

“In The Zone—God-hearted”

[VIDEO OPENER]

It happens on the golf course. It happens in the boardroom. It can also happen in relationships. You birdie three straight holes on the back nine. You close the deal that makes your company a lot of money. Maybe you surprise your spouse with a weekend trip away. You say, “I’m hitting on all cylinders. Life is on a roll. **I’m in the zone!**” We love to throw that phrase out there these days, don’t we? In the zone. What does it mean to be in the zone? What’s a zone?

A zone simply is an area that’s distinguished from the surrounding areas. It’s in contrast to other places--it’s the sweet spot. Our God—and this is going to shock some of you—our great God wants all of us to live in the zone. He desperately desires us to operate in the sweet spot of his success. He wants me to live in the zone. He wants you to live there, too. So are you? Are you living in the zone? Are you zoned in? Or do you find yourself zoned out? You might ask, “What’s the sweet spot of God’s success?” **[TAKE OUT OUTLINES]**

Today I’m launching a brand new 3 week series called “In the Zone.” I’ve learned a lot just preparing for this stuff. I’m pumped up about this series because this is so huge. And because this topic is so monstrous, it’s not going to be easy to show up here at Saint Paul’s for this series. You’re going to have a bunch of wild and wacky stuff happen in your life to try to keep you from getting here. That’s the enemy. The enemy does not want us to talk about this stuff. He does not want us to download this stuff. So just understand that right up front.

Also, too, know this: that this stuff is difference-making stuff. It will help you and influence you in every area of your existence. I pray that you find yourself in the spirit of prayer during the next three weeks, that you simply say, “God, I want to open my heart and my life to this teaching.”

So, having said that, let’s kind of back in to this subject matter: living in the zone. Are you zoned in? Or do you find yourself zoned out? Our God is a God who wants us, who desperately desires us, to live in the zone. One way we do this as followers of Christ is by being God-hearted. Being God-hearted leads us to the zone and it means to mirror the majesty of who God is. If we know God personally, we should mirror who he is. We should have the character qualities, we should reflect the stuff that God is about.

Well, what’s God about? John 3:16 answers that pretty well. This is a verse that’s familiar to a lot of people. You even see this watching football games. After the extra point, they lower a sign, “John 3:16.” **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16).** From this verse we can see that one of the key characteristics of God’s heart is generosity. God loves us more than anything, and God demonstrates his love through his generosity. When we mirror that characteristic we’re being God-hearted. That’s a big part of being God-hearted.

Then look at Romans 8:31-32, **“If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).** Let me stop right there. If you don’t get anything else I say today, get this: God is for you. God is for me. It’s just down right sad, tragic, that a lot of the time we don’t want to accept that fact. God is for us. He wants us to have a life of excitement, adventure, vitality, and joy. Living the Christian life is the best way to live.

Let’s keep going. Look at the next verse here. **“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32).** So our God is a God who is for you and me, and our God is generous. And because God is generous, we should emulate that and be God-hearted.

Now, becoming generous starts with understanding something very important: the fact that everything we have comes from God—our gifts, our aptitudes, our abilities, even the material stuff that we have. And because God has given it to us, we should reflect that. That’s living in the zone.

One of the guys that we need to understand who lived in the zone lived a long time ago. His name was Abraham. Abraham was a very interesting guy. He came from a family of idol worshippers. He was zoned out. But he got zoned in to the blessings of God. Let’s read about his life. If you have your Bibles, turn to Genesis Chapter 12. I’ll read Verses 2 and 3. God’s going one on one here with Abraham. God says in Verse

2, [SLIDE...] "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:2-3, NIV).

You see here's how that works and what that means. Through Abraham, the nation of Israel was born. Through the nation of Israel, the Savior Jesus Christ was born. And because of His birth, we can be born into the family of God. Abraham was blessed to be a blessing.

Let's keep going, because Abraham was a man who was truly blessed. In fact, one of his workers said this about him: Genesis 24:35, he said—he's talking about Abraham here—[SLIDE...] "The Lord has blessed my master abundantly and he has become wealthy. He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, menservants and maidservants, and camels and donkeys" (Genesis 24:35). Abraham was blessed, if you read about his life, occupationally, relationally, and financially. He knew what it meant to live in the zone. He knew that everything he had came from God. He was blessed by God. And in turn, Abraham was a blessing.

Let's take a little side road for a minute. We throw that term around a lot. Blessing. You sneeze, "God bless you." Someone asks, "How are you doing?" and some people will say, "I'm blessed." Watch a comedian. He'll take the Lord's name in vain 400 times. He'll drop the F-bomb 35 times. And then to conclude his show, he'll say, "God bless you."

