

**Series:** The Most Amazing Race  
**Title:** A Race Worthy of Our Investment  
**Text:** John 12:1-11; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7  
**Key Word:** Incentives  
**Proposition:** Everyone will identify Biblical incentives for generous giving.

Good Morning Everyone. We are delighted that you have chosen to join us in worship. We honor you today because you have set aside time from your busy lives to connect with God. We firmly believe that God is here. God is here to love you, to speak to you, to hear the sweet sounds of your voice, and to show you His ways.

The contestants on CBS's reality show, "The Amazing Race" come from all lifestyles with the hope of winning the \$ 1,000,000 grand prize. Many earn prizes along the way as they reach a pit stop first. It's hard to imagine why folks apply for this globe trotting marathon race. I suspect some feel the pull of the one million dollar grand prize. Others love competition, world travel, or the attention of a worldwide audience. Some may see the race as a way to prove that they can accomplish things they thought was impossible. Others may want to overcome their fears, evaluate a relationship, or even build a deeper relationship in the midst of trying circumstances. Whatever the incentive, thousands audition for an opportunity to invest their time, energy, relationship, and creativity in this reality show.

For the past several weeks, we have been on a different race called, "The Most Amazing Race." The writer of Hebrews describes this race like this: *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with*

*perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”* Hebrews 12:1, 2

This race offers a prize worthy of our full investment. Jesus led the way in the initial episode. He outlined his motive for investing His all. He said that he entered the race to “*preach Good News to the poor...proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the downtrodden will be freed...and that the time of the Lord’s favor has come.*” He told a short man hiding in Sycamore tree, “*The Son of man came to seek and to save what was lost.*” He did not seek personal financial gain, nor prestige, or power, or to overcome his personal hang-ups. He entered the race of life so that others would find life, that others may win the race. Along the way, he had many successes; lives were touched and changed by his presence and power. Obstacles, roadblocks, resistance, betrayal, and suffering and even death attempted to eliminate him. However, nothing kept Him from the final pit stop. The tomb was empty. Love was the only incentive that drove him to make such a worthy investment.

One could list several reasons why a corporate or private investor would invest financial capital into land, business, or a bank. Some would be looking for future financial security. Others would simply be looking to acquire more wealth. Corporate investors would be looking for tax incentives, a strong community work ethic, educational opportunities, quality of life, and solid infrastructure. My friend

Jon, who is in his late twenties, said that one of his incentives for investment is acquiring more wealth so that he can have more to give away! Jon wants to be remembered as a generous person. He lives his life by what Jesus said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* My hope is that we too would learn the truth of Winston Churchill’s famous words, *“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”* Such a life is worthy of our investment.

I would like to share with you, our Kingdom stockholders, how our life together has been worthy of our investments this past year. We will see that we are developing a life, one life at a time, through our Connect Investments, Grow Investments, and our Serve Investments.

**We are committed to developing radiant followers of Christ who connect with God and others.** This past year we have connected with others through our First Impression Ministry, which strives to provide a warm, welcoming environment for all those who enter into our lives. In 2008, we distributed 73 welcome bags to first time visitors. Since January, we have given 44 welcome bags to our guests. These welcome bags contain information about our church family and a welcome gift. Forty-seven servants have provided Sunday morning food hospitality for all who come and worship God with us. One servant connected with eleven new Tipp City homeowners. We are making a positive first impression.

In addition, we have held several Explore sessions for our guests to learn more about our church “DNA.” They learned how to make deeper connections with our

church family. Approximately 37 folks enjoyed a wonderful lunch, made new friends, and learned how we develop radiant followers of Jesus Christ who connect, grow, and serve.

Our three Sunday worship celebrations provide an opportunity for folks to connect with God through diverse worship styles. Our 9:15 contemporary service has seen a 15% increase in attendance. Our music ministry with our chancel and bell choirs and our praise band brings us closer to Christ. Praises Unplugged ushers us into prayerful worship. Our children's choir brought us closer to Christ in their passionate faith. Our adult worship is supported by simultaneous children's activities. We also hired a new praise bandleader and multi-media coordinator to provide quality music and multi-media for our contemporary service. A new student praise band has been launched this fall.

Our special events connect with our community through music and other fun-filled events. Chocolate Jazz with David Wells brought 125 folks into a connection with God and others. The free community pool party saw 90 folks cooling down at the Tipp City Aquatic Center. The Ohio Valley British Brass Band prepared our spirits for the Christmas season. The Community Wednesday Night Dinners weekly draw over 100 folks for a restaurant quality meal with family ambiance. The Community "Price is Right" connected hearts with humor, great food, and raving beauties. Last October, Light the Night connected 400 kids and their families with a

friendly smile and delicious treat revealing God's love. Truly, God has made some special connections through our radical hospitality and passionate worship.

**In addition to these connect investments; we have seen much fruit in all our Grow investments this past year.** We have several classes and groups every week for every age and interest; where we have seen folks grow in their commitment to personal spiritual growth.

Our nursery has had a 96% increase with all the beautiful babies. First Look for ages 3-5 has increased by 50%. K-5 has added a new 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade level. Our children's ministry has doubled in attendance. 86 children heard and learned about the love of Christ during our evening VBS. Thirty-five VBS families attended a Smores and more gathering at Kyle Park. Two hundred and forty-seven children enjoyed our Christ-centered Upward Basketball and cheerleading this past winter. Forty-eight preschoolers attended our Mainstreet Preschool where they were introduced to the love of Christ. A new fence was also added so that these youngsters can enjoy God's creation.

