

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity



**"A generous (person) will
himself be blessed."**

(Proverbs 22:9a)

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

Themes for the three-week stewardship emphasis:

- “The Joy of Receiving God’s Blessings”
- “The Joy of Managing God’s Blessings”
- “The Joy of Sharing God’s Blessings”

*Coming
Soon!*



Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

“Whoever brings blessings will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered” (Proverbs 11:25).

“God has given us two hands, one to receive with and the other to give with” (Rev. Billy Graham).

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

A Three-week Stewardship Emphasis



Week One: The Joy of Receiving God's Blessings

Week Two: The Joy of Managing God's Blessings

Week Three: The Joy of Sharing God's Blessings

Coming Soon to
_____ Church Name _____

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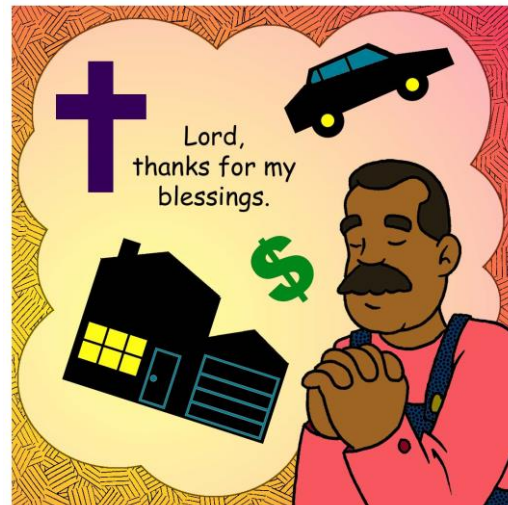
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Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

A Giving Heart Is a Gift of God.

Week 1: Receiving



Week 2: Managing



Week 3: Sharing



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(Acts 20:35).**

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity



Leader Tips:

A Three-week Stewardship Emphasis

- The Joy of Receiving God's Blessings
- The Joy of Managing God's Blessings
- The Joy of Sharing God's Blessings

Emphasis Goal:

The goal of this three-week emphasis is to address whole-life Christian stewardship. We first receive with gratitude the generous blessings from our Heavenly Father; then we are called to faithfully manage those blessings; and then we are to share the blessing that God has entrusted to us. Through this emphasis, your members' relationship with their Lord will be deepened, they will better understand Christian stewardship, and they will grow as stewards.

Power Point Presentation to Church Leaders

Pastors and stewardship leaders are encouraged to offer a prepared power point presentation to help your elders, council members, and committee members grow as stewards and to become familiar with the three-week emphasis. This power point focuses on receiving, managing, and sharing God's blessings joyfully. This presentation to the church leaders should be offered just shortly before the emphasis is shared with the congregation. You may offer this 33-slide power point presentation in one or more sessions. The power point file on the CD is titled "Power point presentation for church leaders"

Spending time discussing this emphasis with your church leaders will help them become informed and more interested in the emphasis.

Small-group Bible Study Participation:

In order for your members to grow as faithful stewards, they need to be reading and studying God's Word. Every effort should be made to increase Bible study participation. To show the importance of Bible study, council members, elders, and other church leaders should be encouraged to attend. This small group Bible study covers the three studies from the book *Tithing: An Unexpected Joy* (These books are available at 50 cents each). An answer guide is on the CD. You will need to recruit leaders and secure locations for the three studies. The effort to get the Bible study leaders and set the locations for the studies needs to get underway at least two months prior to the emphasis.

Sunday Morning Bible Studies:

In order for your members to grow in their relationship with the Lord and to grow as stewards, they need to spend time reading and studying God's Word. The three studies for Sunday mornings are available on the CD. An answer guide is on the CD.

Testimonials/ Lay reader talks

There are three lay reader talks provided. Personal testimonials are more effective, but, if no willing member is found to share his/her stewardship story with the congregation, these talks may be used. The talks may be given at the start of the service or during the time of the offering.

Daily Devotions

It is recommended that you distribute the copied daily devotions for the first week on the Sunday prior to the start of the emphasis, and the other two sets on the following two Sundays (one set each Sunday). Then members will be able to read the daily devotions focusing on the weekly theme prior to the message on Sunday.

Emphasis CD

All the material in the binder and on the CD may be copied. The only materials that will need to be purchased, if interested, are the banners, and, if you plan on offering small group Bible studies, you will need to order the Bible study books. After downloading the files, you are permitted to make changes. One suggested change is to add your church's name to the trifold brochures. For example, you may want to remove the Stewardship Advisors name and replace it with your church's name.

Banners

Banners are optional. If you want to use them, they will need to be ordered (while supplies last). The larger banners can be clipped very nicely onto 30 x 40 inch foam board that can be purchased at places like Office Depot and Staples for approximately \$2.00 each. These will sit on tripods or easels which make the banners very visible to the congregation.

Commitment Sunday (weekend)

Members should be encouraged to make financial commitments to the Lord through their church. Commitment forms can be distributed with the bulletins/worship folders on commitment Sunday, which is the third Sunday of the emphasis. Members should be asked to bring their commitments forward to the altar. Every effort should be made to make Commitment Sunday a special and meaningful day. To show the joy and importance of making a commitment to the Lord, you may want to have balloons and/or other decorations. You could provide some special snacks. Some churches have found that inviting a special guest preacher is helpful. Some churches celebrate their commitments by having a lunch on Sunday.

The commitment forms should be available on commitment Sunday. If you send the pastor's letter to your members, you are encouraged to enclose a commitment form with the letter. This will act as a reminder for members to think and pray about their commitments. If they fail to bring their commitment form with them, it won't matter because there will be another form for them on Commitment Sunday.

After Final week

You are encouraged to send reminder letters to members who failed to return their commitment forms and send thank-you letters to members who returned their commitment forms.

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

Getting Organized Prior to the Emphasis:

Publicity/ Communication

Two months prior:	Identify small group Bible study leaders and locations for Bible studies focusing on the booklet <i>Tithing: An Unexpected Joy</i> .
Month prior:	Newsletter article Listing of small group Bible study times and locations Promote sign up for small group Bible studies Order the Bible study booklets <i>Tithing: An Unexpected Joy</i> , and banners.
Three weeks prior:	Place clip art—"Coming Soon"—in bulletin. Promote sign up for small group studies.
Two weeks prior:	Promote sign up for small group studies. Place clip art—"Coming Soon"—in bulletin. Copy daily devotions to be distributed the Sunday prior to start of emphasis. Begin copying and folding the trifold brochures
One week prior:	Place devotions "The Joy of Receiving God's Blessings" in bulletins or have ushers hand them out (Members should be encouraged to read the devotions prior to next week's sermon on the theme "The Joy of Receiving God's Blessings."). Place bulletin message in bulletin. Start small group Bible studies. Put up banners (optional) Send letter from pastor to church members..

In order for people to grow in their generosity and to help them experience the joy of generosity, they need to be reading and studying God's Word. This emphasis offers two three-week Bible study opportunities. The small group studies will focus on the booklet: *Tithing: An Unexpected Joy* and the Sunday morning Bible studies will use the Bible studies found on the emphasis CD.

Launch the Three-week Emphasis:

First week:

“The Joy of Receiving God’s Blessings”

Place the bulletin message and bulletin message with illustration in the bulletin
Place copied devotions “The Joy of Managing God’s Blessings” in bulletins or
have ushers hand them out (Members should be encouraged to read the
devotions prior to next week’s sermon on the theme “The Joy of Managing
God’s Blessings.”).

Testimonial or Lay-reader talk for first week provided on the CD

Distribute trifold brochure “The Joy of Receiving God’s Blessings.”

Remind people of the small group Bible studies and the Sunday morning Bible
study opportunities.

Second week of the small group Bible studies and first week of the Sunday
morning studies

Children’s message

Worship helps

Sermon

Second week:

“The Joy of Managing God’s Blessings”

Place the bulletin message and bulletin message with illustration in the
bulletin.

Place copied devotions “The Joy of Sharing God’s Blessings” in bulletins or
have ushers hand them out (Members should be encouraged to read the
devotions prior to next week’s sermon on the theme “The Joy of Sharing
God’s Blessings.”).

Testimonial or Lay-reader talk for second week provided on the CD

Distribute trifold brochure “The Joy of Managing God’s Blessings.”

Distribute or email flyer encouraging members to experience the joy of
generosity this week.

Remind people that next Sunday is Commitment Sunday or Commitment
Weekend.

Third week of the small group Bible studies and second week of the Sunday
morning studies

Children’s message

Worship helps

Sermon

Third week:

“The Joy of Sharing God’s Blessings”

Place the bulletin message and bulletin message with illustration in the bulletin

Testimonial or Lay-reader talk for third week provided on the CD

Distribute trifold brochure “The Joy of Sharing God’s Blessings.”

Place commitment form in bulletins. Allow members time to fill them out and
collect them at the altar.

Third week of the Sunday morning studies

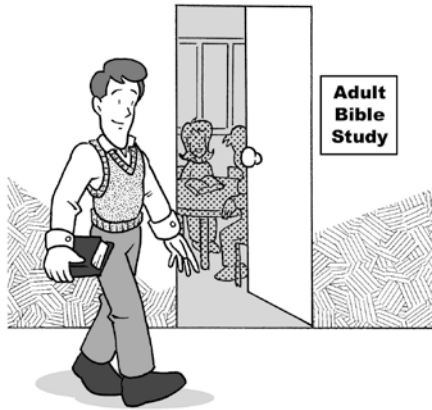
Children’s message

Worship helps

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

Small-group Bible Studies

To help God's people grow in their relationship with Jesus, pastors and church leaders should continually encourage and provide Bible study opportunities. In this emphasis, you have Bible study material not only for Sunday morning; you also have study material for small groups. Small-group studies of eight to 15 people facilitate discussion and enhance Christian fellowship.



The small-group Bible studies will focus on the book *Tithing: An Unexpected Joy*. Joy comes from being loved by God and sharing that love. As we share God's love through our generous giving, God infuses us with joy. Acts of Christian giving leave us feeling blessed. Through our generosity, we reflect God's image of love. Our giving in the name of Jesus points others to the Ultimate Giver, our Heavenly Father

God wants us to be joyful people. Giving spontaneously will give us temporary joy. However faithful and cheerful giving that is intentional, regular, and proportionate connects us to God, and the joy that comes as a result of our giving will last. Tithing is the giving discipline that encourages us to make giving a priority. It also encourages us and provides a benchmark for us to give in proportion to the blessings God entrusts to us. Because our hearts are changed, giving is no longer something we've "got" to do but something we "get" to do. Tithing blesses the church and the tithers. By God's grace, we will experience the joy of giving generously.

To order *Tithing: An Unexpected Joy* @ 50 cents each, call 248-644-6150 or email stewardshipadv@aol.com. No prepayment is necessary. An invoice will send with the material.

