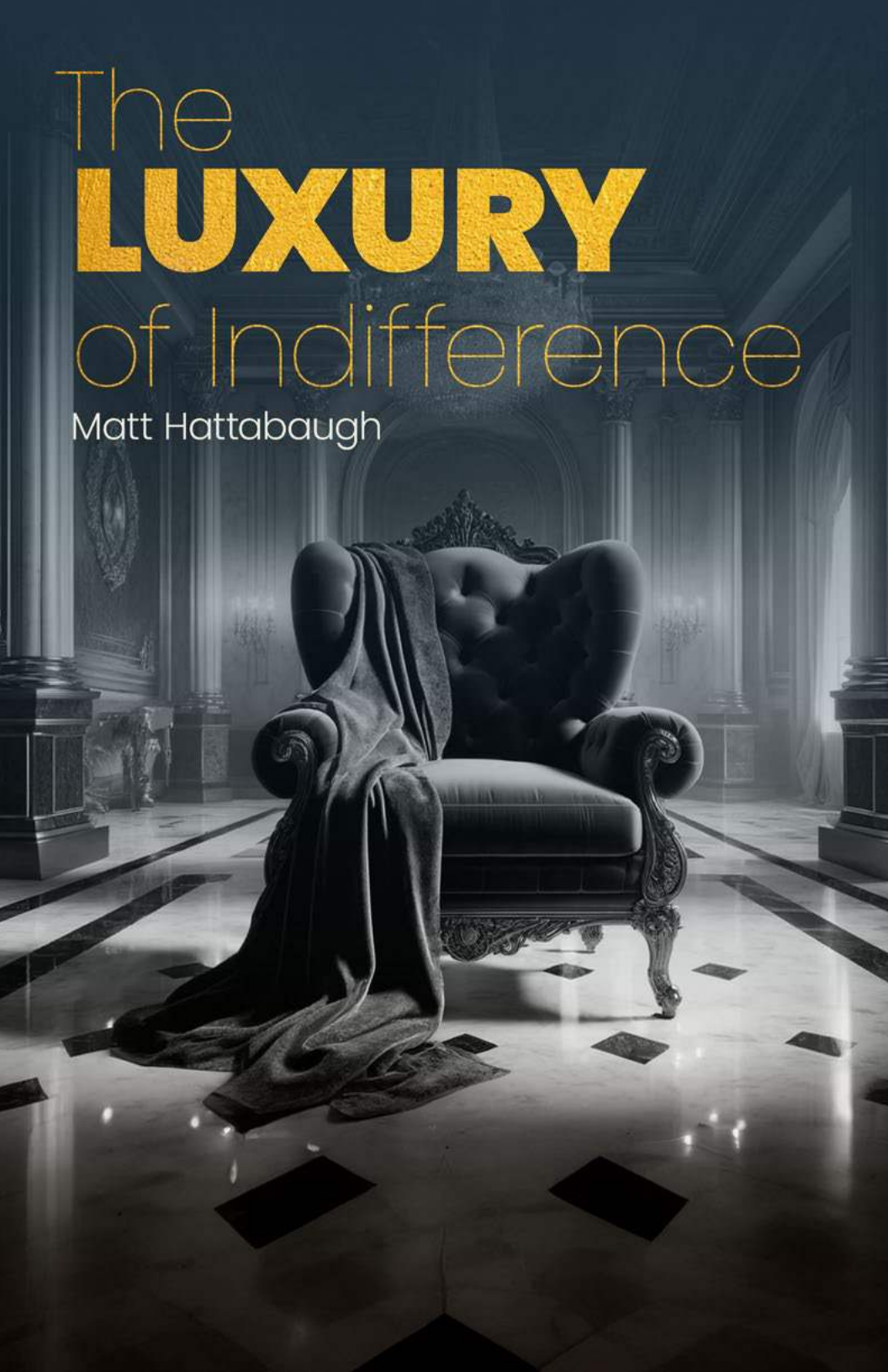
The LUXURY of Indifference

Matt Hattabaugh



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INTRODUCTION

I have always been moved by the refrain popular among the Moravians – may the Lamb receive the reward of His suffering. This group of believers lived a missional-focused Christianity that seems comparatively extinct in today's church world. Moravians organized and sent mission teams to unreached areas before the missiological vocabulary existed to describe their pursuit of Christ's Great Commission (Bost 1862). Teams of families were strategically sent to areas where no Gospel work was known to establish a community of believers and make disciples. Cooke (2020) details the effect of the Moravian

