

# Guest Speaker: Doug Hayes

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Preacher: Doug Hayes

[ 0 : 00 ] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at [trinitygraceathens.com](http://trinitygraceathens.com).

Good morning and thank you, Walt, for that beautiful introduction. Wow, I'm moved. I'd like to meet that guy. If you would, turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 14.

And while you're turning there, let me bring you greetings from your brothers and sisters at Covenant Fellowship just outside of Philadelphia. We love you. We pray for you.

We love the fact that we're in mission together in Sovereign Grace and we pray regularly for our brothers and sisters in Sovereign Grace. Multiple times this past week, I let people know, hey, I'm going to be preaching down in Tennessee.

They're like, oh, where? Where? Who's the pastor? I said, oh, do you remember when Walt came in and preached from Ecclesiastes and multiple people just said, oh, that was a powerful message.

[ 1 : 00 ] That message really moved me. And I told Walt, when he said the words, eat the donut, he stumbled me a little bit. I don't know if you heard that message here.

But it was just a beautiful, powerful message from the Word of God. You are a blessed church. I got a chance to meet some of your other leaders and pastors last night. And what a blessed church you are to sit under the ministry of the Word in that way.

So thank you so much for welcoming me. I do feel very welcome even though I'm far from home. If you're with me, well, let me tell you first, after we spend some time in the Word, I'm going to introduce the ministry of Covenant Mercy.

So I've got some slides and video and we'll take you to Africa a little bit and introduce you to the program that we are running in several different countries there. But first, I love to always begin in God's Word and remind ourselves of the profound motivation we have from God's Word for this type of ministry.

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 is at the table of a Pharisee. He's been invited to a dinner party there.

[ 2 : 14 ] He, being Jesus, said also 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.

And Lord, we pray that you would bless the preaching and the hearing of your Word this morning.

Well, we all know what it feels like to be on the receiving end of a kindness that has strings attached.

An act of kindness or generosity that seems to be motivated more by a spirit of self-interest than by a true spirit of generosity. The classic example for this, for me, of this for me, is some guys I'll refer to as the squeegee guys.

I don't know if you've seen this phenomenon in this area. Maybe in Knoxville when Peyton Manning was playing, there were big crowds coming in for those games or something. But in Philadelphia, if you're going in from the suburbs, I've grown up in the Philly suburbs, and if you go in and you arrive at a certain traffic light, maybe you're heading in for a sports game or a concert or something, some kind of big event, you stop at a particularly long traffic light, and immediately these guys will be on your car and washing your windshield.

[ 3 : 52 ] And if you're from out of town and a little bit naive, you might be, oh, wow, it's really true. The city of brotherly love. Look, the welcoming committee's here, and they're washing my windshield.

But you would learn very quickly that there are strings attached, that these guys have a reason that they're doing this. And some of them would get very good at kind of getting halfway done and then looking at you to see whether you had anything for them.

I don't necessarily blame the squeegee guys. In some ways, it's better than just coming with your hand out. They're offering to do something for you. But my point is, from the perspective of the recipient, there are certain forms of generosity you can almost feel like you need to be on your guard against because they're nothing more than thinly veiled attempts to obligate you to do something in return.

Well, this reciprocity ethic, this idea that I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine, was very strong in the Greco-Roman world that Jesus lived in. It was pervasive in Jewish society of the day as well. So as Jesus sits at the table of this Pharisee, he knows well the mindset he's addressing. One would act in a generous way toward others in order to elicit a similar generosity in return.

[ 5 : 10 ] And conversely, if someone extended an act of kindness or generosity to you, you would feel an obligation, even an ethical obligation, to reciprocate. Now, while this reciprocity ethic may not be as explicit in our modern Western way of thinking, it is undeniably present in our world today as well.

It lies just beneath the surface in so many of our personal and social interactions. If we're honest, we really have to admit that there's very little we do in life that isn't somehow motivated or influenced by our own self-interest.