Prior to the start of the small groups:

1. Identify small-group leaders
2. Identify locations
3. Encourage members to sign up
4. Order the book *Tithing: An Unexpected Joy*

Conducting the studies:

- Participants in the small-group studies should be given the book *Tithing: An Unexpected Joy*.
- Participants should be encouraged to read the daily readings.
- During the study, the leader may want to review four of the daily readings. In week one, some key points in the first four studies may be pointed out. In week two, the next four readings could be discussed, etc.
- Answers to the questions for the three small-group studies are on the CD.

Letter to members

Dear Member,

Greetings in the name of our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus!

I am pleased to share with you that beginning on ____ (Date) ____ we will begin a three-week stewardship emphasis titled **Experiencing the Joy of Generosity**. This three-week period will be an enriching time for our congregation. Through the Holy Spirit, God continually reaches out to us and daily gives us His love, grace, and mercy. Faithful stewardship is our faithful response of gratitude for God's generosity to us.

The three weekly themes for **Experiencing the Joy of Generosity** are as follows:

Week one: "The Joy in Receiving God's Blessings"

Week two: "The Joy in Managing God's Blessings"

Week three: "The Joy in Sharing God's Blessings"

During these three weeks, our worship services, sermons, Sunday Bible studies, and small group Bible studies will focus on these themes, which consider our **joy** and **generosity** in Christ.

God's people truly experience joy as we spend time getting to know God through His Word and participating in the Lord's Supper. The Holy Spirit helps us begin to understand how much God loves us and what He has done for us. We experience true delight, or we might say a heavenly bliss, knowing that God loves us and is with us. When we do God's will and bear much fruit, He fills us with His joy. This is beautifully expressed in the book of Nehemiah when the people committed themselves faithfully to building the wall of Jerusalem. Their rejoicing was evident at the dedication of the wall. *"And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away"* (Nehemiah 12:43).

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God transforms us into truly generous, loving and giving people. With new hearts of faith, we care for others. In giving to others and our church, we experience the joy of generosity. In this three-week emphasis, you will understand why Rev. Chip Ingram wrote, "Giving generously is one of the smartest, most intellectually sound and emotionally satisfying decisions you will ever make."

May God continue to bless us as we faithfully steward our lives and all the blessings which He has entrusted to us.

Serving Christ together,

Pastor

Newsletter article preceding the emphasis

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

In a couple of weeks, we will begin a three-week stewardship emphasis titled “Experiencing the Joy of Generosity. This will be an exciting and beneficial three weeks of sermon messages and Bible studies. We believe this program will be a blessing to those who already are experiencing the joy of being generous with the gifts God has given to them, and we hope and pray that this effort will help many more experience the joy that comes from giving faithfully and generously.

When we give to God through giving to our church and others, we experience one of the true joys of being Christians. Jesus said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). God doesn’t need our gifts, but He asks us to give them. He accepts and uses them and gives us joy in sharing them. As we respond to God’s love for us by giving back to Him part of what He’s given to us, He reacts by giving us even more. *“Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you”* (Luke 6:38). Although we don’t give so that we will receive God’s blessings, God’s Word promises us that, when we give faithfully and willingly, we will receive an abundance of spiritual blessings and, for some, material blessings as well .

Have you ever wondered why you are left with such a joyful feeling when you are able to give a gift to your church or to help a person in need? The answer to that question may be rooted in us as Christians who are being recreated in the image of God. To be made in God’s image means we are made to be like Him whose nature is to give. Giving helps us feel fulfilled as we reflect His nature. Although the image of God was lost by sin, as those converted by faith in Jesus, we *“have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator”* (Colossians 3:10). Our Creator empowers us to give joyfully to our church and others according to His will. With this attitude of joyful gratitude, God keeps us close to Him, and others see His image through us.

Our pursuit for fulfillment and joy culminates in the discovery that we receive those things when, by God’s grace, we respond with eagerness to God’s directive to give. Like David, we exclaim, *“But who [are we]...that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from You, and of Your own have we give You”* (1 Chronicles 29; 14).

We hope and pray that the emphasis “Experiencing the Joy of Generosity” will be a blessing to you and your family.

Bulletin message the week prior to start of emphasis

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

Next week, we begin our stewardship emphasis “Experiencing the Joy of Generosity.” We hope and pray that you will be blessed by the three weeks of sermon messages and Bible studies. Joy is a beautiful word that seems to bring a smile in saying it. As God’s people, we know that Jesus is the source of our joy. We have the deep and abiding joy of being loved by God through Jesus. King David wrote, *“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore”* (Psalm 16:11). Our stewardship emphasis will encourage us to experience the joy that God gives us through our generosity in sharing with others and extending His kingdom. In the words of Rev. Robert Schnase: “Through our generosity, God can do extraordinary things. Through our giving, God changes lives, and in changing them, transforms us...The practice of generosity describes the Christian’s unselfish willingness to give in order to make a positive difference for the purposes of Christ.” May God bless us as we honor the Lord through our generosity.

Three-weeks and two-weeks prior to emphasis, place “Coming Soon” clip art in the Sunday bulletins



Following the Final Week of Emphasis:

Bulletin message for week following emphasis

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

Members Respond to Annual Stewardship Appeal

We are wrapping up our annual stewardship commitments. We thank all those who have already submitted their commitments for ____ (year) _____. Your support enables us to continue our ministries in the church and the community. Thank you! We encourage everyone to submit a commitment for ____ (year) _____ commitment by the end of the year. Making a financial commitment is part of the commitment that we make to the Lord and to each other as members of our church. God has brought us together—let's all do the best we can for the Lord!

Telling your members thanks

Pastors and stewardship leaders have the opportunity to say thank you to those who made financial commitments. This letter should come from the pastor or stewardship leader. This thank you should be sent as soon as possible after each commitment is received. You may use the letter that is on the CD or write your own personal thank-you letters. If you write your own letter, you should describe some highlights of the past year and a paragraph looking forward to opportunities for the coming year.

Asking members for their commitments

A letter should be sent to encourage those who have not submitted a commitment to make a commitment. Following up with this letter shows that it is important for each member to make a commitment to the Lord through your church. A letter is provided on the CD.

Bulletin message to be used the two Sundays following the emphasis

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

Members Respond to Annual Stewardship Appeal

We are wrapping up our annual stewardship commitments. We thank all those who have already submitted their commitments for _____ (year) _____. Your support enables us to continue our ministries in the church and the community. Thank you! We encourage everyone to submit a commitment for _____ (year) _____ commitment by the end of the year. Making a financial commitment is part of the commitment that we make to the Lord and to each other as members of our church. God has brought us together—let's all do the best we can for the Lord!

Thank-you letter to members who turned in a Commitment Form

Dear Fellow Christians,

Greetings in the name of our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus!

Thank you for your recent financial commitment for ____ (year) _____. Your commitment will further God's work at our church. The generosity of so many people supports our ministries for children and youth, the elderly, the, sick, the shut-ins, our staff, and our facilities, along with outreach and missions.

We hope you were blessed by our recent stewardship emphasis "Experiencing the Joy of Generosity." God makes our generosity possible, and He gives us joy in receiving, managing and sharing His blessings faithfully and generously. Pastor Robert Schnase writes in his book *Extravagant Generosity*: "Through our generosity, God can do extraordinary things. Through our giving, God changes lives, and in changing them, transforms us...The practice of generosity describes the Christian's unselfish willingness to give in order to make a positive difference for the purposes of Christ." Through faithful followers of Jesus, God is truly blessing the work and ministry here at our church.

We will keep you and the entire congregation informed on the work of our ministries throughout the year so you can see your contributions in action.

Thank you again for sharing your blessings and being a partner in this journey of faith. May God's blessings be yours as you faithfully and joyfully receive, manage, and share all that He has entrusted to you.

Serving Christ together,

Pastor _____

Letter to members who have not turned in a commitment form

Dear Member,

Greetings in the name of risen Lord and Savior, Jesus!

“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints” (Colossians 1:3-4). Through the faithful stewardship of the Body of Christ here at our church, we are able to proclaim the Gospel in both word and in deed.

During our recent stewardship emphasis “Experiencing the Joy of Generosity,” we focused on the joy of receiving God’s blessings, the joy of managing God’s blessings, and the joy of sharing God’s blessings. Through faith, we understand that God is the source of all good things. As recipients of His love and generosity, we demonstrate our gratitude by faithfully receiving, managing, and sharing God’s blessings.

How can we respond to this great love of our Father and use all His gifts to us for His glory? God is totally committed to us. Are you willing to make a commitment to Him? Your commitment form has not yet been received. Perhaps you’re still praying about it; maybe you’ve forgotten it; maybe it’s been lost. We are enclosing another form and ask that you complete it and return it to the church office at your earliest convenience.

Thank you and may God continue to pour out His blessings on you as you experience the joy of generosity.

Serving Christ together,

Pastor _____

Week Two

Contents on this page may be used to make three separate power point slides to encourage members to read the trifold brochures.

File on CD: Trifold power points

Week One



The Joy of Receiving God's Blessings



We hope you will read and be blessed by the trifold brochure "The Joy of Receiving God's Blessings."

Week One:
Experiencing the Joy
of Generosity



The Joy of Managing God's Blessings



We hope you will read and be blessed by the trifold brochure "The Joy of Managing God's Blessings."

Week Two:
Experiencing the Joy
of Generosity

Week Three



The Joy of Sharing God's Blessings



We hope you will read and be blessed by the trifold brochure "The Joy of Sharing God's Blessings."

Week Three:
Experiencing the Joy
of Generosity

Old Testament Reading: Exodus 36:2-7

² And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the Lord had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work. ³ And they received from Moses all the contribution that the people of Israel had brought for doing the work on the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning,⁴ so that all the craftsmen who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task that he was doing, ⁵ and said to Moses, “The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do.” ⁶ So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp, “Let no man or woman do anything more for the contribution for the sanctuary.” So the people were restrained from bringing, ⁷ for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more.

Epistle: 2 Cor. 8:1-7

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

Gospel: Luke 10:25-37 (Good Samaritan)

²⁵ And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” ²⁷ And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁸ And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.” ²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” ³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

Worship Helps

Week One: “The Joy of Receiving God’s Blessings

Readings:

Old Testament: 1 Chronicles 29:10-14
Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 4:1-7
Gospel: Luke 19:1-10 (Zacchaeus received faith, salvation, and the gift of generosity)

Hymns:

“Come Thou Almighty King”
“Beautiful Savior”
“Sing to the Lord of Harvest”

Litany from Psalm 103

Pastor: *“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.”* (verses 1-2)

People: Joyfully, dear Father in Heaven, I receive Your gracious gifts.

Pastor: *“Who forgives all your iniquity, Who heals all your diseases.”* (verse 3)

People: Joyfully, Lord, I thank You and give You praise for the forgiveness of sins.

Pastor: *“Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy;”* (verse 4)

People: I rejoice, Lord, that You have rescued me from the pit of hell and daily shower on me Your love and mercy.

Pastor: *“Who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”* (verse 5)

People: All I need I joyfully receive from Your gracious hand.