teams through the impact of one of their converts, John Wesley.[1] As the Moravians would send off their families and partners into the harvest fields, they would call to one another, *may the Lamb receive the reward of His suffering* (Bost 1862). This refrain would be sung on roadsides and pier moorings until those going and those sending could no longer see one another. That is a beautiful illustration of the truth that some go, and some send, but the whole body is engaged together in His mission. Like the Moravians, my purpose in writing this tract is that the Lamb receive the reward of His suffering; moreover, those who go and those who send be united in a single effort – to see the Great Commission fulfilled.

1 John Wesley experienced the New Birth after encountering Moravian missionaries. He traveled to Herrnhut, Germany, in 1738 and was influenced by the group's strong evangelistic focus (A. M. Johnson 2014). Wesley spent 53 years preaching the Gospel, traveling over 250,000 miles on horseback, winning over 130,000 people to Christ, and establishing churches and ministry training centers (Cooke 2020). It is worth noting that the Moravian mission movement was funded, in part, by Zinzendorf's fortune and perpetuated by the members of the community sharing a covenant responsibility to see the Gospel teams GO with the message.

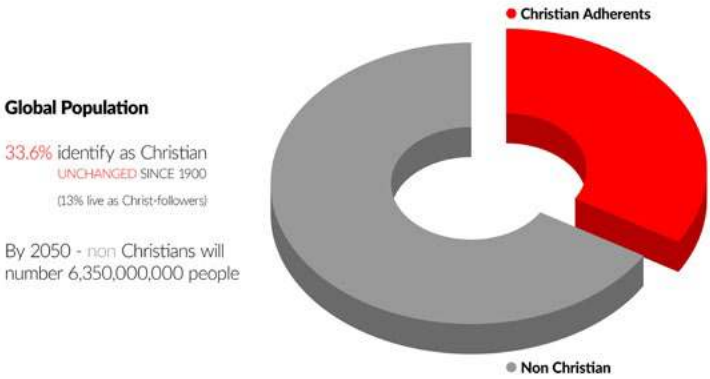
PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the contemporary Christian landscape, there is a significant disconnection between believers' accumulated wealth and the intentional application of these resources to the Great Commission. Jesus said, "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation*" (Mark 16:15, NIV). The mission to take the message of redemption to all nations belongs to the whole church (Mark 16:17, Matthew 24:14). Despite the command of Jesus, if we honestly consider how believers spend their money, this is not a priority for the church. The disparity between Christian giving and the number of unreached people groups represents a spiritual crisis at the core of Christian discipleship and stewardship.

Now-dated statistics reported by Barrett and Johnson (2001) reveal that Christians, constituting a

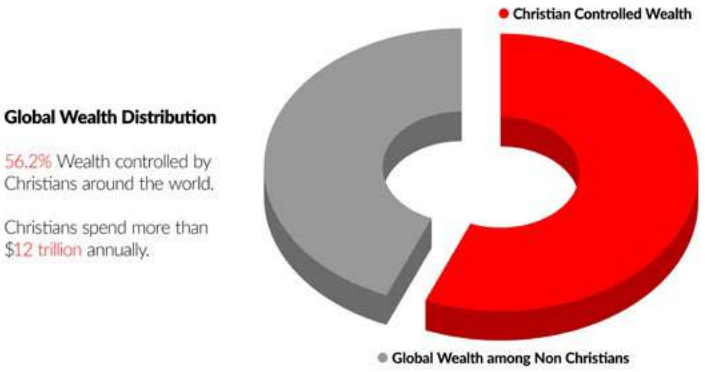
minority of the world's population, control over half of the world's annual income (See Figures 1 & 2). This is unsurprising; Christians should be the most blessed people in the world (Ephesians 1:3, 3 John 2). What is surprising is that believers dedicate a mere 2% of their money to missions (Johnson and Zurlo 2023). This significant imbalance serves as a clarion call for the church to reassess its financial priorities in a world deeply in need of the Gospel.[1]

Figure 1



1 See also (Bosch and Fletcher 2019), (UBS 2024) & (JoshuaProject (Ed.) 2022).

Figure 2



Spending acts as a sight glass into our priorities. A sight glass is installed on critical machine parts and provides a view of what is happening inside. For example, in the tail rotor of a helicopter, a sight glass allows pilots and mechanics to verify that critical parts are in working order before flight. Both individuals and churches can easily see what is essential by examining spending. When Julie and I decided to reorder how we spent our time, money, and effort, our lives were catapulted into the center of God's will for us. It is anvil simple—if we prioritize what Jesus says is most important, we move from the center of our will into His.