Our devotion to Student ministry saw spiritual and numerical growth. Our teens learn the power of sharing their faith at Dare to Share in Chicago and the Alive Concert. Through fun-filled activities, intentional bible study, and service opportunities we have seen a 60% increase in participation. Our student ministry room has been renovated with a new ceiling and multi-media thanks to our Faith in Action week.

Our adult discipleship pathway is now fully equipped with three core classes. Ninety-two folks have taken our Walk class, fifteen have taken our Grow class and ten have taken the Serve class. Our Growth groups has deepened and grown during the last year, picking up momentum since our Radiant Life Weekend with 165 folks growing deeper in their faith. That is 65% of our average worship attendance!

We have invested in the development of our staff. We have attended training sessions at the Proctor Center in London, OH and at the Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas. Our preschool staff also undergoes training on a regular basis to help hone their skills in teaching and caring for young children. In all these ways and more, we are seeing folks grow in Christ.

**Finally, our Serve Investments have made an impact in people's lives. We have touched folks with the hands of Christ locally, nationally, and around the world.** God sent eight servants to help a Tipp City family whose house was flooded. Our SIMS, (Servant in Missions) group sent seven servants to assist a church in Lapel, Indiana. Thirty folks from SIMS served three families in Martinsville, IN whose homes were severely damaged by floodwaters. Any time the Lord sends our folks into either an area to serve as clean up or construction laborers, we are sending Servants in Mission.

Twenty servants serve our community clothesline. We sent eight pick-up truckloads of clothing to St. Paul's outreach in Dayton. Tipp City's Needy baskets received over 4500 lbs of food from us. One hundred and fifty Hispanic Migrant

workers and their families attended the Golden Acres Migrant Ministry annual Christmas party with our support.

We supported two couples who represent Christ on two college campuses with Campus Crusade for Christ. Habitat for Humanity in Miami County, Oasis Ministry in Dayton, Tipp Community Relief, Good Works in Athens, OH; Grass Roots Ministry to orphans in Tanzania, and a health clinic and orphanage in Mexico were touched by the love of Christ through out generous giving. A thousand dollars was raised for “Nothing but Nets” providing 100 mosquito nets for African people saving more than one hundred lives from Malaria. Over \$ 17,000 went back into our local community through our General Ministry Love Fund. Our women’s ministry gave over \$ 5,400 to local and national kingdom causes. Just as Jesus sent out, the twelve we send 12 Matthew ministers out to care for over 40 homebound and nursing home residents. Our driver ministry has taken 62 folks to medical appointments. Almost 900 free meals were prepared and delivered by our “Food with Love” ministry. Almost 250 pints of blood were donated through our church. We put our faith into action by serving our neighbors.

In addition, we put the needs of others before ourselves by contributing to the mission of the United Methodist Church. In 2008, we helped fund African University, the church in Mexico, Vietnam, and the Congo. We supported new church starts, revitalizing existing churches, campus ministries, and our camps for children and students by contributing over \$ 64,000 to the United Methodist Church.

This year we will contribute over \$ 36,000 to spreading the love of Christ through the United Methodist Church.

Our deep hope is to keep pushing forward with the key, strategic initiatives that help our church family grow in spiritual maturity and engage in life-changing mission. We also look forward to continuing to make ministry dreams come true so that many will grow along with us in advancing God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

**We see many Kingdom Investment Opportunities on the horizon.** In the year to come, may we make investments in making a new welcome desk center for our gathering area? May we make generous kingdom investments so that we can produce a new video for Explore? May we invest in creating a climate of excellence in our worship celebrations by redesigning our chancel area and improving our audio equipment. With these investments, we will see people making a love connection with the living God in worship and heart connections through heart-warming hospitality.

We see many opportunities to invest in our Grow ministries. We have a unique opportunity with Upward Basketball and Cheerleading, Mainstreet Preschool, and our growing children's and student ministries to expand our grow ministries with families and children of all ages. Next year we will be hiring a new Coordinator of Children's Ministries. We are committed to continue creating age-appropriate environments; employing interactive, innovative, Christ-centered curriculum and most importantly

providing competent and caring servants to help people of all ages grow in their faith. A new color copier will enable us to communicate more effectively the opportunities to grow deeper in Christ. A consultant will help us discover creative and unique ways to develop Christ-centered leaders who change our world.

We see many opportunities to invest in our serve ministries. By the grace of God, we hope to develop a partnership with Golden Acres, a Hispanic-migrant workers community in Bethel Township. Life skill training, spirited worship, and a joint vacation bible school will strengthened their lives, connect them to Christ, and deepen their faith.

We could send a team of Servants in Mission to Grass Roots Ministry in Tanzania to assist them in the care of the orphans. We could send a team of adults and youth to serve the poor in Mexico or Jamaica. Oasis, two collage campuses, Tipp-Monroe Community services, Needy Basket, and the Clothesline would all be touched by the hands of Christ through our generous financial support. Africa University, the United Methodist Church in Mexico, Vietnam, the Congo, and our camps would benefit by our commitment to contribute to the mission of the United Methodist Church.

In order to provide the leadership and coordination to build bridges of service with our community and world, we intend to add a new paid part-time staff position to lead our outreach ministries. The Coordinator of Outreach Ministries will lead, manage, coordinate, and equip our outreach ministries so that we can be effective in

reaching out with the hands of Christ. Our community and world deserves the love of Christ through our radiant witness.

How will you invest in the God's kingdom? I challenge you to make generous and sacrificial investments by **Praying about what God would have you to do to make our world a better place...by offering your Presence** when we come to connect with God and others...**by bringing your best Gifts so that others can simply live...and by sharing your love in humble Service to the poor.** We have the prize of changed lives waiting for us to claim. All we have to do is invest in the Most Amazing Race.