All: Let us never take for granted, dear Father, all that You give us and do for us day-by-day. Teach us to “experience the joy of generosity” as with gratitude we receive Your goodness. Through Christ, our Savior, we pray. Amen.

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

The Joy in Receiving God's Blessings

Today is week one in our stewardship emphasis **Experiencing the Joy of Generosity**. Our theme for today is "The Joy in Receiving God's Blessings." In the words of Billy Graham, "God has given us two hands, one to give with and the other to receive with." Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are able to appreciate how generously God gives to us. He provides for us physically and spiritually. God demonstrated His love for us by giving "*His only Son, that*



whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). First God loved, then He gave, and He keeps on giving. Forgiveness, salvation, and, in fact, all we are and everything we have or ever will have are gifts from God. May God help you experience the joy of receiving God's blessings.

We hope you will read and be blessed by the trifold brochure "The Joy in Receiving God's Blessings" that you received.

Next week, we will focus on the joy of managing God's blessings, and, on the third week, we will discuss the joy of sharing God's blessings. We hope you will join us in both worship and Bible study.

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

STEWARDSHIP CAN BE DEFINED AS "A GRATEFUL RESPONSE TO GIFTEDNESS."

King David prayed: "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from You, and of Your own have we given You" (1 Chronicles 29:14).



Lay reader talk for week one: “The Joy of Receiving God’s Blessings”

The Joy of Receiving and Giving

This is the first week of our stewardship emphasis **Experiencing the Joy of Generosity**. Our theme for week one is “The Joy of Receiving God’s Blessings.” Please read the trifold brochure with the title “The Joy of Receiving God’s Blessings.”

In the beginning God created life, and He sustains it through His power. The life we have today and each day that we will enjoy in the future are gifts from God. James 1:7 reads, *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights...”* The air we breathe, the food we eat, and the places we live are all made possible because of God’s grace. Through His Word and Sacraments, we receive His grace that gives us life eternal. We receive His love that didn’t spare His only Son, and we receive His forgiveness along with His victory over sin and death. God is the giver, and we are the receivers. As God’s redeemed people, we receive God’s gifts with joy and thanksgiving. What a privilege it is to receive God’s love, grace, and mercy daily. Through faith, we become dependent upon God’s gifts, and we receive them gratefully and cheerfully.

However Jesus tells us something very interesting and paradoxical. Jesus said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). At first glance, this seems to be impossible. We know the great joy that comes from being the object of God’s love and care as we receive His blessings. What Jesus is telling us is that, while there is great joy in receiving, there is even a deeper joy in giving. God turns things upside down. Whether we have little or lots to give, we can all experience joy through our giving.

During this three-week stewardship emphasis, we will better understand the joy that comes from receiving God’s gifts and the greater joy that comes from giving them.

to the Lord. He prays, *“For all things come from You and of Your own have we given You”* (1 Chronicles 29:14).



Showing our Gratitude

God gives us His love, goodness, and mercy daily. He has given us victory over sin and death through His Son. Christ has given us the blessings of forgiveness of sins, justification, a new life, and an eternal hope. Because of His bountiful blessings, we should be compelled to show our gratitude. Do we? Could we, at times, be taking all that we receive for granted?

If Christ were to come into our homes in physical form, certainly we would express our thanks in tangible ways. We would make Him comfortable, run errands for Him, offer Him our best food, and give Him our time and attention. Since we don't have that

opportunity, we show our gratitude in other ways.

One way that we express our gratitude is to give thanks throughout the day. When we see life and its blessings as gifts, we are prepared to offer our thanks. Our thanksgiving is demonstrated when we use the faith God has given us to live in obedience to His Word. God hears and sees our gratitude through the lives we live. When we generously share our time and money with others in Christian love, we show our thanksgiving for our gifts. Our giving reflects Christ's love in us. We express our thanks to our heavenly Father when we joyfully receive His gifts in private and corporate worship.

As stewards, we find that gratitude to God opens our hearts to receive more of God's love which enables us, in turn, to be more faithful with our time, talents, and treasures. In response to God's love and grace, we give ourselves and our resources. When we acknowledge God as the creator and owner of all, we will serve the Lord faithfully out of gratitude for all His gifts to us. Our gratefulness to God will enable us to experience joy in Him even during bad times because God promises to comfort and sustain us in all things.

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The Joy of Receiving God's Blessings



Week One: Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

Receiving, Then Giving

In the words of Rev. Billy Graham, “God has given us two hands, one to give with and the other to receive with.” Most stewardship educational efforts focus primarily on helping God’s people grow in the grace of giving and serving. Little time, if any, is devoted to the importance of receiving God’s blessings faithfully and joyfully.

How often, during the course of the day, do we think about what we are receiving from God every moment? That next breath you inhale – who manufactured that? The warmth of the sun that sustains our beings and every living thing – did you hang that sun in the sky? As God asked Job, “*Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?*” (Job 38:4).

Everything we receive comes from God’s hand, and we can never run out of things for which to thank Him. Receiving is an essential part of our relationship with God. God is the giver; we are the receivers. Receiving can be difficult because we don’t like to “owe” anything to anyone. If someone invites us for dinner, we must plan an even more elaborate meal for them. If someone does us a favor, we must reciprocate in an equal manner. This attitude creeps into our relationship with our Lord.

It’s hard for us to comprehend that, along with all the physical and material gifts He gives us, God also offers us spiritual gifts: forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation through His Son. We who pride ourselves on our independence, on our self-sufficiency, find that these once presumed positive traits keep us from knowing God, from relying on Him, and from joyfully, freely receiving all He wants to give us. But this is God’s plan: He joyfully gives us all we “need to support this body and life” (Luther’s Explanation to the First Article of the Creed) and Heaven besides.



Many have thought they must “do” something to earn these gifts, but God says, “No.” *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God...”* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

As we hear His Word and participate in His Sacraments, the Holy Spirit is

at work, creating and nurturing faith until at last we get it! We come to the realization, as Martin Luther did, that we are all “beggars before God.” But we don’t acknowledge this with a sigh of resignation. No, with joy we eagerly receive all God has to give us. Only after we have found joy in receiving are we able to respond by giving back freely and with proper motivation. We love others because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). We give whatever we can because God gave even His own Son to die for us (John 3:16).

Day by day, by the Spirit’s sanctifying work in us, we come to rejoice in our role as God’s stewards, managers of the many and great blessings God gives us daily.

King David’s Prayer

Reading about King David in the Old Testament, we are made aware of how much he trusted God and how he gave God the glory and honor he, as a powerful ruler, could have ascribed to himself. One of his greatest achievements was the amassing of all the materials Solomon would need to build the temple. Perhaps he had enough resources so he could have provided everything necessary out of his own wealth, but he involved the people who gave from their resources as well. When all is ready, he prays a prayer commending the whole project

Children's message for week one

Good morning boys and girls! It is great to see you!

Today we are going to be talking about the word "joy." This week and the next two weeks we will be talking to the adults about the "joy" of receiving, managing, and sharing God's blessings. We can take the letters of the word "joy" to help us remember something very important. The J in joy can stand for "Jesus"; the O can stand for "Others"; and the Y for "You."

When you put Jesus and others first before yourself, you will discover joy. Joy is like being happy, but it is much more. We can be happy many times throughout the day. For example, I bet you're happy when your mom makes your favorite meal, when you get to watch TV, or when your friends treat you nicely. These worldly things can bring happiness. But when the meal is eaten, the TV turned off, and your friends hurt your feelings, you don't feel as happy as you did before. Joy, on the other hand, stays. You have joy because you know your mom and dad love you no matter what. You have joy because you know that Jesus is always with you and is always for you.

Another way to experience joy is to do something nice for others. If you spend time with someone who appears lonely, help someone with their homework, or share some of your snacks with another boy or girl, God will give you a special feeling That's joy!

Thank you for coming up here this morning! Let's pray. Thank You for the joy that You give us because we know that You love us and want the best for us. Thank You for watching over us and protecting us and especially for loving us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Stewardship Emphasis: “Experiencing the Joy of Generosity”

Sermon Week One: “The Joy of Receiving God’s Blessings”

Text: 1 Corinthians 4:7

“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer” (Psalm 19:14).

The text for the sermon today comes from the Epistle reading in 1 Corinthians, specifically verse 7, which reads: *“For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”* So far the text.

Before we unpack this text today, let me take a moment or two and discuss what we will be hearing here at church over the next three weeks. This is our annual Stewardship emphasis called **Experiencing the Joy of Generosity**.

The weeks are broken up into three separate aspects of stewardship. This week I will be covering the **Joy of Receiving God’s Blessings**; next week will consider the **Joy of Managing God’s Blessings**; and then on week three we will learn more about the “Joy of Sharing God’s Blessings.”

Joy, Joy, Joy. There is lots of joy coming in the next three weeks of sermons. Therefore, let’s make sure that we take a minute to understand fully what that joy is. Many will consider joy and happiness as the same or at least very similar. At the surface this may seem correct, but if we compare joy and happiness, we learn of some significant differences.

Meaning

Happiness is an emotion in which one experiences feelings ranging from contentment and satisfaction to bliss and intense pleasure.

Joy is stronger, but less common than happiness. Witnessing or achieving selflessness to the point of personal sacrifice frequently triggers joy. It is feeling spiritually connected to God or to people.

Causes

Happiness comes from earthly experiences, and material objects.

Joy comes from spiritual experiences, caring for others, gratitude, and thankfulness

Effect

Happiness shows itself in the person through an outward expression of elation.

Joy shows itself in the person through an inward peace and contentment.

Time Period

Happiness is temporary, based on outward circumstances.

Joy is lasting, based on inward circumstances.

There is a wonderful quote in the devotions that were passed out for last week as preparation for this sermon and, if you did not take advantage of looking at them, please do during the next two weeks so that your heart and mind will be prepared for the sermons to come. The quote is from

Epicurus, the Greek philosopher, and it states: “If you want to make a man happy, add not to his riches but take away from his desires.”

I am going to modify what Epicurus said to this: “If you want to make a man happy for a short time add to his riches, but if you want to make a man joyful, content, and at peace take away from his desires.

So we can see that there are some similarities between happiness and joy, but there are also some significant differences. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, but happiness is not. Joy is present even in sorrow, but we cannot be happy when we are full of sorrow. Happiness is being elated, and you cannot be elated in sorrow. Joy is having peace and contentment, and we can be at peace and content even in sorrow. Hold on to that thought because we will come back to it later.

Now let’s return to our text for today from 1 Corinthians. The book of Corinthians was written by Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, as he was addressing practical issues that the church was dealing with. They had many issues that were going on: sexual immorality, lack of unity, issues with marriage, and idolatry.

Sound familiar? Today we still deal with the same issues of sin that the church in Corinth wrestled with.

There is another issue that Paul speaks to in Corinthians regarding their practice of Communion and how they had turned this wonderful means of God’s grace into a drunken party with segregation based on a person’s economic status.