APOSTOLIC EXHORTATIONS: SUPPORT & STEWARDSHIP

Scripture speaks directly to this issue. The Apostle Paul advises Timothy, "*Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment*" (1 Timothy 6:17, NIV). This instruction extends beyond resource management, challenging believers to align their hearts with God's provision and purpose.

In each New Testament epistle, direct instructions are given to Churches and Christians to help and fund Gospel missions. Paul wrote to the church in Rome, "*I commend to you our sister Phoebe … receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of His people and*

to give her any help she may need from you" (Romans 16:1-2, NIV). John wrote, "*… send them on their way in a manner that honors God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought, therefore, to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth*" (3 John 6-8, NIV). At the direction of the Apostles, the church in the first century gave natural resources to see the message of Jesus go everywhere. The primary means of communication was sending workers to pioneer new works and strengthen new assemblies of believers (Acts 15:36, 41 & Romans 15:20).

In his epistle, James warns against hoarding wealth and indulging in luxury at the expense of justice and mercy.

> *"Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last few days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves on the day of slaughter. You have condemned and*

murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you (James 5:1-6, NIV)."

This passage should be taken in context. Spotlighting the plight of workers exploited by the wealthy is not merely an injunction against unscrupulous business practices. "*Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop*" (James 5:7, NIV). The valuable crop is the harvest Jesus spoke of in Matthew 13:39, in which He said, "*...the harvest is the end of the age*" (NIV). Taken in context, these scriptures present a troubling reality: believers and churches prioritizing financial accumulation over the imperative to advance the Gospel do so to their condemnation.

While reading this passage in James, the statement, "*...You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you*" (James 5:6, NIV) stood out to me. The workers – those engaged in bringing in the harvest are not in opposition to the rest of the church. The divine view is that the whole church works together for the harvest. Paul explains that members of the body are set where it pleases Christ (1 Corinthians 12:18, 27). Each member of the body of Christ is graced to edify the other (Romans 12:6-8, Ephesians 4:16). Those in the body who go with the message are part of those who send.

"*Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The harvesters' cries have reached the Lord Almighty*" (James 5:4, NIV). Notice that the harvesters' cries are directed to the Lord. No one should look to a person, a ministry, or a church as the source of their supply. Paul learned by experience that the Lord can meet any need according to His riches in glory (Philippians 4:16-19). It is worth noting, however, that James says the money has a voice, and it is crying that it was gathered for the harvest. The Holy Spirit, through James, has caught my attention as a believer and pastor. As uncomforting as it may be, there are ready fields and unfunded harvesters.

The Biblical exhortations of John, Paul, and James underscore an essential challenge for today's church: critically assessing our stewardship of wealth. Furthermore, it is a Biblical imperative that believers in Jesus align their priorities with God's missional heart (Luke 19:10). The goal is not amassing wealth but cultivating the 'precious fruit of the earth'—reaching and discipling unreached people for Christ (James 5:7, KJV, see also Luke 12:18). Despite the explicit instruction of the New Testament, Christians tend to enjoy a luxury of indifference resting on assumptions of divine sovereignty.

ETERNAL VS TEMPORARY: RETHINKING CHRISTIAN WEALTH

The pursuit of material wealth, while offering temporal comfort and security, pales compared to the eternal significance of investing in the Church's mission. That is not to discount the importance of financial prosperity. On the contrary, moving the message of Jesus worldwide costs money, especially in breakthrough areas that are currently closed or unreached.

Before John instructed to help the traveling ministers in his epistle, he said, "*I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers*" (3 John 2, NASB). Moses' admonition to the children of Israel can be applied in this instance. "*[R]*

emember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant" (Deuteronomy 8:18, NIV). There is a purpose for our prosperity. Jesus and the disciples traveled through Judea, Samaria, Decapolis, and Phoenicia because partners – specifically wealthy wives of prominent merchants and political figures gave financially (Luke 8:2-3).