And on certain levels, that's perfectly okay. I don't mean to suggest that the idea of reciprocity is in and of itself evil or impure.

Think of the business context, for example. If you're in business, let's say I'm in business and I'm providing a product or a service to you that I'm happy to provide for X number of dollars and you're 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.

[ 6 : 24 ] My point is simply to say that the idea of the concept of reciprocity is not in and of itself evil. However, as Jesus so often does, he comes to us here with questions that probe beneath the surface into the depths of our hearts and motivations and push us beyond these natural human tendencies.

Jesus calls us here to a selfless love that expends itself for others without regard for 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 neglecting things that really have no personal profit for us at all, no personal benefit.

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

And in fact, one of the defining characteristics of generosity that's uniquely Christian, and by that I mean generosity that's driven by our faith more than just driven by our humanity, is its intentional focus on those who can do nothing to repay it.

[ 7 : 59 ] Jesus says, You want to know whether your love is truly Christian love? Love those who have no ability to love you in return. You want to know whether your generosity is like that of your Father in heaven?

Give to those who have 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 lives of his disciples.

So in the balance of our time in the word, I just want to draw out two observations about this generosity that Jesus commends to us. Number one, it takes selfless, Christ-like initiative.

This generosity takes selfless, Christ-like initiative. Now, contrary to the way that Jesus' words may sound to us at face value, he's not forbidding us from having our friends over.

He's not forbidding us from being kind or generous toward our families. In fact, if that's what he was doing, he'd be commanding us to violate other very clear scriptures.

[ 9 : 08 ] Remember, Jesus is sitting at the table of a Pharisee. He knows well what their practices are. He knows what our human tendencies are, as we've just been reflecting on.

So he's speaking here in hyperbole. He's using strong language to jar us out of our complacency, to jar us out of our comfort zone, and to make a point.

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, even apart from Christ.

It's normal to be generous toward those who can return the favor to us somehow. As disciples of Christ, we are called to take generous initiative toward those who can't repay us.

And listen, I love this. We're called to do it precisely because they cannot repay us. I just love the way Jesus explains this as if it should be intuitive to us.

[10:06] He explains the reason why we shouldn't invite our friends, our family, our rich neighbors that we might want to hang out with to our little dinner party. He says, no, no, don't do that, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid.

I want to say, oh yeah, that makes perfect sense, right? Let's say I bump into Elon Musk on the street and invite him over for dinner, and for some reason he comes and we have a lovely time, and so he flies my wife and I out to Austin, and we have dinner with them at their beautiful estate.

Maybe after dinner he says, hey, let's go up in SpaceX. This one's on me. That would be a tragedy, right? No, 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 with only in within those bounds, what difference really has the grace of God made?

Let's read 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 because they cannot repay you.

[11:20] Do you notice he didn't say you'll be blessed even though they can't repay you, despite the fact that they can't repay you? No, he says you will be blessed because they cannot repay you.

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 God's people and distinguish us from the world. See, this is a characteristic that differentiates Christian love from love that we might think of as natural or normal in the world, even apart from Christ.

Earlier in Luke's gospel, Jesus spoke in similar terms when calling us to love our enemies.

Beginning in verse 32 of Luke 6, Jesus said, If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you?

[12:35] 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? 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. Did you follow the similar biblical 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 to those who can do nothing to repay it.

[13:49] Jesus says to us, Not so with you. It shall not be so with us as His disciples. We demonstrate that we are children of our Father in Heaven and disciples of His Son Jesus by taking initiative where it wouldn't be natural, where it wouldn't be normal for us to do so.

By loving even our enemies. Think about that. I think we get so used to hearing words like that roll off of Jesus' tongue that they don't take us aback the way they should.

Loving even our enemies. Those we would naturally hate. And by ensuring that our generosity extends even to those who can do nothing to repay us.

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

It's a fact that goes right over the head of His original hearers, but we should see that we take note of it this morning. And that simple fact is this. The one who is reclined there with them at this table

and addressing them is Himself God incarnate.