They did not know how to receive simply, humbly and joyfully this gift God was giving them in His Holy Supper.

And Paul does not mince his words when he points this out to them. He asked them in the words of our text: *“For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”*

True, but tough words. And these words are not only for the Corinthians but definitely apply to the world today.

The world today is great at seeking and receiving happiness, especially when that comes in the form of material riches, but the world is not very good at receiving blessings with joy, especially those blessings that remove desires rather than build wealth.

Many people, and maybe even many within this sanctuary, look at worship in a completely opposite way than God would have us look at it.

I often have this discussion with the people during Bible Study Classes or conversations when we discuss worship and what it is. So many see it as us giving and sharing something with God, sharing our time, sharing our offerings, sharing our songs.

That is not what worship is. Worship is not us giving, but rather worship is us receiving. Receiving God’s gifts, His blessings, and His means of grace. We so often misunderstand this when it comes

to what worship is.

Just earlier today you received God's forgiveness in His absolution. As I speak you are receiving God's words and in a few minutes you will receive His very body and blood in communion with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. Please be aware of this and what you are receiving.

So, too, when it comes to stewardship, I truly believe if we are honest with ourselves, we often cringe when the annual stewardship emphasis is upon us. We think that now here come those sermons on how we should give or time our talents and especially our money to God.

That is not what stewardship is.

So often we think of stewardship as us giving to God with a special focus on material things. This is not stewardship.

Stewardship begins and ends with our realizing what God has given to us and the joy and the peace and the contentment that come from this. Period. It is the Gospel, *"for God so loved the world that He gave!"* That He gave, not we gave. That He gave His one and only Son to die for us.

A pastor wrote about his own confusion regarding what stewardship is. Here are his words:

After 8th grade and Confirmation I went through high school and college years falling away from the church. I was somewhat involved, but, honestly, it was rather hollow and I was really just going through the motions.

Then in the mid-1990s my one and only big brother was diagnosed with cancer and that rocked my world. One time after visiting him in the hospital I was headed home, but rather than going home I headed to church. I knelt in front of the cross, and I prayed like I had never prayed before. And part of that prayer was my confused attempt at stewardship.

I tried to make a deal with God and said that, if He would heal my brother, in turn I would get more involved and would start tithing. I thought that stewardship started with me giving rather than me receiving what God was giving me. Happily I can report that my brother is doing great and has been cancer-free for over 10 years.

But, even more important to me than the happiness that I received in the news that my brother was well, was the joy and the peace and the contentment that I truly now have in understanding what I have received from God on the cross. This is the reason that any time I come up to preach, I take the time to walk over to kneel in front of the cross. It reminds me of what Jesus has given me.

Realizing what God has given us is the source of our joy, but it does not mean that we will always be happy and that is important for us to realize.

Remember what we spoke of earlier—you cannot be happy when you are sorrowful, but you can have joy even in sorrow.

Some weeks, our church experiences some sorrowful times. Sometimes we are attending more

funerals than baptisms. A baptism, of course, is a joyful event.

Funeral days are definitely not happy times, but they are joyful times. Even in the sorrow of saying good-bye to a loved one, there is joy, contentment, and peace in knowing what Christ has given them: life everlasting with Him.

Some time ago in the news two stories appeared side by side. They had both huge similarities (just like happiness and joyfulness) but also had stark differences too.

The two stories were about two young women who both were suffering with inoperable brain tumors. One whose name is Brittany Maynard had recently been married when she received her diagnosis, so she and her husband moved to Oregon where there is a “death with dignity” law. On November 1st, 2014, Brittany took some pills that her doctor had prescribed her so that she would die, and she did.

The story next to that one was of Lauren Hill who also was a young lady diagnosed with a brain tumor who was just entering college. On November 1st, the same day Brittany died, Lauren played in her first and also last college basketball game, which she organized to serve as a fund raiser and to build awareness for cancer research. The game was televised on national TV and received much press and also raised significant funds for research.

Hearing about both of these stories, the words of our text may echo in our ears. *“For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive?”* We can see something different in Lauren Hill. And we can see in her someone who realizes the gift of life that she has received and is a joyful steward of that gift.

One last comment I would like to make and this one is pointed squarely at me. Sometimes I as a preacher need to remember the gift that we all have received and that gift is the Gospel, the salvation we have through Jesus Christ, through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave.

Often I try to leave you at the end of the sermon with a way to apply the message to your life, and often in doing this I will emphasize what should be done, or what we should work towards.

I read through all of 1 Corinthians in preparing for this sermon and I would like to end it in the way that Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit ended 1 Corinthians and point you to the cross of Jesus Christ.

When you come forward in a few moments to participate in that foretaste of the feast to come, together with the angels and the archangels and all the company of heaven, even those who just recently joined that company, be aware of the grace-filled gift that is being given to you, a gift that you are literally receiving in the shadow of the cross where Christ died for you and for me.

“Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:54b-56).

Amen!

Experience the Joy of Generosity this Week by Sharing God's Love

- Help a neighbor, friend, or stranger
- Give a special gift to a person (family) in need or to the church
- Send a card of encouragement
- Call someone to thank him/her for his/her work or ministry.
- Donate groceries to our food bank
- Offer to babysit for a church member or a neighbor
- Provide someone a ride to church
- Volunteer to do a needed project at church
- Take an elderly person shopping
- Take lunch to someone who is homebound and stay awhile to visit



*Go and Bear
the Fruit of
Faith*

Worship Helps - Week Two

Week Two: “The Joy of Managing God’s Blessings”

Readings:

Old Testament: 2 Chronicles 1:7-12
Epistle Reading: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15
Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

Hymns:

“Christ Be My Leader”
“Fruitful Trees, the Spirit’s Sowing”
“Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us”

Litany from Acts 2 and 6

Pastor: *“And [the new believers] devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (2:42)*

People: Lord, let us joyfully manage our time that we may make meeting together in worship and Christian fellowship our priority.

Pastor: *“And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need... praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” (2:45, 47)*

People: Lord, let us joyfully manage our goods and possessions that we might share our abundance with others that “they may see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Pastor: *“[The early believers] chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” and other Godly men to oversee the distribution of food to those who were in need. (6:5)*

People: Lord, let us joyfully serve wherever You place us, managing the talents and gifts You give us for Your glory and the good of others.

All: Dear Father, by Your Spirit through Your Holy Word and Sacraments, lead us to “experience the joy of generosity” as we use our gifts in our daily lives. In the name of Jesus, Who “came not to be served but to serve” (Matthew 20:28) we pray. Amen.

Lay reader talk for second week: “The Joy of Managing God’s Blessings”

God’s Managers

This is the second week in our three-week stewardship emphasis titled **Experiencing the Joy of Generosity**. Today we focus on “The Joy of Managing God’s Blessings.” Please read the trifold brochure “The Joy of Managing God’s Blessings.”

God entrusts each of us with various amounts of time, talents, and money. As God’s stewards, we are called to manage our blessings according to God’s will. He is the source and owner of all things so our goal is to please and honor Him with how we manage our gifts and blessings. On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the absolute best, how would you rate what you are doing as a steward of what God has entrusted to you? As you think about this for a moment, you will begin to realize that, by your own efforts, you will never come close to being a “10” in your personal stewardship. On God’s grading scale, we would all rate a zero without Him. Fortunately, God knows that that we are not perfect. Since the fall of Adam, God has used ordinary sinful people to do the extraordinary. Abraham was a man of God, but, when foreigners asked Abraham about his wife, he said that she was only a relative, not his wife. Jacob stole his brother’s birthright, Peter denied Jesus, and the disciples quarreled.

In spite of our imperfections and frailties, God wants to use us, just as He did those Biblical heroes just mentioned, as His hands and feet to feed the hungry, house the homeless, build His Church, and seek the lost with His Gospel. God has made us His stewards, and He equips us for the task. The Apostle Paul wrote, “*And God is able to make all grace to you, so that in all things, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work*” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

God doesn’t expect us to be perfect stewards, but He expects us to have attitudes that desire to praise and serve Him. Jesus didn’t say, “Blessed are those who achieve their potential and never make a mistake” nor did Jesus say, “Well done, good and successful servant.” What Jesus did say was, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . those who mourn . . . the meek*” (Matthew 5:35). He also said, “*Well done, good and faithful servant*” (Matthew 24:23). In our humanity, it is easy for us to make a mess of things, but we please the Lord when we, through faith, willingly use our time, talents, and treasures to help others and His Church.

The good news for us is that, in Christ, our “0” becomes a “10.” With faithful hearts, let us thank the Lord that He gives us the opportunity to be His stewards. As we serve the Lord, let us not be discouraged that we are not always faithful in our stewardship, because we know that God forgives us and is always with us.

Parable of the Talents

In the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), the master (Jesus) was planning to go on a long journey. Before his departure, he entrusted three servants (you and me) with various amounts of money, which in Jesus' time were called talents. The master knew his servants differed in ability, so to the one who was most gifted he gave five talents, to another, two, and to the last, just one.



The master's observations and assessments of his servants' abilities were correct, because the servant who was given five talents and the one given two talents went out without hesitation to invest their talents faithfully and deliberately. The servant who received five talents gained five more and the one who received two earned two more. The master applauded their individual efforts, commitment, and faithfulness

with these words to each of them: *"Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your master."* The servant who received one talent hid it in the ground. The master's response wasn't so kind. He admonished him saying, *"You wicked and slothful servant!"*

By telling this parable, Jesus lets us know that He is concerned about the management of our money. He wants and expects us to use and multiply the resources He entrusts to us. The following are some truths we can learn from this parable:

- Everything we have comes from God.
- Our financial lives are important to God.
- Wise management of money pleases the Lord.
- Poor management displeases Him.
- God does have high expectations of us as we use, manage, and invest His resources.

Some day we will be held accountable. What will God say about the way we managed our money? When we have managed faithfully the resources God has entrusted to us, we will find joy and fulfillment, and God will be pleased.

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The Joy of Managing God's Blessings



Week Two:

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

God Owns—We Manage

In our capitalistic system, we are allowed to own private property. We become owners through deeds, certificates, and other legal instruments. Ownership is part of the American dream. Most of us would rather own than rent.

As legal owners of so many things, it is sometimes difficult for us to acknowledge that God is the real and ultimate owner of everything. We don't always recognize that He is the owner and that we are merely managers of God's property. King David reminds us, *"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein"* (Psalm 24:1). God is the landlord. We are the tenants. We possess, we occupy, we use, we manage—but we don't own.

Scripture tells us, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1). Out of nothing, God created life. The world and all who live in it are gifts from God. In order that we might sustain life, He gives us the ability to produce wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18). He gives us strength, wisdom, knowledge, and all we need to live our lives on earth for His purpose.

God's plan from the beginning was that we should be in charge of His kingdom. *"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion...'"* (Genesis 1:26). God has made us, His stewards, responsible for all the gifts He has entrusted to us. As wise managers, we understand that we will be held accountable for how we manage God's possessions. If we manage what we have been given wisely and responsibly, we will one day hear God say, *"Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your master"* (Matthew 25:23).