Jesus Christ, in His Sermon on the Mount, directly challenges His followers: "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*" (Matthew 6:19-21, NIV). Once, a new believer brought a large gift to GoChurch. He said, "I have had this in my safe at home, but I realized I have a new kind of 'safe' at this church – I am safe." He continued, "My wife and I want to have treasure in heaven," and pushed a stuffed envelope across the desk.

Jesus provocatively questions the temporal investments commonly regarded as wisdom, especially within affluent societies. Saving is a principle taught in Proverbs – but so also is sowing. Proverbs 11:24 says, "*One person gives freely, yet gains even more; an-*

other withholds unduly but comes to poverty" (NIV). Paul quotes this Proverb, applying it specifically to money and Christian giving (2 Corinthians 9:6). In Paul's Corinthian instruction, he said that giving was not to impoverish them but to bring them to a place of abundance (2 Corinthians 8:13 & 9:8). This abundance is neither to define nor reward Christians. The purpose of wealth is to equip the church for its mission: reaching the unreached.

Reports estimate that Christians spent $12.5 trillion annually in North America and Europe alone (Johnson and Zurlo 2023). Redirecting even a fraction of this sum towards global missions could radically transform the evangelical landscape, impacting lives across nations desperate for the Gospel. The failure to strategically allocate resources for God's work is evident when considering the negligible portion of Christian giving directed towards efforts in the least reached countries and people groups.

The Washington Post reported that Americans spent $350 million on Halloween costumes for their pets (Halzack, 2014). Alarmingly, only 0.1% of all Christian giving reaches missions in these regions (Barrett & Johnson, 2001). To clarify that statistic, for every $100,000 Christians earn, $1.83 is given to reach unreached people (The Traveling Team). There is a two-fold reason for the disparity. The primary

reason is that missions are not a priority for many churches. Attendant to that, more workers need to be active in unreached areas. The solution to both these issues is change.

Followers of Christ stand at a crossroads, faced with a choice between the perishable and the eternal. Investing in the kingdom of God encompasses more than financial contributions; it involves a heartfelt commitment to prayer and the great commission. All are called to go in one way or another. Look again at John's instruction, "... send them on their way in a manner that honors God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought, therefore, to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth" (3 John 6-8, NIV). The Apostolic instruction is that those who help and those who go are equal and together in their pursuit of Christ's Great Commission.

The disparity between current spending (finances and focus) and the potential for kingdom advancement is not just a fiscal misstep but a spiritual oversight demanding individual and collective repentance and realignment. The decision is stark: prioritizing momentary material gains or, as the Moravians would say, the reward of the Lamb (Bost, 1862).

STRATEGIC REALIGNMENT

The luxury of indifference that characterizes much of Christian giving excises a high tax the global church cannot afford. This indifference stems from an ignorance that our collective responsibility to reach the unreached is only realized by our individual action. For some, that action is to go; for many, it is to send.

The Traveling Team's Claude Hickman illustrates the disparity between missional giving and Christian income. Hickman suggests that if a large ballroom's ceiling height symbolized the Christian world's income, believers' giving toward reaching the unreached would equate to the thickness of two flat dollar bills lying on the floor (figure 3). The numeric disparity is so great that mission giving is invisi-

ble if represented in a bar graph (figure 4). This stark imagery confronts us with a sobering truth: There is already an immense potential for global impact through existing Christian income. What is required is the strategic application of financial giving toward those workers in the harvest field (Matthew 9:37 & James 5:4).

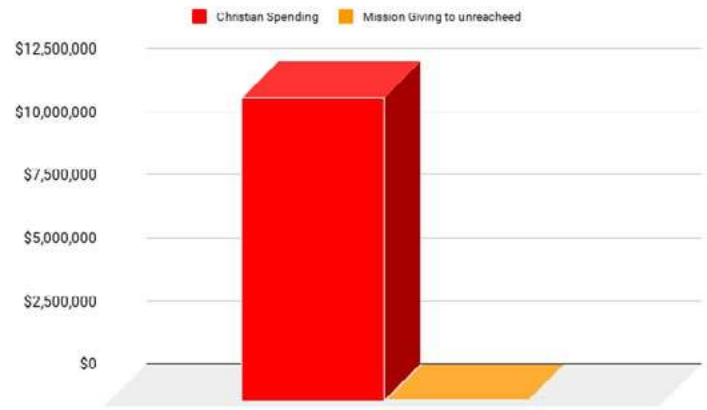
Figure 3

Visualization of Hickman's illustration[2]

2 The Traveling Team 2023

Figure 4

Annual Spending versus Annual Giving to Reach the Unreached



Note: In millions of dollars.

