to university, he became a teacher and he was able to influence the lives of so many others because you gave to him when there was nothing he could give you in return.

My mind can just get going when I think about the ripple effects of the investments we're making into these children's lives now. Think of the ripple effects, think of the future children and grandchildren, of the children that we're giving toward now who will know the love of Jesus because their mother or their grandfather received Christ when he was just a little child running around the community with insufficient care but somebody invested into him.

Well I believe part of our reward in eternity will be the joy of seeing with the eyes of eternity the full glorious impact that our acts of kindness and generosity we're able to achieve in this life.

It takes the eyes of faith to see that in the here and now and I couldn't be more grateful for the faith that God has given to so many who have invested generously in the work of Covenant Mercies for 19 years now.

So I'm going to turn the corner now and just start to introduce you to the ministry of Covenant Mercies which will turn 20 next year. We're about to become young adults I guess.

[28 : 36] The main centerpiece of Covenant Mercies ministry has always been what we call our orphan sponsorship program and it's through this program that sponsors are able to invest into the life of a fatherless child.

So for the purposes of our program we define an orphan as a fatherless child. Sometimes the mother is still alive other times they've lost both parents and grandparents have taken the children in or an aunt or an uncle has taken the children in and then through the teams we build on the ground with our indigenous church partners we're able to go out into the community and to deliver some basic nutritional, medical, and educational care into the lives of the children.

Well it is an exciting time for us after 19 years of ministry you might imagine a lot of the children that we started with when we were young as a ministry they were very young children and now they're

beginning to graduate from our programs and take their place in society as young adults.

So some of them are able to express in their own words the impact that the program has had in their lives so I want to introduce you to a young lady named Masai from our program in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia she's now a graduate of that program.

I'm told there might be a little bit of a delay in the audio of the video but hopefully you'll catch it. My name is Masai Ayyeli I was born in Addis Ababa I'm 17 years old the reason we came to Covenant Mercies is because we were in trouble my dad died and then my mom couldn't find a job we didn't have anything in the house so we left and went to the street that's when Covenant Mercies found us they helped me attend school they got us to where we are now Masai had a little fight with her mom it was very like minor thing and then she said bad things about her mom and then she was cursing her she was feeling really bad and then she left the house when I got on the street

[30 : 50] I couldn't find a place to spend the night I stayed three weeks on the street and then I found some girls and they befriended me and we begged people to give us money to pay for bed each night Helena kept calling my mom and she couldn't find me for a long time so my mom came and she found me where I used to be she told me Helena been looking for you she wants to talk to you so in our meeting Masai was she was so stubborn she said she doesn't want to there is no need for her to talk to us but she just simply came here to tell us that she doesn't want to be part of the program I told her I want to get out of this sponsorship delete my name I was going to leave and she said ok let's pray before we leave but then

I asked her if it's ok for us to pray and then we prayed and surprisingly after the prayer she was a different person and then when I asked her to write her goals the goals she was writing was completely different like she was saying she wants to go back to school make peace with her mother and then start old friendships with healthy friends and then start studying hair styling which is her dream since I returned to the Lord he has done a lot of great things in my life I read my Bible I go to church and I obtained some of the Bible classes those are great times the Lord has done great things in my life now my relationship with my family is so much better than it was before it's joyful before we didn't have peace in the house but now we all love each other and live together in peace after I finish school

I want to help people who are like I used to be what I want to say to my sponsors I run out of words when I think about them may God repay them may God give them all kinds of good gifts the Lord is great and will do great things in my life I know that there's so many reasons I love to show that video as an introduction of our ministry and I don't

I won't take long to highlight them but just briefly obviously Messiah's deep appreciation for the difference that her sponsor has made in her life by persevering with her and giving even through those kind of challenges the emphasis on the family we work with the family and we see it as a provision of God's common grace that family ties are very strong in all the African nations where we're working and so rather than removing the children from that context in an institutional setting we just come alongside the family and it's a beautiful story there of the restoration of that family and then I just love the opportunity to introduce you to some of the godly competent indigenous leaders that the Lord has provided for us so you get to know Helena a little bit there we are blessed with such competent and godly brothers and sisters that we are working with and they are integral to our ministry in covenant mercy so a few of our core values come out in that way even just in telling Messiah's story well through 19 years of ministry in sub-Saharan

Africa we have learned that effectively breaking cycles of poverty and making a significant difference in the life of our children requires an intentional and increasingly direct investment in the education of our children from day one in our program education has always been important and we've always recognized it's going to be critical to help these children break out of cycles of poverty and yet simply putting a child in a school uniform paying their school fees providing them with the basic necessities of going to school isn't enough in many cases when a hundred other students may be in the classroom with them depending on which program area we're talking about and maybe there's one teacher and a few textbooks to share among those hundred students if our goal and this is the way we define our goal in the life of each individual child if our goal is to restore them to everything God has created them to be as his image bearers then an investment into their education will be critically important for us and a hundred students in a single classroom will be a major obstacle that's why 15 years ago now we began collaborating with our partners at