Seeking God's Wisdom

In order to have a proper attitude toward money and to manage it faithfully and responsibly, we need God's wisdom. His wisdom gives us a proper perspective toward money, which is to see it as a tool to provide for our own needs, the needs of others,

and to help spread the Gospel, so many people can *"be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (1 Timothy 2:4). God's wisdom enables us to understand the importance of consciously using all of our wealth for the glory of God. Using our money for God's purposes fills us with joy and draws us closer to Him.

Even with God's wisdom, money issues will cause life to be challenging and confusing. Because we live in a fallen world, God's wisdom will not eliminate setbacks, problems, and disappointments with our money, but we know that He is in control and provides for us and uses these setbacks for our ultimate good. He will help us make proper choices and decisions with our money. We see a greater purpose for our lives and money. No wonder Solomon wrote in Proverbs 3:13-14, *"Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding."* Wisdom is more *"precious than jewels..."*

As faithful managers, filled with God's wisdom, we are mindful that it is God's resources that we are managing. To manage God's money according to His will, we need to prioritize how we are going to manage His resources. As faithful stewards, we are to put God first with our money, time, and our talents.

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

The Joy in Managing God's Blessings

Today is the second week in our stewardship emphasis **Experiencing the Joy of Generosity**. Our theme for today is "The Joy in Managing God's Blessings." As God's stewards, we are to manage faithfully the time, talents, and money that He has entrusted to us. Through faith, we understand that all that we are and have are gifts by God's grace in Jesus. To express our gratitude, we manage our blessings in ways that give our Lord praise and honor.



We hope and pray that these worship services and Bible study opportunities will help you draw closer to God and will help you understand the importance of following God's plan for managing your blessings.

We pray you will read and be blessed by the trifold brochure "The Joy in Managing God's Blessings."

Please join us next week when we will focus on "The Joy of Sharing God's Blessings."

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

GOD'S WISDOM WILL ENABLE US TO MANAGE OUR BLESSINGS FAITHFULLY AND RESPONSIBLY.

"Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from [wisdom] is better than gain from silver and her profit is better than gold." (Proverbs 3:13-14).



Children's message for week two

Props: Two pull toys, one without a string

Goals: To help children understand management and to know that we need God's help to be good managers

Let's talk about a big word today. That word is "managing." I don't think you know what it means to manage something. Even many grown-ups have trouble understanding it and doing it well. Maybe you've heard your mom or dad talking about managing their time, money, and all their blessings. I'm going to try to show you what managing means. **(Show the toys to the children. Take the toy with the string and pull it around behind you in circles, squiggly lines, etc.)** Did you notice that this toy goes wherever I go? If I go in a circle, it goes in a circle. If I zigzag, it zigzags. When I stopped, it stopped. When I pulled the toy around and did all those things with it, I was managing.

Now, let's take a look at this toy. **(Place toy without a string in front of you. Walk around in the same manner as you did with the other toy.)** What did you notice? **(Allow children to comment on all your questions.)** Why didn't this toy act like the other one? Right! It has no string, so I couldn't manage it. To manage something, you need to be connected to it.

The adults in our church are learning how to manage the blessings that God entrusts to them. They are finding that, in order to manage these blessings well, they must be connected to God, just as that toy had to be connected to me before I could manage it.

How are we connected to God? Jesus is the One Who connects us. He's the "string" that holds us together. God sent Jesus into the world, so that we could be connected to Him. When we're connected to Him, we can enjoy managing our lives so that we can use our blessings to serve God. We also manage our lives by helping others, by forgiving others, by worshiping in church, and by telling others about Jesus.

Let's pray together. Dear heavenly Father, thank You for giving us Your Son Jesus so that we can be connected to You. Thank You for helping us learn to manage our blessings and our lives so that we can help others to know You and know how much You love them. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Stewardship Emphasis: “Experiencing the Joy of Generosity”

Sermon Week Two: “The Joy of Managing God’s Blessings”

Text: Matthew 25:14-30

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for today is Matthew 25:14-30, the Parable of the Talents read earlier. That will be our text. You may be seated.

Before we start in earnest, please open your pew Bibles to Matthew 24:3. Maybe mark it for later reference. I know that is not our text, but that is where you will need to be. Again, that is Matthew 24:3.

This is the second week of our Stewardship Series, “Experiencing the Joy of Generosity.” Last week we looked at the great joy we experience through the blessings and gifts God bestows on us, especially the joy we have because of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection that brings to us the most precious gift of all: eternal life. In fact, we came to realize that this is the very definition of joy: Life eternal in the presence of God, a life that began with your Baptism.

This week we talk about **Experiencing the Joy of Managing God’s Blessings**. Now I am sure for most of you that brings to mind the time, talents, and treasures God has given you. Maybe you expect that we are going to mine the Bible for helpful hints on how to live effectively in this world; how to manage the time God has given us since none of us seem to have enough, how to manage our talents so that they are used effectively and productively and we can be blessed with even more as the Gospel lesson may seem to infer; and how to manage our money so that we know how much we should be giving to God, how much we should be dedicating to the future, and how much we can in good conscience use for our own pleasure.

Well, we are not going to talk about any of that. We are going to talk about your heart, and we are going to talk about others.

Heart and others.

What do those have to do with **The Joy of Managing God’s Blessings**? Absolutely everything. Actually, they are all that matters. For we find **Joy in Managing God’s Blessings** only when our hearts are dedicated to using what God has entrusted to us for the furthering of His kingdom and the benefit of others.

Did you read the stewardship devotions that given to you this last week? The devotions were specifically written to help you prepare for this Sunday. There are also devotions for the coming week. Be sure to read them, they are very helpful.

If you read those devotions, did you notice how each one, in one way or another, pointed to the heart, to our attitudes toward God, pointed to God's kingdom, or pointed to others?

Listen to these quotes from those devotions:

- Monday – “Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God enables us to use our gifts faithfully and joyfully for His purposes”—His purposes.
- Tuesday – “The world sees money as life's report card and source of all happiness and security. In contrast, we, as faithful stewards, see money as a means to provide for our needs, to help others, and to further God's kingdom.”
- Wednesday – “Jesus does not condemn the rich farmer because he had wealth, but He did condemn his wrong attitude toward his riches.” (And I would add, therefore, his attitude toward God and others.)
- Thursday – “The secret of contentment is gratitude for what God gives.” (We talked about that last week, didn't we?)
- Friday – “Our goal is to keep “the main thing the main thing,” which is to love, serve, trust, and obey our Heavenly Father.”

Each devotion in one way or another points to the heart, to God's kingdom, or to others. Our text and Old Testament readings for today do the same thing.

If you recall, our text for today is the Parable of the Talents.

Most of us are probably very familiar with the Parable.

A master goes away and entrusts his servants with differing amounts to manage from his estate, (really these are huge amounts so it is part of his kingdom), during his absence. When the master returned, the two servants who had received the most returned to their master double what they had received, and they were rewarded with even greater amounts to manage. The servant who had received the least returned to the master exactly what he had received, explaining how he feared the master and took precautions, though a foolish precaution, to assure none of the assets was lost. The master rebuked that servant as wicked and slothful and took away even that small amount he had given him and gave it to the servant who already had the most, casting the wicked and slothful servant into outer darkness.

The application in our lives seems obvious. In fact, I will read the application right from the study notes in our Lutheran Study Bible:

“Our relationship to God and the world is one of stewardship. We are to use everything entrusted to us in such a way that it benefits God's kingdom. Though modern people often have far more material and technological means than any previous generation, they often use these tools selfishly. An unfailing promise attaches to faithful stewardship: if we use the things entrusted to us for God and His purposes, we will be blessed here and in heaven.”¹

¹ Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). *The Lutheran Study Bible* (p. 1639). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

That is a solid application. We can, and should, walk out of here today looking for ways to use those things God has entrusted to us for His purposes. But it may be that a lot of us do not understand the full implications of that application. It may be that we tend to focus on the obvious, but wrong, *object* in the parable.

What if the parable is not primarily about what we *do* with the talents? I believe it was Dr. Gibbs of the seminary in St. Louis who suggested that this parable is not about what the stewards DID with the talents entrusted to them, but is rather it is about their ATTITUDE toward the master, their relationship with the master. In other words, what if this parable is about your heart?

Open up your Bibles to Matthew chapter 24:3. This is the start of a long discourse by Jesus. Our text comes near the end of this discourse, this long talk that Jesus gave. The discourse begins at Chapter 24:3 and ends with the close of chapter 25. It might be instructive to understand the big picture of what Jesus was talking about before and after He spoke this parable, so let's look at the headings:

- The heading for Matthew 24:3 says: "Signs of the close of the age." Then
- "The abomination of desolation"
- "The coming of the Son of Man"
- "The lesson of the fig tree"
- "No one knows the day and hour"
- "The parable of the ten virgins"
- "The parable of the talents" (that's our text)
- "The final judgment"

That's the context in which Jesus spoke this parable. All of this is about the last day, the end of the world, Jesus' return.

Looking at the parable in that light opens up a brand new possibility or at least changes the emphasis of how we apply the parable.

Now we can look at the parable this way:

- Jesus entrusts portions of His kingdom to His servants when He leaves.
 - What does Jesus entrust them with? What is this treasure? Well, let's look at the last words of Matthew's gospel. Jump forward in your bible to Matthew 28:18 – You know these words:
 - ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."²
 - The Gospel is the great treasure Jesus entrusts to His disciples, with us. And they are not supposed to just preserve, but to share it—to invest it with the whole world!

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Mt 28:18–20). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

- Back to the parable we see that some of the servants have been faithful and have born fruit, actually the identical fruit of 100% of what they were first given. It does not say so in the text, but it is clear those servants love their master and it shows in their response to his blessings. They put those blessings to work for the master's benefit. And verses 21 and 23 tell us they are received into "*the joy of the master.*"
 - What is "the joy of the master"?
 - It is eternal life. Remember the context. This is the last day, the day of Jesus' return, and they receive eternal life.
- One of the servants represents those who have not been faithful. It is clear his attitude toward the master is different than the other servants. This servant sees the master as harsh and hard, even capricious. Keeping in mind the context, we realize that he sees the master as a terrifying judge, not as his Savior. And well he should, for the master casts him in to the "*outer darkness*" where there is "*weeping and gnashing of teeth.*"
 - What is that place?
 - Clearly it is hell. And even those blessings the unbeliever enjoyed here on earth, those tremendous blessings God showers on the righteous and the wicked alike, are taken away.

Viewed this way, the parable cuts through all of our works and looks directly at our hearts. Yes, there is a difference between the two types of servants and how they used the talents the master gave them, but the reason they used those talents differently is because of the difference in their hearts, because of the faith or lack of faith in their hearts when they used those gifts.