Consider James' statement, "*Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty*" (James 5:4, NIV). Taken in the context that all Christians have the responsibility to in some way help bring in the harvest, it is sobering to me to think that missionaries are crying to God for the resources necessary to put in the sickle, but because I prioritize other things, they are without. It is worth an honest self-examination to

ensure that resources I have saved or spent on other things are not crying out against me (James 5:4).

This gap in support and pervasive indifference transcend financial implications and reveal a profound heart crisis. As the body of Christ, we are called to act justly and love mercy, principles that extend to how we steward our wealth, especially in fulfilling the Great Commission's mandate to make disciples of all nations (Micha 6:8, Matthew 28:19). Faced with the urgent gospel need in areas where Christ is least known, followers of Christ must scrutinize their financial priorities and giving in the light of the global mission field's opportunities.

The Status of Global Christianity 2023 outlines a stark yet hopeful scenario: the global Christian community is endowed with significant financial capacity (Johnson and Zurlo 2023). That is the fulfillment of a Bible promise. Malachi says there is enough in the house of the Lord from the tithe of the people of God (Malachi 3:10). Paul told the church in Corinth that God plans that they be thoroughly furnished for every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8). With the potential to have a substantial impact and complete the great commission by bringing the Gospel to all nations, the call to action is clear. Redirecting wealth toward Kingdom purposes is a clarion for decisive action.

As followers of Christ, we must critically assess our wealth distribution and strategically shift financial support to areas where it can most effectively propagate the Gospel. This strategic redirection of resources involves prioritizing support for missionaries and projects among unreached people groups (UPGs) and investing in urban missions amidst burgeoning city populations of displaced, unreached people. The fields are ripe for harvest in these regions, yet the laborers—and resources—are needed now (Matthew 9:37).

If Churches, denominations, and individuals are to complete the Great Commission, it demands the practical step of strategic financial realignment. This journey begins with awareness and understanding of the current state of giving versus the global mission field's needs. It continues with deliberate budgeting and fundraising to bolster mission work in the least reached and strategic locales. Every Christian has a role to play. These parts are not insignificant or small but equal and important because we are one body.

The available research shows that not a lack of finances but misappropriation keeps workers out of the harvest fields and billions yet untold. Misappropriation is perhaps too kind a word. Based on published data, $59 billion is embezzled from churches yearly compared to $225 million strategically given to

reach unreached regions (Johnson and Zurlo 2023). Such a disparity can exist because of the indifference too many Christians enjoy toward Jesus' command to go everywhere and tell everyone (Mark 16:15).

Innovative strategies, such as partnering with national ministries, investing in sustainable development projects among unreached peoples, and leveraging technology to equip missionaries, can move current work among frontier groups forward and mobilize new workers into the harvest.

By embracing this challenge, we adopt Christ's command to spread the Gospel to all nations. This is investing in heavenly treasures that yield eternal dividends. The commitment to wise stewardship and mission-focused church practices represents the blueprint for achieving significant, lasting impact.

PRACTICAL STEPS

As startling as the statistics may be, most Christians do not lack sincerity. Rather, the scale of the Great Commission seems too daunting for one person – which it is. Moreover, church leaders often struggle to gather enough resources to host a weekly meeting. For many local churches, the strain of maintaining congregational worship services leaves little outreach. As James said, "…these things ought not so to be" (James 3:10, King James Version).

Though the challenge of Jesus' mission—to go everywhere and tell everyone—is great, it is not complicated. The answer is simple: as a follower of Christ, I am to make His priorities mine. Jesus said, "*But seek first His kingdom…*" (Matthew 6:33, NIV). It is easy to identify what has first place in our lives by looking at

spending. His priority is the harvest. Can we say the same of ourselves?

Two things every Christ-follower can do to align with the Great Commission are:

1. Be a percentage giver in a local church.

The church is God's plan to reach the world with the message of Jesus (Ephesians 3:9-10). A strong local church can reach beyond itself to affect its community, region, and the world. Conversely, anemic local churches struggle to stay afloat as a world of people remains untold.

