11.1 Engage Local

11/3/2026

Father, we've just been singing these challenging words: before you even ask, my answer will be yes because I love you.

I ask that that would sit with us, Father, over the next several moments, that we would ponder before you what it is to say yes to your invitation, to your instruction.

Before you even ask, my answer will be yes because I love you. Holy Spirit, I ask that you would encourage and challenge and instruct us through your word. In your name, Jesus, I pray. Amen.

So that challenging idea, before you even ask, my answer will be yes, because I love you. So, think about a time when you have been told to do something pretty difficult and you're thinking, you know, the truth is you don't want to do it, but as you ponder it, you know, you think, well, maybe I should do this, but it's going to be difficult. And I want to just invite you into that, whether you remember a time when that happened or imagine it happening, you're told to do something difficult that you don't necessarily want to do.

So, it's good to hold that thing and just to have some conversation with the Lord, and that's part of what I want to create space for us to do this morning. I'm going to read some passages and just talk briefly about those passages and then give us some space to really process, are we up for doing what these passages are telling us to do? So, the first passage we'll look at is in 1 Timothy 6:11, and this is Paul writing, the Apostle Paul writing to this young pastor named Timothy, and he's giving him some instruction. So, in 1 Timothy 6, verse 11, Paul writes this. He says, but you, Timothy, man of God, flee from all of this.

We'll talk about what this is in a moment. Flee from this and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. So, flee from all of this. The this that he's talking about, Paul, in just the previous section, had been writing to Timothy about the problem he sees in the community about this love of money, this pursuit of money, this idolization of money. When I think about moving that over to our context today, we often use this phrase, time is money.

So, when we think about the pursuit, you know, Paul encouraging Timothy to flee from the love of money, I want us to think about 2 things, money and time, because they're 2 things that sometimes we can be kind of tight-gripped about. It's, it's my time, it's my money. And, and Paul is encouraging us to ease up on that pursuit, to share more of it. So how do I flee from love of money, love of my time? I ease up on the pursuit of it and I share more of it.

So this is one of the difficult things that I want us to consider this morning, this idea— hard, difficult thing— of Loosening our grip on our money and on our time. The next thing Paul mentions to Timothy is he says, pursue righteousness, godliness, and faith. So he's using righteousness, godliness, and faith in, in many ways as 3 synonymous ideas that all have to do with the right standing with God, being like God, trust in God. Seeing that God is greater and he is one to be followed. So, this kind of submission to his will and his way involves a life of love and endurance, the next couple words that you see in that passage.

When you see love and endurance together, that's kind of implying or hinting at the fact that this is a love that's going to be difficult, that's going to require some endurance. It implies some sacrificial love. Gentleness suggests a posture of considering another's needs over our

own. So, this is a path of submission to God and sacrificial love for others. And this is Paul's difficult admonition to Timothy and to us, that Timothy, that we would loosen our grip on our money and our time, that we would submit to God and sacrificially love others.

So, as you hear that instruction, then the question that is next is, all right, who's in? Who's ready to loosen your grip on your money and time and sacrificially love others and submit to the Lord? And we think then, wow, you know, when I imagine, like, over time, why is anyone joined this movement that says, yes, I'm up for that.

There's a writer, Apostle John, in John— 1 John 4:19, and he tells us why he and others were up for this call. He says in 1 John 4:19, he writes, we love because he first loved us. So, the disciples had this reason for their love, because he first loved us. This was the motivation for martyrs in the first century, and this has been the motivation for, really, millions and millions of people over the ages who have been convinced of and compelled by the love of Jesus. And in response to experiencing the love of Jesus, they begin to loosen their grip on their money and their time, they submit to God, and they extend sacrificial love to others.

Paul encourages Timothy, he continues on this road, and he says a few verses later in verses 17 and 18, Paul writes to 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. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. So, command those who are rich, and we know, I think, that that is all of us. When we look at the financial wealth of the rest of the world, We have more than 90% of the rest of the world's population. We are rich.

So, Paul is commanding us not to be arrogant. So, it's right to ask the question, do I take pride in my position or my busy schedule? Is it the case that any of us, do we take comfort in our success or our importance and the amount of money that we've been able to earn, or is your confidence placed in the unconditional love of our Heavenly Father?