Our stewardship of God's gifts is a matter of the heart. It is a matter of faith—faith the Holy Spirit works in us, faith that allows us to be reshaped into God's will. That will of God for us that we lost sight of in sin.

And what is God's will for us? God's will for us is that we would "*love the Lord [our] God with all [our hearts] and with all [our souls] and with all [our minds], and that we would love [our neighbors] as [ourselves]*" (Matthew 22:37-39).

Sound familiar? We usually think of those words as the summary of the law, and indeed they are! But we must also understand that the law tells us who we really are, what God created us to be, what His will is for us, not His demand of us, but what He wants for us. In other words, what it means to manage God's blessings as He intended.

Did you notice the Old Testament lesson? God asks Solomon what he would have the Lord give him. Solomon asks for wisdom and knowledge to govern God's people wisely. Solomon, who is about to embark on a massive task of managing God's gifts in this world, asks that he be able to do that for the benefit of others and God's kingdom. Now listen again to God's response: "Because this was in your heart..." God went straight to Solomon's heart. By God's grace, in Solomon's heart was a love, a concern for God's kingdom and for others. This is the key. This is what was lost in the Garden of Eden—God and others.

In the Garden of Eden, God set mankind to be the steward of what he had created. Adam and Eve did that with no thought of themselves. They loved God with their whole hearts and souls and minds and they loved each other and all of God's creation as themselves. They managed God's creation for the benefit of that creation. But with sin, their focus turned inward. Their love for each other and all of God's creation became instead a love first for themselves. God's gifts were no longer managed for the benefit of others and God's kingdom, but for self.

And that inward focus has been hard to shake. Actually, of ourselves we cannot shake it at all. It is only through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, through the faith that the Holy Spirit works in us, that we are again able to begin to love God truly with our whole hearts and to love others as ourselves.

So where does that leave us? If we truly find **Joy in Managing God's Blessings** when our hearts are dedicated to using what God has entrusted to us for the furthering of His kingdom and the benefit of others, what are we to do?

We know we cannot do this ourselves. But through the faith that God works in us, through the power of the Holy Spirit working in us, we are empowered to truly place God and others first.

We fail constantly, but we are also constantly forgiven. Daily immersion in God's Word, partaking of the sacrament, going to Bible Study, praying, reading God's Word—these continually regenerate our souls. The more we are focused on God, The more He focuses us on others.

The more we are focused on others, the more we understand the joy of managing God's blessings, not for ourselves, but for others.

And when Jesus returns, we will all be made perfect in our love for God, perfect in our love for others, perfect in our management of God's gifts for the sake of His creation.

May the Lord, Who has begun this good work in you, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ,
In Jesus Name, Amen

We pray the third verse of the hymn "Savior, Thy Dying Love" from the old red hymnal:

Lord God Heavenly Father,

- Give me a faithful heart, likeness to Thee
- That each departing day henceforth may see,
- Some work of love begun, some deed of kindness done,
- Some wand'rer sought and won, something for Thee.

In Jesus name.
Amen.

Worship Helps – Week Three

Week Three: “The Joy of Sharing God’s Blessings

Readings:

Old Testament: Exodus 36:2-7
Epistle: 2 Corinthians 8:1-7
Gospel: Luke 10:25-37 (Parable of the Good Samaritan)

Hymns:

“Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee”
“Take My Life and Let It Be”
“Holy, Holy, Holy”

Litany from 1 Chronicles 29 (David Prays in the Assembly)

Pastor: *“And David said: ‘Blessed are You, O Lord, the God of Israel our Father, forever and ever. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all’”* (verses 10b, 12a)

People: Joyfully we give You thanks and praise.

Pastor: *“In Your hand are power and might, and in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all”* (verse 12b)

People: “[With joy] now we thank You, Our God, and praise Your glorious name” (verse 13)

Pastor: *“But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly?”* (verse 14a)

People: For all things come from You, and of Your own have we given You.”
(verse 14b)

Pastor: As David the king freely offered his wealth for the building of the temple,

People: so do we offer our gifts freely and joyfully for the building of Your Kingdom.

All: Lord God, thank You for allowing us to “experience the joy of generosity” as we return to You a portion of what You have first given us. Through Christ Who gave Himself for us, we pray. Amen.

Lay reader for third week: “Joy of Sharing God’s Blessings”

Joyful Giving

This is the third and final week of our three-week theme **Experiencing the Joy of Generosity**. Today we are focusing on the “The Joy of Sharing God’s Blessings.” We hope you will read the trifold brochure “The Joy of Sharing God’s Blessings.”

One day a second-grade boy came to school without his lunch. He did not think about it until his classmates started washing their hands and getting out their lunch boxes. He was a shy little kid, and he did not want to say anything because he was embarrassed, but his stomach was really growling. Against his will, his lip started to quiver and his eyes filled with tears. Soon his teacher noticed and then all the students, and he was forced to tell them his problem. No sooner were the words out of his mouth than his classmates were looking into their lunches. One student had two sandwiches and gave the hungry boy one. Another child had an apple and an orange and gave his friend his choice of fruit. Another had too many cookies (Could that ever be?!) and shared them. In short, the hungry boy had a feast, all because of the generosity of others who had more than they needed. This is just as God has planned it. One person is in need and others give so that the need is met. The Bible says that “*your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness*” (2 Corinthians 8:14).

God wants our giving to be joyful and fulfilling. Through our giving, we worship and honor our Lord. Giving expresses our gratitude for God’s love and grace given to us through His Son, Jesus, who has conquered sin, death, and the devil through His death and resurrection. Giving can fill the hunger pains of a little boy. It can also help the homeless and helpless, and it can support the ministry of our church. Through faith, we can share the abundance God has given us. As we do, we will find “joy in sharing God’s blessings.”

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

The Joy of Sharing God's Blessings

This is the third and final week of our **Experiencing the Joy of Generosity** stewardship emphasis. This week's theme is "The Joy of Sharing God's Blessings." God wants our giving and sharing to be joyful and fulfilling. How could we not be joyful when the creator of the universe chooses us to be His stewards who care for His creation and His gifts to us? How could we not want to express our gratitude through our faithful and joyful giving? Our generosity flows out of our understanding that God has created and redeemed us. In spite of our sinful ways, He loves us and calls us each by name. By God's grace, we can live as forgiven and redeemed people through the blood of Jesus on the Cross.



Today we are making our annual commitment, and, by doing so, we celebrate the blessings of Jesus Christ in our lives through faith in Him. In our commitments, we commit to serving Him and others through the mission and ministries of our church.

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

A CHEERFUL GIVING HEART IS A GIFT OF GOD.

"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).



Does Your Gift Represent You?

God graciously gives to us, and He wants us to share our blessings with others out of love for Him. We can love and give because He first loved us. Our giving is an outward expression of the depth of our love and faith.

There is a story of a pastor who had made an appeal in church for a great and worthy cause. A certain woman, a member of the church, came to him and handed him a check for \$50, asking at the same time if her gift was satisfactory.

The pastor immediately replied, "If it represents you." After a moment of soul-searching, she asked to have the check returned to her. She left with it, and a day or two later she returned, handing the pastor a check for \$500, again asking the same question: "Is my gift satisfactory?"

The pastor gave the same answer as before. "If it represents you."

Considering all of her spiritual and physical blessings from God, she took back the check and left. Later in the week, she came again with a check. That time it was for \$5,000. As she placed it in the pastor's hand she said, "After earnest, prayerful thought, I have come to the conclusion that this

gift does represent me, and it is a joy to give generously to the Lord to help my church."

The Lord has blessed some of us with little wealth and others with much, but in either case our response needs to represent us. *"Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more"* (Luke 12:48).



In Conclusion

Through our faithful giving, we worship our Lord, express our thanks to Him, and renew our commitment to Him. When we give, we joyfully put our faith into action. God's grace, through faith, enables us to give as we have received. May we all find joy in sharing God's blessings with others.

Stewardship Advisors
248-644-6150
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The Joy of Sharing God's Blessings



Week Three:

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

God's People Give

John 3:16 proclaims, *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."* God showed us what it means to love and to give. The Apostle Paul tells us that we are called to imitate Jesus (1 Corinthians 4:16). Just as Christ loves and gives, we are called to be loving and giving people.

Someone said, "Whoever has a heart full of love always has something to give." The Bible identifies many people whose hearts were overflowing with God's love prompting them to give joyfully and generously. King David gave his personal fortune to the construction of God's temple (1 Chronicles 29:2-3). The Widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:9-16 and the Poor Widow (Luke 21:1-4) gave all they had. The Good Samaritan gave his time and money to help an injured person ((Luke 10:25-37). Zacchaeus gave half of his money to the poor (Luke 19:1-10). Barnabas sold a field and gave the proceeds to help support the Gospel message of the apostles (Acts 4:32-37). The Christians in Macedonia shared generously, and the result was an *"abundance of joy."* This joy in the Lord caused them to want to give. Even out of their poverty, they gave in order to share in *"the relief of the saints"* (2

Corinthians 8:2-4). These few examples of God's people, who gave joyfully and generously to their Lord, are a great encouragement to us in our giving.



The life of faith is alive, full of vitality, and all-encompassing. Giving is an essential part of that life of faith. We give our firstfruits and honor the Lord with all of our resources out of joy and gratitude for what He has done and continues to do in our lives. Our giving expresses our worship and praise for who God is and what He does. In the process of giving we realize the truth in what Jesus said, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."* (Acts 20:35).

God's Love Prompts Giving

We can be certain that God loves us because love is at the heart of Who He is and what He does. *"But God shows His love for us in that while we were*

still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). God expressed His great love for us by giving us His Son, *"Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross"* (Hebrews 12:2). The Cross stands as the greatest witness to God's love for us.

Once we are able to comprehend even dimly the depth of God's love for us, we desire to share that love with others. God's love automatically flows through us into others. The fruit of God's love in our lives is seen in both our words and deeds. God's love is seen in us as we reach out to others and as we give joyfully and generously. Grasping the depth of God's love we give glory to Him *"throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen"* (Ephesians 3:21).

The Joy of Giving

The joy of giving is illustrated in the story of the boy who gave the pastor a fish for his tithe. The pastor asked the boy, "Where are the other nine fish?" The boy responded joyfully, "I'm going back now to the river to catch them!" Basking in his joy knowing how much his loving and gracious God cared for him and in his joy of giving, the boy left for the river knowing he could trust God to help him catch more fish.

Children's message for week three

Text: Psalm 24:1 (**Read aloud**) "*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.*"

Two little children (**point to two of the younger children present**) like you were eating breakfast one morning when one of them suddenly grabbed her glass of juice and shouted, "My juice!" The other child did the same thing. He grabbed his glass and shouted even louder, "My juice!" The first child noticed her bowl of cereal and called, "My cereal!" "My cereal!" yelled the little boy, grabbing his bowl. The two created such an uproar they had to be excused from the table. It didn't end there, sad to say, for throughout the day, they could be heard shouting, "My doll!" or "My truck!" or "My legos!"