[15:06] He's there with them at this table because He didn't consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but humbled Himself, made Himself nothing, took the form of a servant, and took initiative toward those who could do nothing to repay Him.

Soon He will turn toward Calvary where He will give all, enduring death on a cross for those who could never repay Him for His sacrifice.

Listen, if you're here today and you're not a Christian, maybe you're exploring the claims of the Bible, you're exploring what the Christian faith is all about, let me be abundantly clear with you. There is nothing you can do to repay God. I loved some of the words that we sang this morning. This came through in so many of the songs that we sang.

You don't come to Jesus as a way of repaying God for the wrongs you've done or for the kindnesses that He's shown you. You come to Jesus as an act of faith, believing that His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave are sufficient to cover the penalty for your sins and restore your relationship with God.

[16:20] 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 what Jesus is calling us to here.

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

Why? Because that's the very thing Jesus did when He left the glory and the riches of heaven and came to earth to seek and save lost sinners like you and me.

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

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

[17:35] Let's again read 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 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 the terms of this world, Jesus promises that we will be rewarded, we will be repaid in eternity.

And this is a reward that can only be embraced in the here and now by faith, by simply trusting that the words Jesus is saying to us are rock solid truth.

That what we sacrifice in this life for those who can't repay us will accrue to our benefit 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 cannot repay you. 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 for some other purpose that might serve you more in the here and now.

[18:54] But, when you consider that sacrifice in light of the reward that Jesus promises us here, it really is no sacrifice at all.

It's better thought of as an investment. And in a world with a devaluing dollar and a volatile stock market, I can tell you, you cannot make a more secure investment than this one.

And when you think about it, there are many sacrifices we make in life for the short term to receive a reward down the road. I happen to be someone who loves gardening. So, every spring, I love getting out there, working the soil, getting that dirt under my fingernails.

And it's amazing. Within a few months, you can plant some seeds, you can plant some little plants, and within a few months, you can be enjoying the fruit of that. Several years ago, I got into the idea of perennial fruit-bearing bushes.

And so, we're blessed to have about an acre. And, you know, I spread these bushes around. I've got 11 different blueberry bushes of various varieties around our property. And I threw myself into the research.

[20:03] You know, I want to do this right. I want these bushes to thrive. We were planting them from little baby sticks, basically, with a few roots on the bottom. And so, I learned, okay, you need to replace the soil. Our soil is not nearly acidic enough, so I needed to replace that with the right kind

of organic materials so that these plants will thrive.

I needed to mulch significantly around the base of the plants. They love to have, they have a very shallow root system, so they love to have wet feet pretty much all the time. But the other thing that I learned was in that first three years, again, we're planting from little baby, not even bushes, little baby sticks.

The conventional wisdom is you pinch the blossoms off those plants for the first three seasons. So, for three years, you're, when I say pinch the blossoms, I mean you're pulling them off and dropping them on the ground.

Now, you probably know the blossoms are what become the berries after the bees come and do their miraculous work. So, what you're doing is you're saying, I'm deferring any enjoyment from these bushes for the next three seasons.

I remember the first season, obviously, it's easy. There are hardly any blossoms. You pick them, you drop them on the ground. Second year, a little harder. That third season, it was really difficult. I've been at this for three years.

[ 21 : 17 ] I want to taste the fruit of my labors. And the bushes, you know, there's more blossoms on them. I could have had a few handfuls of blueberries that year, but I did, as advised, I pinched those blossoms.

And today, we are enjoying from about late June through early August, we enjoy so many blueberries. We had somewhere between 120 and 130 pints of blueberries every year at this point. We can them, we freeze them, we give them away, eat them all year long. I mean, if you knew how many blueberries I eat, you'd be surprised I haven't turned blue. Listen, Jesus is saying to us here, do you want to be satisfied with a handful of blueberries now?