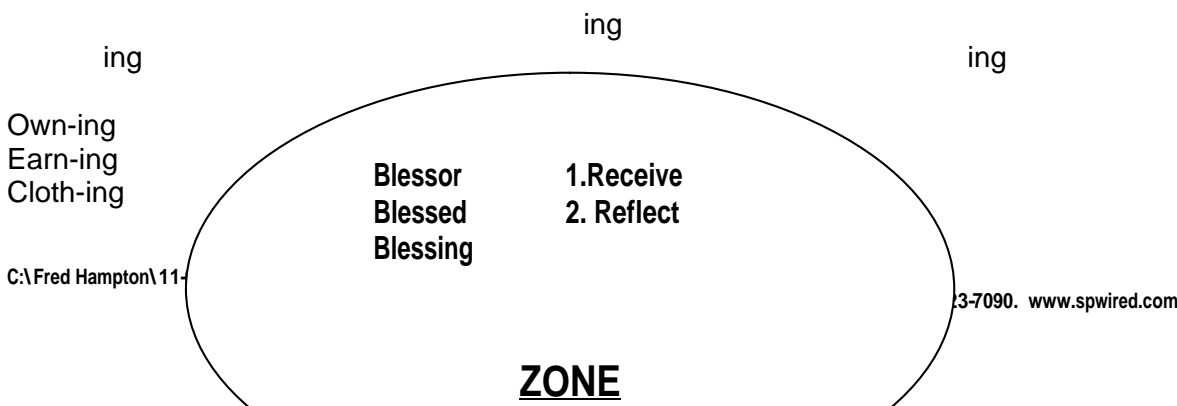
What does it mean to be blessed? Here's a working definition of what it means to be blessed: [SLIDE...] To be blessed means to be on the receiving end of the tangible and intangible favor of God. To be blessed means to be on the receiving end, to be a recipient, of the tangible and intangible favor of God. The intangible blessings are things like peace, joy, tranquility of the soul, love and all that. Things we cannot taste and touch and smell and feel. The tangible blessings of God are things like our stuff, our material possessions, our finances. So living in the zone means putting ourselves in a place where God can bless us. And a big part of that is knowing the difference between ownership and stewardship; the difference between management and ownership.

A few weeks ago I was at a meeting for pastors of large churches. We met for a day at Tan-Tar-A at the Lake of the Ozarks. One of the other pastors that was there owns a condo at Tan-Tar-A that overlooks the lake, gorgeous view, great accommodations, beautiful. I've known this guy for years. All his kids are grown and out of the house. He's a very good man. After the meeting he took me aside and said, "Aaron, anytime you and your family want to use the condo, just call me. Especially this summer. Bring the kids and it's all yours, and it's free. We want you to make yourself at home." I said, "Let me think about it. Yes!" He said, "Really, it's free, there's just a few things you've got to do when you're there. Take out the trash, wash the towels, clean up before you go. There's a little list on the refrigerator."

Isn't that generous of him and his wife? Free run of the place; a beautiful condo, great view, access to all kinds of activities. Wow! So are we going to do the things that are on that list on the 'frig? You bet we are! That's not our condo, but when we go, we're supposed to take care of it, manage it for the time we're there. And it will be a blast to do it.

You see, God has given all of us a phenomenal house. We've all been blessed by the Blessor. And He says, "Enjoy my house. I want to bless you. Be a blessing. But make sure to do the stuff on the list that I have on my refrigerator. You don't own it. No, no, no, no. You manage it. Enjoy it. But do my stuff, and obey the stuff on my list."

Let me try to explain it better. I think I'm a frustrated artist. Okay.



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Here's the zone. God is the Blessor. We understand that. He desperately desires us to live where? In the zone. We're wired to live in the zone. God is the Blessor. When we're in the zone, we understand God is the Blessor. In the zone, we are what? Blessed. God is the Blessor. We are blessed. Think about Abraham. Think about your life and mine. God's the Blessor. Everything comes from Him. We're blessed. And because we're blessed, because we're in the sweet spot of His success, what happens? We can become a blessing. A blessing. Well, you might be saying, "Okay, okay, how do we go from blessed to blessing? How do we do that?"

Good question. Two things. Number one, we receive. Number two, we reflect. We receive and reflect. We receive from the Blessor, the favor of God. Tangibly and intangibly, we receive Christ. We move from outside the zone to inside the zone. We're blessed. We understand that. We're not owners, we're managers. And we are a blessing as we receive that. And then as we reflect that, as we mirror the majesty of God, the generosity of God, as we are God-hearted.