Have you ever acted this way? Have you ever seen someone else act this way? (**Let the children answer your questions.**)

Sometimes a young person will take something that belongs to another person and say, "Mine!" even though he knows it isn't his. Sometimes even older children, when they go to school, take things that aren't their own. Do you know what that's called? It's called stealing.

I really don't know anyone who does that, but did you know that God warns us not to steal from Him? Did you know you could steal from God? Do you remember what our Bible verse was –the one we started with today? "*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.*" You see, everything belongs to God, but He lets us use it for ourselves. He is so good to us and loves us so much that He even gave us His Son Jesus to take away our sins. He wants us to share what He's given us with others. He wants us to give away some of our money for the work of the church and to help others. Since God has given us so much, wouldn't it be terrible to hold onto it and say, "Mine!"?

Let us pray together: Dear Lord, help us to say, "It's Yours, God." Thank You for letting us use what You have given us and help us to be glad to share with others." In Jesus' name, Amen.

CHURCH COPY

**Experience the joy that comes from giving,
serving, and growing in the Lord!**

To help me grow in the joy of generosity,

My giving per week in ____ (year) __ will be _____

**the joy
of
generosity**

To help me grow in the joy of serving and growing in the Lord

_____ I commit to grow in the joy of serving by using my time and talents in serving within the church.

_____ I commit to grow in the joy of knowing Jesus more by reading my Bible daily, attending church regularly and developing an active prayer life.

Name(s) (please print) _____

YOUR COPY

**Experience the joy that comes from giving,
serving, and growing in the Lord!**

To help me grow in the joy of generosity,

My giving per week in ____ (year) ____ will be _____

**the joy
of
generosity**

To help me grow in the joy of serving and growing in the Lord

_____ I commit to grow in the joy of serving by using my time and talents in serving within the church.

_____ I commit to grow in the joy of knowing Jesus more by reading my Bible daily, attending church regularly and developing an active prayer life.

Stewardship Emphasis: “Experiencing the Joy of Generosity”

Sermon Week Three: “The Joy of Sharing God’s Blessings”

“Go and Do Likewise” Luke 10:37

Slide 1 up from start of sermon

God’s grace, His mercy, and His peace are yours through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and I pray He opens our hearts and minds as we hear His word. That word for today comes from our Gospel reading in Luke 10, the very familiar parable of the Good Samaritan, encased within the story of a lawyer who wants to know what he has to do to inherit eternal life.

Slide 2

I’ll mention the words of Jesus at the very end of the story in verse 37, where Jesus says to the lawyer, and to us, “*You go, and do likewise.*”

This is our text. Please be seated!

Slide 3

Let’s look at the story which Jesus told the lawyer in today’s context. You’re heading off to work and see a man who clearly needs help. Everyone else is passing him by. Oh, and you notice he’s part of a group of people who have been openly hostile to you and your family. But you stop, patch the guy up by using your own very expensive supplies (oil and wine in the story), take him to a hotel where you give him more care and attention for the rest of the day and overnight, and then the next day, you give the hotel manager two days’ wages to keep caring for the man, with the promise you’ll pay more if it’s needed.

Slide 4

Then Jesus wraps up the story with these words: “Go and do likewise.” Could you? Would you? I don’t know about you, but this seems like pretty advanced Christianity to me. This is world-class-level kindness. How can we hope to be like the good Samaritan? Well, remember, Jesus is talking to a lawyer who wants to know how to earn his way into heaven. Jesus tells this story in response to make it clear that he CAN’T. That’s really the point Jesus is making. The lawyer CAN’T earn his way into heaven. Neither can we. There is only one true Good Samaritan. Guess who?

Slide 5

Yes, Jesus Christ. In challenging the lawyer, Jesus was also pointing out the true way to heaven – through Him alone. Jesus is the one Who meets each one of us on the road. We aren’t beaten down by robbers; instead, we are dead in our own sin. And by that sin, we proclaim ourselves to be God’s enemies, openly hostile to His ways. And yet Jesus stops and brings us to His Father for care. The innkeeper needed money to care for the man, but our Heavenly Father demands something much

more. He tells Jesus the price He must pay to give us life. So Jesus willingly suffers and dies on the cross of Calvary to restore us. That's the real story here of the Good Samaritan.

Slide 6

But how does that tie in to our Stewardship Series, "The Joy of Generosity"? We're talking about the **Joy of Sharing God's Blessings** this week. Where does the Good Samaritan fit in?

Well, this story is also a picture of the perfect steward. The Good Samaritan is blessed with many things, and he uses them all to help his neighbor. He takes the time needed to make sure the man is on the road to recovery; he uses his abilities and skills to provide care for him; and God has given him material goods — wine, oil, a donkey, money — which he uses to help the man, too. Time. Ability. Money. It's the complete picture of a good steward. What we would call a FULLY DEVELOPED steward. Like I said before, world-class. We'll talk about how God moves us toward that goal.

Slide 7

But first, I want to talk very openly and honestly about stewardship, and my first open, honest statement is this: we don't talk enough about it. We emphasize it for three weeks every year, which is good, and there are references here and there to giving back to God throughout the year, of serving and giving, but we can be doing more. More to emphasize the truth that spending some of our time, serving with our abilities, and giving money to God's church is not a once-a-year conversation, but rather, a vital part of the Christian walk. It is our way of life. Our daily rallying cry should be, "go and do likewise."

Slide 8

A visual way to depict "go and do likewise" is this image. I like it because it shows very clearly that our giving is also part of our worship to God. And in worship, God gives us His gifts. So too, in our faithful giving, God outgives us. He does amazing things with our offerings of time, abilities, and money. And through our giving, He works within us as well, bringing us joy as He moves our hearts away from ourselves, and more toward others.

Slide 9

Growth is really what it's all about. Because stewardship isn't a once-a-year reminder that our church requires money, time, and abilities in order to share the Gospel and care for others. Stewardship at its heart is a way God helps us to grow spiritually. And at the same time, it's a measure of our spiritual growth that we can understand about ourselves, because simply put, giving requires that we trust God.

So growth is what it's about. And when I think of growth, I think of personal training. I think of weightlifting.

Slide 10

And I think of Hans and Franz. Have you seen the new commercial with Aaron Rodgers? Yeah, I get to include the Green Bay Packers in here. Hans and Franz tell Aaron Rodgers they're going to PUMP <clap> him up! And they put him through all kinds of exercises while they're insulting his weakling arms. Then finally –

Slide 11

He IS pumped up! Boom. Thirty seconds, and he goes from weakling to massive. Well, we know that's not the way it really works. In the real world, you lift smaller weights, then go to slightly heavier weights, and on and on. You can't have enormous muscles right away by going straight to the largest weights. Likewise, you can't spend life on a couch, then get up one day and run a marathon. First you walk, then you jog, and on and on. Longer and longer distances, until eventually your body is ready to handle the world class-stuff.

Slide 12

It reminds me of a time I talked to a personal trainer about getting in shape. What did I need to do to get started? I expected a daily training regimen. Switching between weight lifting and aerobic activity. Different machines. Different types of weights. Perhaps a diet, as well. You know what she said to me? "Why don't you just start walking around the neighborhood at lunchtime?"

I thought it would be hard to get started. And that was because I had the goal in mind – a perfectly fit body, limitless energy, strength and flexibility. You know, world class. That's a great goal, but it was better for me to focus on the next step, rather than the finish line. Start walking. And when I see improvement, it will encourage me to go to the next level. And so on. Step by step.

And it's great to have a personal trainer. Someone who knows what it takes.

Slide 13

Someone who will yell instructions at you until you succeed, right? No, that doesn't work so well. But how about –

Slide 14

Someone who has been there, done that? Someone who can model the right path to follow? Someone who will join you as you work and struggle, who will always be there to encourage you. That's the kind of personal trainer we want.

Slide 15

This is true for our stewardship training, as well. Jesus has been there, done that. He promises to be with us, to encourage us and strengthen us, and to equip us for work in His kingdom. He is moving us toward the goal in the story of the Good Samaritan. It is the goal toward which we all strive as His redeemed children.

Slide 16

But if you see your life as God's steward to be very far away from the Good Samaritan, don't let that cause you to lose heart and give up! Focus on the next step. Some of us here are just getting off the couch. Others are running marathons in terms of their stewardship. Look at where you are now, and go a little further. Lift a little heavier weight. Pick up your pace from a walk to a slow jog. And watch how God works through your increased generosity to bless you and bless others. He will bring you the joy and the motivation to go to the next step.

Slide 17

In this way, our rallying cry becomes something like this: “Grow and do likewise!” Grow in the grace of giving. Grow in generosity. Grow in your spiritual life. Become more and more like Jesus.

Slide 18

Please look in your worship folder for your stewardship commitment form. The top part is to turn in today. The bottom is for you to keep as a reminder of your commitment for ____ (year) _____. During the offering and communion, we’re all going to fill out our forms and place them in this basket as we come up for communion. Consider this your personal training commitment. What is your next level?

Slide 19

No matter where we are in our stewardship walk with Jesus, each of us can take a step closer to the ultimate goal which God has shown to us through His Son, Jesus Christ, the true Good Samaritan. God wants us to be like Jesus. And He uses our Baptism, His Word, the Lord’s Supper, prayer, fellowship with one another, and our stewardship – all these things He uses to make us more like Him.

Slide 20

Please stand and let’s pray: Lord Jesus, we want to be more like You. We want to be truly selfless with all the gifts You’ve given us – our time, our abilities, and our money. Lord, work through us by Your Holy Spirit to take the next step as we seek to “grow and do likewise.” Work in us so we are blessings to each other and the world around us. By Your grace alone, so, too, we know we will be blessed beyond measure. We pray this in Your name, Jesus. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.

Bible Study 1

“The Joy of Receiving God’s Blessings”

Opening Prayer:

Introduction:

The first words of the Bible are *“In the beginning God...”* That’s how everything begins—with God. God created all things, and He gives us all things. All of life is a gift from God. *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above”* (James 1:17). We are the recipients of all of God’s gifts and blessings, and we are stewards of everything He entrusts to us. He owns, and we manage. The Apostle Paul wrote: *“What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”* (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Receiving lies at the heart of what it means to be human. Fundamentally, we are needy beings: dependent on God for our existence and all the good gifts of creation, and dependent on one another for community, relationship, sustenance, and so much more. We’re needy. God created us that way. We receive, and then we can give. If we reject our dependence upon God, we are putting ourselves in God’s place.



Memory verses:

“Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit Who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God” (1 Corinthians 2:12). Only by the Spirit can we begin to understand God’s grace in Jesus. The Holy Spirit helps us realize that all we are and have are gifts we receive from God.

“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father Who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him?” (Matthew 7:11).

Read Psalm 103. Receiving God’s blessings joyfully and thankfully gives God praise.