So, do this thought experiment for me, with me for a moment. When you walk into a room, and this happens all the time, you walk into a room with few people or lots of people, and when you walk into a room, you do this immediate evaluation. You're processing how you feel, and a lot of time, it's a lot of times it might be that you're comparing yourself to everyone else in the room and you have some confidence based on your success, wealth, skills, or something compared to the others in the room? Is that often how, how you process things as you walk into a room? You feel confident or not confident based on who you are compared to the rest of them, your success or so on?

Or do you walk into a room and your confidence is based on the fact that you have received unconditional love from the heavenly Father.

I want us to consider that, and I think about how these verses, it's— they're rightly dismantling to us. Part of the act of placing confidence in God's love rather than in your riches includes loosening your grip on your money and your time, which is difficult. So one more push in this direction, and then I'll ease up and let us process all of this for a little bit. The last push in this direction comes from James 1:27. You might recognize this passage where James writes, he says, religion that our God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

So, are you looking after the poor, the needy, the hurting, the oppressed in this community? This is the difficult thing that God is inviting us into, to loosen our grip on our money and our time, to submit to God and to sacrificially love others and to look after the poor and the needy. So this is what I want to sit with for a moment as I tell you some things about our community, some of the needs and some of the pains and some of the hurts in our Lafayette-West Lafayette community. So first, when we think about children in our Lafayette-West Lafayette community, As of last month, there were 95 children who have been abused and neglected in our community and are going through court cases right now with their parents being judged with child abuse and neglect. 35 of those children are paired up with a CASA, a court-appointed special advocate, who comes alongside them and gets to know them and then speaks up for their best interest in court.

So 35 of those children being abused and neglected are connected to ACASA. 60 of them are on a waiting list. As you can imagine, for a child to be abused and neglected, that's this horrible trauma in life that many of us can only barely imagine. The second trauma in their life that comes just shortly below that is the trauma of being removed from the home of the parents you love despite and amidst the wrong things they're doing to you. So these children are removed from the home by DCS, and then they're in this awkward waiting period where DCS is trying to find for them a foster home while the court case is going on.

So in this in-between time where they've been removed from their home and DCS is trying to find a home for them, Isaiah 117 House provides this beautiful, comforting place where the children and the DCS workers come and, and the children are spoiled and comforted and blessed by volunteers who come and give them gifts and give them attention. 127 children have been cared for by Isaiah 117 House this year. Volunteers coming in and caring for these children in one of the hardest moments of their life.

I think of other children in our community. I think of children in elementary schools, and there's one particular elementary school, Murdock Elementary School, that we partner with. This school has a high percentage of children who need the free lunch program. So Covenant has come alongside them and partnered with them, and there are Covenant members who are classroom partners for every classroom in Murdoch. So, what that means is every child in Murdoch Elementary School is being prayed for by a classroom partner from our church family.

They're visited once a week and the teachers are encouraged and then helped by these adults coming alongside the kids and reading to them or helping them in different classroom activities that the teacher has. When I look beyond that and I think about adults in our community, you're aware that there's so many men and women in our community that are stuck in generational poverty and stuck in different kinds of addictions. Salvation Army is an incredible ministry that comes alongside some of these men and women. They provide practical tools and they help them navigate a system of providers in this area that can come along and provide all sorts of practical helps with food and housing and getting a job. Trinity Life Ministry is another organization that comes alongside men in particular that are trying to get out of addictions.

Trinity Life Ministry operates a 12-month residential program for around 30 men at a time. They provide biblical discipleship, personal accountability, healthy relationships, practical life skills, and a supportive Christian community that encourages lasting transformation. These are men going through something that none of us would ever want to experience, where addiction has just ripped apart their life, and they're trying to crawl out of that. When I

think about the homeless population in our community, the men and women who are experiencing homelessness today, it's estimated that around 280 men and women in Tippecanoe County are experiencing homelessness. LUM's overnight shelter, which has been full for a year and a half, every day with a waiting list.

They provide a meal and a bed for 48 individuals experiencing homelessness. Since it's been full and with a waiting list for the last year and a half, they're now under construction to up that facility to a 78-bed facility. There are many people in our community that, that while they have a home, they can barely get by and they need some home repairs, and Habitat for Humanity comes alongside them through an army of volunteers. And this army of volunteers along with Habitat for Humanity has completed 183 home repair projects this year for people in need. Habitat's also in the midst of working and building 7 homes in our community.

7 homes, and that's when you look over the course of time that Habitat for Humanity has built homes in our community, they built more than 365 homes in this community over time. Then when we think about food insecurity in our community, there's a statistic that shows that 70— sorry, 17% of our population in Tippecanoe County fits the food insecurity description. So that's 32,000 people that live around us with limited or uncertain access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food. By God's grace, there's food pantries in our community, several of them, where people donate food and these food pantries are open almost every weekday. There's a different food pantry open for people to come in and receive some of this help.