"*Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it*" (Malachi 3:10, NIV). The tithe is a percentage (one-tenth). The tithe is designed to furnish the local assembly with everything it needs. In other words, when the individual believers that make up a local church body bring their tithe, there is enough to equip that house for every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Some have argued that Malachi is in the Old Testament and does not apply to New Testament believ-

ers. However, Jesus said, "*You should tithe…*" (Matthew 23:23, New Living Translation).

Nevertheless, I agree – these are Old Testament commandments. Thank God we have a better covenant – established on better promises (Hebrews 8:6). Therefore, we are not limited to one-tenth. We can give better. Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek, not in observance of a commandment – but by faith (see Genesis 14:18-20 & Hebrews 7:1-13). In like manner, we can bring the tithe to see the church fully furnished for the work Jesus has given us to accomplish.

2. Be a vital part of a local church.

Jesus said, "*…I will build my church…*" (Matthew 16:18, NIV). It is clear that the church was founded upon the revelation of Christ (Matthew 16:18 & Ephesians 2:20), but what is the building material for the church? "*[Y]ou also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood*" (1 Peter 2:5, NIV). We are the material Jesus selects to build the church.

To be a vital part of a local church means more than casual attendance. Paul uses the body as a picture of the church (1 Corinthians 12:27). Consider our natural body. We may not be concerned if a single strand of hair falls out – perhaps we would

not even take notice. However, if our nose came off while washing our face – it would capture our attention and focus. That is because it is vital. Let us purpose to be a vital part of our local church – one which would certainly be noticed if it were missing.

While the task appears formidable, the path to engagement is clear-cut. Embracing Jesus' directive to prioritize the Kingdom (Matthew 6:33, NIV) requires a tangible commitment to the local church—financially, through percentage giving, and personally.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this tract underscores a pivotal challenge within the contemporary Christian community: the stark discrepancy between believers' financial resources and their commitment to advancing the Great Commission. As evidenced through scripture and real-world statistics, a profound spiritual crisis exists rooted in the misallocation of wealth. This situation necessitates a reevaluation of our priorities toward eternal investments over temporal accumulations. My purpose in writing this is to compellingly argue for realigning Christian wealth with Kingdom priorities, advocating for strategically redirecting resources to support missionaries and projects in unreached people groups (UPGs) and urban missions.

The teachings of Jesus, Paul, James, and John serve as foundational pillars, urging believers to prioritize the gospel's advancement and to steward their wealth in alignment with God's missional heart.

Johnson and Zurlo (2023) highlight the significant imbalance wherein Christians spend a minuscule portion of their vast financial resources on missions, particularly in the least reached countries. This illuminates the urgent need for change, calling for monetary contributions and a holistic commitment to prayer, discipleship, and the Great Commission.

Believers can significantly impact the global mission by embracing innovative financial stewardship strategies and mission-focused church practices. The author envisions a church where every Christian actively participates in this transformative journey, leveraging their resources for the Kingdom's advancement. This vision is achievable and essential for the fulfillment of the Great Commission, inviting believers to invest in heavenly treasures that promise eternal dividends.

In reflecting on this urgent call to action, we are reminded of the potential within the global Christian community to enact substantial change. Through deliberate, strategic realignment of our wealth with Kingdom purposes, we can address the spiritual crisis of wealth mismanagement and step into a future where the Gospel reaches every corner of the earth. This is not merely a financial endeavor but a spiritual mandate that challenges us to examine our hearts and priorities in light of eternity. As we move

forward, let us do so with a renewed commitment to stewardship, generosity, and a heart aligned with God's purposes. This ensures that our investments today pave the way for a world transformed by the Gospel tomorrow.

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The author critically examines the discrepancy between the Christian community's significant financial resources and engagement in fulfilling the Great Commission. Highlighting the historical zeal of the Moravians for missionary work and contrasting it with the modern church's relative indifference, the author argues for a realignment of Christian wealth toward Kingdom priorities. Citing research data, Matt Hattabaugh underscores the minimal financial support directed toward missions, especially among unreached people groups (UPGs). The author suggests that spending patterns serve as a "sight glass," revealing true priorities. The author calls for a comprehensive approach encompassing financial giving, prayer, discipleship, and active participation in the Great Commission. Advocating for innovative stewardship and mission-focused practices, the author envisions a transformative shift in resource allocation to significantly impact the global mission field and fulfill the mandate of spreading the Gospel to all nations.

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