But, there's a land out there that a lot of people live in. It's The Land of Ing. You would not believe the number of people who live in The Land of Ing. Now, what does it mean to live in The Land of Ing? I understand what it means to live in the zone, to be blessed by the Blessor, to be a blessing, to receive and reflect. But The Land of Ing? What's up with that?"

The Land of Ing would be those people who are into own-ing, earn-ing, hous-ing, cloth-ing, bling-bling. They only see that stuff. They think they're an owner. They think they own stuff. They think their stuff is their stuff. Their abilities, their abilities. Their junk's, their junk. Their aptitudes, their aptitudes. Their abilities, their abilities. Their deal, their deal. That's what they think. A lot of people live in The Land of Ing.

Here is some cool stuff, though. When we move from The Land of Ing into the zone, God puts his bless on our ing. He puts his super on our natural. Isn't that great? That's what our great God wants to do. He doesn't want us to hang out there in The Land of Ing. No, no, no. He wants to put his bless on our ing. Yet, we think whoever dies with the most ings wins.

Do you want adventure? Do you want excitement? Do you want vitality? Understand the fact that you're not an owner; you're a manager, you're a steward. Receive and reflect. It comes from the Blessor. If you're blessed, be a blessing. Be a blessing. That's the sweet spot of God's success. How do you become a blessing? You obey the list on the refrigerator. You enjoy the house God's given you. You enjoy the stuff. But you obey. You trust and obey.

I think I really started to learn this back in 1997. People often wonder about the history of Saint Paul's. Saint Paul's is 115 years old. It started in 1891 at 7th and Moffet. Then it relocated in 1940 to 32nd and Wall Streets. Then in 1992 relocated to right here. Every step of the way, for 115 years, this church has had a vision to lead people to an active faith in Jesus Christ. To help people live lives of purpose, hope, joy and meaning. And all along the way there were people who gave to see the mission and ministry of Saint Paul's flourish. For over 100 years people have propelled this ministry forward because they understood the fact that God was the Blessor. They understood the fact about the blessing and being blessed, and they turned around and reflected the heart and the nature of God. They knew the difference between owning and managing something.

As for Janet and I, in 1997, a couple years after we started here at Saint Paul's, we saw the potential here. A lot of people saw the potential so we all took on the challenge of paying off the old building, the Family

Life Center, so we could get ready to add space and make room for the people God was sending our way. At the time Janet and I owned a little place on Lake of the Ozarks and when it came time for us to give to the church to help get ready for the future we talked, we prayed and it was crystal clear to us. So we sold that place and gave what we had in it to Saint Paul's. It was \$20,000. Man we enjoyed that little house, but we've had even greater joy investing in God's house here.

You might be going, "Aaron, wait a minute. You're paid by Saint Paul's. You mean you give?" You better believe it! God doesn't care if I'm the pastor, or in real estate, or a teacher, or a coach or whatever. I'm just a guy, okay? We joyfully gave that to see lives changed, hearts healed, the lost found. That was a big turning point for us because it was really the moment we realized that we were never owners anyway! We were managers, stewards, caretakers. And when the real owner who was so generous to us, wanted us to do something different, who were we to argue. We had received, then we tried to reflect. We've lived within our means, we've tried to be God-hearted, we've tried to remember always that we're not owners of anything, we're managers. And God has blessed our life in many different ways. He's blessed us occupationally, relationally, and financially. It's just unbelievable.

Now, I'm not telling you, as you move from an owner to a manager that God's going to make your life easy. But I am telling you that you will know, and feel that you are in the zone. You'll be in the zone positioned to be blessed and then to be a blessing.

One time Jesus told a story in Matthew 25 about a guy that owned a business. And this guy hired several people. And he gave one guy five talents, the other guy two talents, and the other guy one talent. The guy said, "Invest the stuff and I'll be back later." When the owner came back, the guy with five talents had parlayed his into ten. The guy with two talents parlayed his into four. The guy with one talent dug a hole and, like, sat on the talent. The owner goes, "Man, what are you thinking? I gave this talent. Get out of my life. You're fired." Then he took the one talent, the owner did, and gave it to the other two who had parlayed their talents. Then Jesus said this, "If you're faithful over a little, I'm going to make you faithful over a lot."

It's the difference between ownership and management. It's doing the stuff on the list posted on the refrigerator in God's house.

Where are you? Are you zoned in or zoned out? Are you God-hearted? Are you generous? Do you see yourself as an owner of the abilities, aptitudes, stuff, money in your life? Or do you see yourself as a steward; someone blessed by God in order to bless others? My prayer for myself and for you is that we would truly be in the zone of God's blessing; that we really would be God-hearted. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I thank Rev. Ed Young, Senior Pastor of Fellowship Church in Grapevine, TX, for his resources for this message.