So these are the hard, some of the hard things going on in our community. And in the midst of this hurt and brokenness and these efforts of compassion, We all, as followers of Jesus, are called to loosen our grip on our money and our time, to submit to God and to love others sacrificially, to look after the poor and the needy.

About 10 years ago, this challenge hit me in a way that I could no longer squirm out of it. So, I was convinced that faithfully following Jesus meant that those in our community, those who were hurting or needy or outside of relationship with Jesus, it meant I needed to help them in some way. And I'm embarrassed, or it's awkward to admit, that the reality was I didn't know many people that fit that description. So, I began to ask the Lord the question, how can I put myself in a place where I can be building relationships with some of these hurting people and serve and help them, show them your love in some kind of way. So, it was then that out of, I'd say, out of willful obedience, I saw some low-hanging fruit and I went for it.

I looked around my neighborhood and I thought, oh, they're looking for people to serve on the homeowners association board, so I'll serve on the homeowners association board and I'll, get to know some neighbors who are likely non-Christians who are probably hurting, and so that's the way that I'm going to reach out and help some hurting people outside of faith with Jesus in our community. So, after a year, as I went through that, I realized I'm not really forming very deep relationships with people. I'm spending lots of time arguing about covenants and trying to lower homeowners association fees, But I wasn't actually building deep relationships. So, I had grabbed at some low-hanging fruit and, and it wasn't very fruitful. So, then I heard this inspiring story about someone in our church family who was volunteering with Bravely Women's Health Center such that they were teaching sex education and safety awareness classes in a public school and I thought, wow, that sounds like big impact.

I can teach, I can make a big impact. So, somewhat proudly or naively, I thought, I'm going to get involved and make a big impact like that. So, I talked to some people at Bravely Women's Health Center and I got trained and we came up with this idea that I would come

alongside some men when a woman comes in and there's an unwanted pregnancy or an unplanned pregnancy and the man is also involved and wants some help or wants some mentorship, then I would come alongside that man and do some classes and kind of a mentorship program. So, we came up with this plan and the first time I met for a while with one man. The second time I met for a while with 3 or 4 men.

And then, well, there was no then. Then nobody else was interested. So, I looked at that and I thought, man, I had this desire for this big impact and I wasn't actually making any impact. So, around that time, I had a conversation with a church member. They came to my office and it was, it was someone who was a foster parent and they were just seeking prayer and counsel as they were sorting through some very difficult things that their foster child was dealing with and that they were dealing with.

And as they shared this story with me, I wept. And I wept so much that I was weeping more than they were weeping. And it came to the point where I was needing more comfort than they were comforting me when they came in to ask for my comfort. And I was so sad about their story that I needed comfort. And I realized coming out of that that, God, you are breaking my heart for hurting children.

I later had a conversation with another church member who was also a foster parent, and as they told me about their experience with one of their foster children, and their— one of their foster children had a court-appointed special advocate, and they talked about how special, how helpful this court-appointed special advocate had been. And they said, you know, I think a lot of people in our Covenant family would be well qualified to serve as a CASA, a Court Appointed Special Advocate. And they said, you know, really what you need is some adequate to good writing skills, some comfort in interacting with strangers, and a love for children. And I thought, I wonder, God, if this is what you're calling me to do. So, I walked away from that conversation logically convinced that being a CASA was just the right volunteer role for me.

Soon after that, it was my— I was going on a run one day during the week and happened to be my birthday. And, and on my birthday, I have this tradition of going on a run and just processing, listening to the Lord about the things he's done in my life in the last year and the things he might have for me in the coming year. So I'm running along and having this conversation with the Lord, and, and the Lord impresses upon my heart this feeling that he is going to break my heart for hurting children. And as I listened to him more, he kept sharing with me and he kept bringing to mind the pain that hurting children are experiencing in our community.

He kind of impressed upon my mind as I continued to listen that he, in the coming year, was going to lead me into some very dark places so that I could bring his light into some of these dark places. So I came out of that experience with the Lord as he's sharing more and more of this with me, and I'm weeping in response to these thoughts of these children who are hurting in horrible situations in our community. And I leave that time being convinced that, God, I think you are calling me to get involved in this way. So after talking to a few other people in our church family who serve as casas, I decided to go through the training and become a CASA. So this then, this was different than the willful obedience this time, and this was more out of a willing surrender to do the thing the Spirit was leading me to do.