Or will you believe me that by making that small sacrifice now, you are creating for yourself a reward in heaven that you cannot even fathom?

Well, this is a reward that can only be seen by faith. And God is pleased. I believe he's uniquely glorified when we simply take him at his word. When we say, Jesus, I can't see that, I can't grasp it in the here and now, but I take you at your word and I'm living my life in light of that promise.

[ 22 : 32 ] I believe he's uniquely glorified when we fix our eyes, not on the things that are seen, but on the things that are unseen. Because the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Jesus is lifting our eyes here to that unseen reward, which, though unseen, is every bit as real as the tangible sacrifice, only it's 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. I'll be telling you more about that program in a few minutes, but this couple was sponsoring seven children.

By the way, they're friends of mine, and so, you know, that number in and of itself wasn't especially notable. Seven is a wonderful number of children to be sponsoring and giving toward, but we have others who are sponsoring seven children, and even more.

What was particularly notable to me is that I know this couple, and I know that they're just living a very average middle-class lifestyle. And by the way, I don't go looking through our database to find out how many children my friends are sponsoring.

[ 23 : 45 ] I just, I happened upon this information, and once I was aware of it, I felt like I gotta drop them a note and just tell them how much I appreciate the sacrifices they're making for this many kids.

So I drop them a note in the mail. Sometime later, we bump into each other and had a conversation about it, and I came to know how that had transpired. Essentially, they decided when we first launched the program, which was in early 2003, they decided they would sponsor one or two children at that time, and then each year as the father, the breadwinner of that family, would receive a raise, they would just add one more child.

And so through the years, it had reached seven by that point. By the way, every time I give this message and talk about this couple, I do check in the database now to find out how many children they're sponsoring.

They are now sponsoring 21 children. So this family has continued with this practice through the years. Now my point isn't that all of us should be sponsoring 21 children or that all of us should even follow that particular practice.

My point is simply to say this is a family that is not of significant means. By American standards, they are living a very normal American middle class lifestyle.

[ 25 : 04 ] But this is a family who is not interested in keeping up with the Joneses, not interested in adding more conveniences and luxuries to their lifestyle.

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

And I don't know about you but I want to live my life in light of that reality as well. When I think of Jesus' exhortation here to be generous toward those who can do nothing to repay us, I can't help but think of the children in our orphan sponsorship program who are being sponsored by so many people.

Listen, if you decide to sponsor a child through our program it is nearly impossible that they will ever be able to do anything to repay you. I hope they'll say thank you.

I hope they'll write to you and say thank you but they will never be able to repay you. Well that's exactly the kind of giving that Jesus is commending to us in this passage.

[ 26 : 20 ] It's precisely this kind of generosity that he promises to repay at the resurrection of the just. And that phrase the resurrection of the just immediately puts me in mind of Matthew 25 where Jesus is giving us a vision of that final day and he's saying that we will come before him and he'll tell us to enter into our reward because when he was hungry we gave him something to eat.

When he was thirsty we gave him something to drink. When he was naked we clothed him. And we'll say Jesus when did we see you hungry or thirsty or naked and he'll say even as you've done it to the least of these my brethren you've done it unto me.

Now what I've just told you is thoroughly biblically what I'm about to tell you is more from my imagination but I just imagine that in that moment Jesus might pull a young girl up by his side and say I want you to know Chalkidon.

Chalkidon was born with HIV she had lost both of her parents to AIDS she was on a trajectory to die of AIDS herself but you intervened through your generosity and your generosity not only gave her better health but you brought a lady named Helena into her life and Helena led Chalkidon to faith. Chalkidon is here in heaven in eternity because you gave when there was nothing she could do to repay you. or you might pull a young man up by his side and say I want you to know Charles.

[ 27 : 47 ] Charles was a student at Lighthouse Christian School he gave his life to Jesus when he was a child in a VBS that they did on a school break there and later he was able to go to university on a scholarship and after he graduated he became a teacher and he influenced the lives of so many other young people all because you gave when there was nothing he could do to repay you.