[36 : 29] Lighthouse Christian School in Zambia in 2006 we sponsored just one classroom of kindergarten students and then we just grew the school by adding one new grade each year to the point that today we have children in grades pre-k through grade 7 at Lighthouse serving more than 300 students each and every year to receive quality Christian education there we also partnered with our partners there to buy land and develop the campus through the years as the school has grown so I think you're looking at some of the pictures of the campus that we have developed over the years we've been so pleased with our investment into the students there at Lighthouse that a couple of years ago in March 2019 we broke ground on Hope Community Primary School in western Uganda where we have about 500 of our sponsored children and this was after spending much of oh first you're looking at the groundbreaking photo that man with the big smile on his face on the far right is Moses Nkwatsibwe he's the pastor of our partner church there and we have had so much joy in developing this school project with them I think you've got a slide of our this is the site plan that Lord willing we will phase in over a period of years and by God's grace we were we've been able to complete phase one very quickly and so you can get an overhead view by the way you can rent a drone in western

Africa or western Uganda so the next photo will show you the progress we've made on that campus thus far and we had the joy of opening that school in February 2020 for about 90 students in grades pre-k through grade one and we plan to add a new grade each each year just as we've done at lighthouse in Zambia and continue to grow that school so that by 2026 Lord willing we'll be doing the same thing grades pre-k through grade seven we'll have hundreds of students that will were able to serve in this severely underserved region of Uganda by that year now our sponsorship program carries the children through grade 12 or the basic vocational school equivalent but in recent years we have also established what we call the Mapalo Scholarship Fund for Higher Education this is for graduates of our sponsorship program so if they're able to graduate from grade 12 and they are eligible to continue on for university studies they're also eligible to apply for a scholarship through our Mapalo

Fund Mapalo means blessing and it sort of provides the blessing of continuing studies for those students who are eligible well one of our current Mapalo scholars is a young man named Michael Nkata and I think we got a photo of Michael circa 2008 when he was first enrolled in our program lost both of his parents raised by his aunt near the school and from the time he was enrolled at Lighthouse Christian school he was just a standout student the teachers were keeping their eye on him through the years well fast forward to today he's now a pre-med student at the University of Zambia on a combined government and Mapalo scholarship so he earned a 75% scholarship through a government scholarship program and then we were just topping up the final 25% to send him on a full scholarship to the University of Zambia in his Mapalo application Michael described his desire to become a doctor and his desire to serve the underserved as a doctor in the following way he said quote being an orphan and being raised in a community of people with low social status has made me want to study hard and be one person who came from such a background and still made it in life and be able to give hope to people where hope has died and I just remember when I was have the pleasure of reading these Mapalo applications as they come in and just being part of the decision process and I remember reading that statement in Michael's application and just being struck with the fact that you know Michael is able to pursue that dream today because somebody gave him hope where his hope might have died because someone gave to him when there was nothing he could do to repay them and all of this in response to Christ who came to us when there was nothing we could do to pay him back well there are many ways that we can respond to this this exhortation from Jesus in Luke chapter 14 and I'm certainly not here this morning to say that covenant mercies is the only way to respond but I do want to invite you to consider whether you might want to join hands with us in a few different ways first of all your sponsorship of children is what enables our partners on the ground like pastor Moses there like Helena and others to you mobilize them as a sponsor to go and and serve in our children's lives and to build that bridge for the gospel into their lives and even the lives of their families so we have a table in the reception area over here where we'll be hanging out afterwards and there are profiles of children who are awaiting sponsors if you'd want to consider sponsoring children I'd be happy to answer any questions that you may have about that the schools that we're developing are we raise funds separately for those schools so we don't utilize the sponsorship funds sponsors give \$39 a month and that's a direct investment into the life of that child but we raise funds in other ways to develop

those schools and then

Lord willing years down the road we will have more of those students who are eligible to continue on for higher higher education studies and so we are building them Apollo fund today with that future day in mind in the end we trust that these young people will become influencers in their home communities influencers in their families in their churches in their communities and those ripple effects that we were kind of dreaming out loud about earlier will take shape through their lives well again I hope you'll stop by the table and consider perhaps sponsoring children we are I didn't even mention we're up to almost 1600 sponsored children in those three different countries in fact you'd send me home a very happy man if the 16 kids in there were sponsored and that would push us over 1600 but those are just numbers please we also have some as I mentioned you know we raise funds in other ways for those school projects and different things that we invest funds in outside of sponsorship so we have some merchandise I've got these beautiful do justice love mercy [43 : 08] Micah 6 8 t-shirts that that we sell for all the extra small through extra large people on your Christmas list also have these beautiful true Africa photo books dear friend of mine traveled with me several times to all the African nations where we serve and he's just you can we've got one there you can leave through it's a little pricier but you could consider that as well as a gift for someone perhaps and also a gift for us as a ministry regardless of whether you decide to join hands with covenant mercies specifically today may we all grow even this Advent season may we all grow in this generosity that Jesus commends to us may we grow to be disciples who take selfless Christ-like initiative toward those who could do nothing to repay us knowing knowing with the confidence of faith that we will be repaid at the resurrection of the just amen