So you go through the training and then you get sworn in as an officer of the court, and that was 7 years ago. In those 7 years, I've had 5— been assigned to 5 cases, and each case usually lasts 12 months to 15 months. And in those 5 cases, I've had the blessing and the

sobering difficulty of working with 9 different children. And those 9 different children have ranged in the ages between 2 months and 18 years old. And what a CASA does is you're invited into the CASA office first, and you sit down with the supervisor, and they give you this police report with horrible, horrible details about what a child has experienced.

And then you move in, you have all of this information about their parents and different service providers and the child, and you move into that child's life and you get to know them and spend time with them and hear about their story so that you can write reports and so that you can go to court and speak up for their best interest in court.

I think of— remember this first-time encounter I had with one of these cases where I scheduled to meet up with a DCS worker, and we met up in a parking lot in an area of town that I've never been to before, at apartment— in an apartment unit that I had never been to before. And we walked up to the door of this apartment building, and this door was battered and beat up and looked like it had been removed and placed back on several times. We opened the door and into this kind of little lobby where there's steps going up and steps going down, and this pungent aroma of marijuana was all around. And we step up to this door and we knock on this door, and I'm wondering what is going to be on the other side of this door. And we open the door and there is a mother, mother of a few kids, and it's a very small apartment, one room with a bedroom and then with the kitchen, and the kitchen is filled with dishes and plates and just stuff that needs cleaned.

And inside the apartment, there was no furniture. There was a TV on a box, there was a pile of clothes, there was some toys miscellaneously sitting around, and there was some evidence of fast food meals. And we have a conversation with this mom and find out her horrible story of things that she's gone through. Poor decisions she's made, horrible things that have happened to her, and she tells us how much she loves her children, and she does. And as you step into these kinds of worlds and interact with these different circumstances, so many times my heart breaks for these things that the children are going through, these terrible, awful things that children are going through because of the poor decisions of their parents.

And then as I get to know some of the parents, I hear these stories about how what those parents went— experienced from their parents is actually even worse than now what their kids are experiencing from them. So, these parents are actually on a trajectory of improving given what they've experienced as children.

When I look at these situations and get to know some of these men and women, one of the common needs I see is for healthy relationships. So many of these men and women, as they look around, they have people trying to pull them in different directions into bad influences, but they don't actually have healthy, loving relationships in their life. And there's so much that the church can offer these men and women in healthy, loving relationships.

I started volunteering with CASA not because it was low-hanging fruit and not because I wanted to make a big impact. It was a simple surrender to the Holy Spirit's prompting.

This is the way the Spirit was leading me to more deeply lean into a life of loosening my grip on my time and my money, submitting to God and sacrificially loving others and looking after the poor and the needy. The Lord wants to use us to shine his light in dark places. And the impact of that light is in his hands and it's often unknown by us.

But I can tell you the impact that it's had on me.

I see the pain and the ugliness of sin and brokenness in new ways.

And when you see the sin and just the ugliness and brokenness and the pain of sin in these new ways, then it exposes sin for what it is. The evil one often tempts us towards sin, making it look attractive. And when you come to realize what it really is, is it's terrible, it's pain, it's ugly, This view exposes sin for what it is. This grows my heart to cling to Jesus and to flee from sin. I don't want to be deceived by the evil one who says this is an attractive way to go when I've seen time and time again these kinds of decisions, they wreck, they wreck children's lives, they wreck adults' lives, they wreck so many lives.

I don't want to be deceived by that.

So it grows my heart to cling to Jesus, to flee from sin, and it reminds me that the love of Jesus is exactly what this world needs.

It's exactly what the world needs and it's exactly what the Lord has instructed us to share. So in willing surrender, because he first loved us, We loosen our grip on our money and our time. We submit to God and sacrificially love others, and we care for the poor and the needy. May it be so as we listen to the Lord. I tell you these things not to— not 'cause I want to share my story, but I want to share the way that the Lord works in us.

He's nudging each of us. He's speaking to each of us in a different way through his Spirit. To invite us into this life of loosening our grip on these things and following after him in sacrificial love. I wanted you to consider, just before I pray and as the worship team comes up, I want you to consider what are those things that the Lord is inviting you into?

Father, we thank you for your patient communication with us.

I thank you for the love that you pour out on us. And now you've given us this love to share. Show us how you want us to share it. In your name, Jesus, I pray. Amen.