Think of the ripple effects throughout eternity. Think of the children and grandchildren of the children we are currently sponsoring who will one day know the love of Jesus because somebody shared the love of Jesus with their mother or with their grandfather when they were just a helpless child running around in the community.

I believe part of our reward in eternity will be the ability to see with the eyes of eternity the full impact that our acts of kindness and generosity were 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 to God for the faith that he has given to so many who have invested generously into our children's lives for over 20 years now so at this point I want to turn the corner and just begin introducing our ministry and especially our orphan sponsorship program to you.

When we launched Covenant Mercies in 2002 we knew the Lord was leading us to serve orphans internationally and we had a vision for developing that work in partnership with indigenous local churches in the developing world but we didn't know exactly where the Lord was leading us.

[ 29 : 33 ] We didn't know exactly what our collaboration with those brothers and sisters would look like. But by the end of 2002 riding on the coattails of a relationship that Sovereign Grace was developing with a little church in a little rural Ugandan town called Nagongera we made our first foray into Africa and it became immediately evident to us that we were home.

This is where the Lord is calling us. This was at a time when HIV AIDS was running rampant on the continent and the antiretroviral drug therapy which had revolutionized care for AIDS patients in the United States and in most of the Western world had not yet become available there on the African continent.

So there wasn't much we could do to prevent all of these parents from dying. One of my enduring memories from that first visit to Uganda in 2002 was being introduced to a woman named Gladys. She was a member of that partner church there and Gladys had lost her husband to AIDS. She herself was HIV positive. Yeah, I think you're looking at a picture of me with Gladys circa 2002 on that very first visit.

She herself was HIV positive and left to care for her two small children even though she was in poor health and there was nothing there was no treatment available for her.

[ 30 : 58 ] Sadly, I only got to see Gladys one more time in 2003 before she was gone and her children were left in the care of their grandmother. Gladys' daughter Mercy Amania was six years old at the time of her mother's passing.

By God's grace Mercy was among the 248 children who were part of our program when we first launched it in early 2003 and she was living then with her grandmother.

So this is a great opportunity for me to just kind of explain to you the nuts and bolts of how our program works because this is a prototypical example. For the most part both parents are gone. Sometimes the mother is still living. All the children in our program are fatherless and what we do then through our church partners is we build teams within those churches to go out and deliver care to the children within the family context.

One of the beautiful things we see in every African culture that I've been able to be a part of you see the extended family taking those children in even if they don't have the means to care for them adequately.

[ 32 : 06 ] So through our church partners we go and provide care for those children within the context of grandma's home or auntie or whoever's taking the children in. And then we provide some basic nutritional, medical, and educational assistance within that context and it gives the local church partner then an opportunity to wrap this family the entire family up into the broader ministry of the church.

Well as Mercy grew up under the care of her grandmother she applied herself diligently in school and the Lord really blessed her efforts. When she graduated from secondary school at the end of 2016 we, Covenant Mercy's had just established what we call our Maupalo Scholarship Fund for Higher Education.

Maupalo is a word that means blessing and we established this program to help our eligible sponsorship program graduates to be able to pursue higher education.

So just to be clear our orphan sponsorship program sponsors the children all the way through the end of high school or the vocational school equivalent and then for those who are achievers who can potentially go on for university studies they have the opportunity to earn through their own merit a scholarship to go on for university studies through a separate program.

Well Mercy became, she applied and became one of our first Maupalo Scholars as that program was launched and just a few months ago actually last year she graduated from Uganda Christian University with a degree in law and Mercy as she was approaching her graduation she got a hold of my email address and she sent me this long email just overflowing with her gratitude for what the Lord had done in her life and wanted me to know how grateful she was.

[ 33 : 56 ] I have excerpted that this is an abridged version of what she shared in those emails so these are Mercy's words. She says, by the time I started understanding I was staying with my mother at home and she was sickly.

I didn't know she was HIV positive. Life became harder each and every day. I stayed with a family of many people and sometimes we could go without food. Unfortunately she passed on in 2003 and a big gap in my life was created leaving me and my brother to stay with our grandmother.

When I got into the program I was in primary two, second grade and that's how my new life started. I continued to stay with my grandmother and I stayed with her until I completed my primary level.

When joining my secondary level high school I was admitted into one of the best schools in Tororo. This was something so great that had never happened in my life.

I never stopped working hard I never forgot about God because my late mother introduced me and made me know who God is and the great things God can do and he did that by bringing covenant mercies.

[ 35 : 06 ] I never stopped saying thank you God because I knew it was him since day one. After I completed my high school in 2016 it was the same year that my Apollo scholarship started.

I applied for the scholarship and just when I thought it was done God showed me that every end to us is just the beginning to him. Who knew that this young girl of primary two would reach this far in life?

And I love the way she concludes she says God did know I can testify that he never forsakes his children. He answers prayers his words are promises he keeps he has been so good to me right from the early years of my life.

I believe it was the timing of God because until now I am still witnessing his goodness. Isn't it amazing isn't it refreshing to hear a young woman whose life hasn't exactly been a bed of roses testifying to the goodness of God in her life.

He has been so good to me she said right from the very early years of my life. well I'm glad to tell you that mercy is not alone.

[ 36 : 22 ] After 20 plus years of doing this type of ministry and investing for literally decades in the lives of some of our kids we are seeing and hearing an increasing number of testimonies like this and so I want to introduce you now by video to a young woman who's a recent graduate of our program in Addis Ababa Ethiopia so if we can go ahead and roll that video.

Well after establishing our work in Uganda for several years we built partnerships in a few different African nations Ethiopia being one of them also Zambia and most recently Liberia to join hands with God's people in caring for fatherless children on the ground there in their own communities.

It was really through our partnership with Wilbrot and Ziki Chanda I think you're looking at a picture of the Chandas on the screen now in Ndola Zambia that we learned the particularly valuable investment that a direct investment into our children's education can be.

By the way if you've been can we just go back to the Wil and Ziki photo we lost Wilbrot three years ago now hard to believe it's been that long the Lord took him home early and the church there is a Sovereign Grace church that Wilbrot brought into the family of Sovereign Grace the church continues to go on and the Lord is providing grace to those other elders to lead the church there Ziki continues to as the director of Lighthouse Christian School to this day and she's doing an amazing job in the wake of the loss of her husband but this dear couple was part of our learning experience in terms of the value that a quality Christian education can provide to the children in our program the Chanda started Lighthouse Christian School in 2005 out of their own resources they had a single classroom of five kindergarten kids as they began and then Covenant Mercies joined forces with them in 2006 to sponsor a second classroom of children and then year by year after that we just added one new grade and we found sponsors for numerous children to continue the expansion of the school and as we did that we have gotten to the point now where we have over 360 sponsored students in pre-k through grade nine at Lighthouse

Christian School receiving a quality education and a Christian education and through the years we've also purchased land and developed the campus so I think you're looking or you've been seeing some pictures of the campus that we've developed through the years as well in this partnership now from day one in our program even when we began in rural Uganda it was obvious to us that investment would be an important tool in our toolbox if we're going to help the children break free of cycles of poverty that so often just chew up one generation after the next increasingly as the years have gone by we've learned that building and developing our own schools can be an especially strategic investment rather than simply sending the children to whatever schools available which is often ill equipped to provide a quality education but in addition to being able to manage and provide a better quality of education developing our own schools also creates for us a Monday through Friday

[ 39 : 45 ] Christ-centered context where we can have that many more gospel opportunities in the lives of our children and also influence their character development from a very young age so our fruitful partnership with Lighthouse is one of the many reasons that we were excited in 2019 to break ground on Hope Community Primary School in western Uganda we've got programs in eastern and western Uganda this one is on the western side of the country and by God's grace we were able to launch right into that construction project begin developing that campus we opened the school in 2020 for just a few classes of students and fast forwarding to today Hope Community is now in its third or I guess fourth school year with 222 students enrolled in pre-k through grade four so we're following that same pattern just adding one new grade each year Lord willing by God's grace we will by 2027 we'll be serving all the way through grade seven we expect somewhere between 350 and 400 students will be filling up those classrooms by that time last year we were

able to add our third three classroom building on the campus one of these slides

I know you don't want to move off with this slide they're too cute but one of these slides is an overview of the campus yeah so this gives you an aerial view of the campus we now have three three classroom buildings which is enough classroom space to grow all the way through grade seven got a nice multi-purpose hall and just over the past year as well we built a building that is a dedicated library on the top floor and a dedicated computer lab on the bottom floor I think you got a picture we just opened our library a few months ago full of books for these children to learn to love reading learn to learn so many things about the world that God has made for them let me let me conclude there I am so grateful that as we enter our 23rd year of ministry this year the Lord has enabled us to do that not simply looking back at his grace over the years which we are and we're so grateful for the way the

Lord has provided for our ministry and given us opportunities in the lives of so many children but we're also at this stage looking forward with excitement about opportunities and challenges that the Lord has placed before us these are opportunities I'm aware that we can only take advantage of because of the generosity of God's people so I'm blessed to invite you to consider these opportunities this morning if you would like to consider partnering with Covenant Mercies in any way I will be at a table in the back that you can't miss as you leave we have profiles of children who are awaiting sponsorships if you'd be interested in sponsoring children you can read their profiles see their photos and consider that there we also have a number of items that we sell as a means of raising funds and I would be happy to provide any of those for you as well by the way that's an opportunity for me to say when you decide to sponsor a child that is truly an investment directly into the life of that child so sponsorship is \$44 a month now those dollars go directly into the life of that child and we don't use any of the sponsorship funds that we raise for developing these school campuses we raise funds in other ways for those projects this merchandise that I've brought with me is just one of many and I'd be happy to answer any questions that you may have about the ministry but listen regardless of whether you decide to partner with covenant mercies this morning I don't come here pretending that this word the only way for this word to be applied is by joining hands with covenant mercies I've actually prayed that the Holy Spirit would be at work applying this word very broadly in our hearts but regardless of whether you decide to join hands with covenant mercies this morning may we all grow in our desire to be generous disciples who take selfless Christ-like initiative toward those who can do nothing to repay us knowing that we will be rewarded at the resurrection of the just I want to pray for Doug we're going to sing in a minute but I wanted to pray for him I think I hope you'll prayerfully consider this and can't talk about this long affections are so great for things like this but prayerfully consider this you know our pastors take very seriously our responsibility to help you steward the resources God has given you and so

I commend his ministry to you that's why he's doing what he's done I know these things can be a bit uncomfortable so prayerfully consider partnering with him but I just want to pray for you felt impressed too so if you would bow your head with me Father in heaven we give you thanks we bow our knees before the Father from whom every family every person in heaven and on earth is named you are the creator of every person under heaven created and stamped in your image there is no one that is not made by your hand we God through his ministry through his ministry and through the ministry of covenant mercies we pray that you would bless it in every way

[ 45 : 59 ] God I pray that you would cause their success in a good godly sense to abound in every way success in provision success in meeting needs success in partners there men he can trust and women he can trust to entrust the day to day ministry Lord I pray that you would answer his prayers for this ministry Lord I pray that you would bless him as he thinks about the future that he would be able to pass on covenant mercies into capable hands to carry this ministry forward for the future I pray Doug I felt like Lord put a verse on my mind that even as he said to Elijah there are more that are with you than those that are with them I just felt like God wanted to build your faith for all that he promised to do and so this in that respect that you would cause every orphan in this program to be born again by the

Holy Spirit into a living hope we pray we thank you in Jesus name Amen You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens For more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at through