Understanding Joy:

- Jesus said, *“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full”* (John 15:11).
- “The fullness of joy is to behold God in everything” (Brendon Doyle)
- “Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God” (Pierre de Chardin)
- “Joy is an intermezzo of gratitude that interrupts the routine motion of life” (Lewis B. Smedes)
- *“Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your words become to me a joy”* (Jeremiah 15:16).
- “When we understand that we are giving away God’s money for God’s work, we will discover joy” (anonymous)
- Experience the joy and freedom that come from fully surrendering everything we have to God and recognizing that it is all His anyway.
- The state of the blessed is the state of joy.
- Faith is the key to experiencing the joy of giving. God invites us to share His joy in giving generously.

- In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus admits his faithful stewards in to His joy (Matthew 25)
- When God puts grace in the heart, He puts gladness in the heart; inward, solid, substantial joy.

How do we express our joy?

- Songs of praise
- Behaving as God desires
- Giving generously
- Living with an attitude of gratitude
- Thanking God
- Being in worship

Thoughts on “joy” from Rev. Charles Swindoll’s book *Laugh Again: Experience Outrageous Joy*:

- Joy is a beautiful word. Maybe because it’s so simple. Simple to spell. Simple to say. Simple to define because it’s the emotion evoked by well-being.
- Jesus is the source of all joy. Our joy is not dependent on others
- True joy transcends life’s circumstances.
- Joy is the result of God’s grace toward believers.
- Worldly joy never satisfies.
- We can be confident and joyful because of God’s unfailing love.
- Confidence in God leads to joy.
- When Christ is our primary focus, we find contentment instead of insecurity, peace instead of anxiety, and joy instead of fear.



Discussion Questions:

1. What does God give you and all people for which you should be most thankful? (John 3:16; Romans 10:17; Ephesians 1:7; 2 Corinthians 9:8).
2. Read Matthew 7:11. God wants to give you _____ .
3. The world lacks any true understanding of God. Read 1 Corinthians 2:12-16. By His grace, what does God do for believers?
4. Read Philippians 1:1-3. How do you attain or maintain joy? How can you have joy despite difficult circumstances?
5. Read Philippians 1:6. What key thought regarding joy does the Apostle Paul discuss?
6. Read 1 Chronicles 29:1-19. What made King David joyful? What do these verses say to you?
7. All that you are and have you have received from God. Read the following verses and identify what blessings and gifts they are referencing:
 - Genesis 1:27
 - Psalm 90:12

“The world asks, ‘What does a man own?’ Christ asks, ‘How does he use it?’ ” (Andrew Murray)

Bible Study 2

"The Joy of Managing God's Blessings"

Opening Prayer:

Introduction:

In the previous study, we discussed the joy of receiving God's blessings. In this session, we will focus on our high calling to manage the blessings God has so generously entrusted to us. God gives us blessings for our good, for others, and to extend His kingdom. Our blessings, to mention a few, involve our time, abilities, families, vocations, and relationships. While we receive both spiritual and physical blessings, this study will focus on the material blessings God gives.



God calls us and honors us with the privilege of being His stewards. This privilege is not something we have earned, but it is a special honor given to us by God's grace. Whether we have little or lots of material wealth, we are to manage all that has been entrusted to us faithfully. Through the study of God's Word, we come to realize how undeserving we are to receive the blessings God gives so freely and generously. God never stops giving. When the Holy Spirit opens our eyes so we can acknowledge God as the owner and giver of all things, we joyfully go

"Make as much as you can,
save as much as you can,
and give as much as you can."
(Rev. John Wesley)

about managing His resources according to His will and guidance. It is not only the envelope we put into the offering plate on Sunday that concerns Jesus; the choices we make regarding money we spend on groceries, gas, clothes, entertainment and so forth are both spiritual and financial decisions. There are some who have the attitude that, once we've given our church contributions, we can do with the rest of the money exactly as we please. On the contrary, since God has made it possible for us to have our resources, we are accountable to Him. As we seek to follow His will, our relationship with God is strengthened. He becomes the Lord of our lives and money.

Personal Financial Questions to Ponder:

- Are you managing your money as if it belongs to God?
- Do you have a spending plan?
- Do you have a saving plan?
- Do you have a giving plan?
- Are you living a God-pleasing lifestyle?
- Are you controlling your debt?
- Are you content?
- Are you seeking financial counsel?
- Are you investing wisely?

- Is God receiving the first portion of your income, and are you giving intentionally, regularly, proportionately, and generously?
- Are you asking the question, “When do I have enough?”
- Do you know that you are accountable to God for how you manage your money (Matthew 25)?

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is the condition of the heart so important in the faithful management of God’s blessings?
2. God blesses you with time. How do you waste or misuse your time? What would God want you to do with your time that you aren’t doing now?
3. What counsel does the Apostle Paul provide in Ephesians 5:15-17?
4. What does 1 Peter 4:10 say about the use of your talents?
5. Read Psalm 24:1; Haggai 2:8. Why should you be a responsible manager? How are you able to be a trustworthy and responsible manager?
6. Read Matthew 24:45-51. What are the faithful and wise servants doing? What will happen to those servants who are neglecting their responsibility?
7. Read 1 Timothy 5:8. What management expectations are placed on fathers or heads of households?
8. How does your relationship with God shape your view about money?
9. God wants you to use your blessings to further His kingdom and to serve others. How can a person who has managed his/her money responsibly and builds up a surplus be useful to God?
10. Which has a greater potential impact on faith—lots of money or a little money (Proverbs 30:8-9; Matthew 19:23-24; 1 Timothy 6:6-10)?
11. Why do you have joy as you manage your money and time faithfully and responsibly so God is honored?
12. Read the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). Who is the Master and who are the servants? What is the relationship between the master and each of the three servants? Why were the servants given different amount of talents? In managing the money, what



did the servants think was expected of them? What did the master say to the servants and why?

13. Read Luke 12:15. What wisdom does this verse provide?

14. What is the purpose of the management of your money? What is the bigger purpose?

15. Why can it be said that the way you manage or handle your money is one of the most accurate reflections of your relationship with the Lord?

“Can a man be poor if he is free from want, if he does not covet the belongings of others, if he is rich in the possessions of God? Rather, he is poor who possesses much but still craves for more” (Tertullian)

16. Read Matthew 6:33. What wisdom and guidance do you receive from this verse?

17. According to 2 Corinthians 9:13, what is the ultimate result of your service?

Closing Prayer;

- Romans 12:6
- Ephesians 1:7
- Hebrews 12:2; Romans 10:17
- 1 John 4:19

“We must not only give what we have; we must give what we are.” (Cardinal Mercier)

8. Read Genesis 49:28: What do you learn from this verse?
9. Read Ecclesiastes 5:18-19. What gift does God want you to have?
10. Webster’s dictionary defines joy as: “very glad feeling, happiness, delight.” What would you add as a Christian to this definition?
11. God gives His people their blessings at the right time or season. Read Psalm 104:27 and Psalm 145:15. How could blessings received at the wrong time be a curse?
12. What does Philippians 4:19 tell you?
13. Read Habakkuk 3:17-19. Where does Habakkuk’s primary joy come from?
14. How would you define blessings?
15. Read Acts 5:41; Hebrews 12:7-10. Can blessings hurt, like suffering or discipline? Why?

Closing Prayer:

Joy is not the ephemeral happiness that worldly pleasures bring, but the deep and abiding joy of being loved by God through Jesus Christ. It is an emotional appreciation for good things received. A result of God’s grace toward believers.”
(The Lutheran Study Bible)

Bible Study 3

"The Joy of Sharing God's Blessings"

Opening Prayer:

Introduction:

This study will help us understand that faithfulness in giving is a part of a Christ-like character. In our giving, we emulate Jesus Who showed us what it means to love and to give. *"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends"* (John 15:13). Jesus gave us the greatest and the most perfect gift by offering Himself on the Cross. With hearts filled with love for what He did for us, we become "givers" rather than "takers." Giving expresses our love for the Lord. In light of what God has done for us through His Son, how can we not give freely to Him? As we give, God fills us with even greater joy and fulfillment.

"A committed giver is an incurably happy person, a secure person, a satisfied person ..." (Eric Butterworth)



When a worldly spirit is in control, giving generously seems foolish. Without faith and trust in the Lord, there is a much greater focus on taking and hoarding than giving. However, mature Christians who are under the control of the Holy Spirit understand the importance of giving and do so cheerfully. The Apostle Paul exhorts us, *"Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is"* (Ephesians 5:17). God's will is to *"contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality"* (Romans 12:13). In order to reach the lost, we are to give to support evangelism efforts locally and throughout the world.

As our faith matures, we turn from love of self to love of God. We live lives in thanksgiving and gratitude because of Who God is and what He has done for us. *"...He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him Who for their sake died and was raised"* (2 Corinthians 5:15). We use our time, talents, and treasures responsibly because we know that God gives us all things, and we want to use what He gives us to glorify and serve Him. By grace, we live for God. Paul put it succinctly, *"You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body"* (1 Corinthians 6:20).

"Giving satisfies the soul, edifies the church, and magnifies the Lord."
(Stephen Olford)

As Christians, we are in this world, but we are not of this world. We are warned not to *"love the world or the things in the world"* (1 John 2:15). We are not in love with this world because, as God's children, our love is directed toward Him rather than things in the world. We love and worship the Creator, not the creation. Through our faithful giving, we demonstrate both our love for Jesus and our ability, by His grace, to break the grip that things of this world can have on us.

Inadequate as we are, God uses us as His hands, feet, and mouth. *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:10). We are His stewards. As redeemed people of God, we are called and equipped to render willingly the firstfruits of our lives and resources to Him.

Understanding Generosity

- The Apostle Paul wrote, *“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work”* (2 Corinthians 9:8).
- Jesus said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* (Acts 20:35).
- Have you ever met an unhappy generous person?
- Giving infuses life with joy. Giving is to be joyful and fulfilling.
- Grace is the action; Giving is the reaction.
- Generosity is a life overflowing with care and concern for others.
- Generosity is an essential quality of spiritual maturity and growth.
- “Through our generosity, God can do extraordinary things. Through our giving, God changes lives, and in changing them, transforms us...The practice of generosity describes the Christians unselfish willingness to give in order to make a positive difference for the purposes of Christ.” (Rev. Robert Schnase)
- “People give because generosity helps them achieve God’s purpose for themselves. By giving, we develop the inner qualities of generosity. Generosity is not a spiritual attribute someone acquires apart from the practice of giving. It becomes a discernable only through visible behavior. We cannot become generous and hold on to everything we have for ourselves without letting go. The opposite of generosity is greediness and selfishness. These are not the qualities that lead to life, and so by our giving we cultivate a different nature inside ourselves.” (Rev. Robert Schnase)
- “The less I spent on myself and the more I gave to others, the fuller of happiness and blessings did my soul become.” (Hudson Taylor)
- Generous people give proportionately to the way God has blessed them.
- “Giving generously is one of the smartest, most intellectually sound and emotionally satisfying decisions you will ever make” (Rev. Chip Ingram).
- Generosity is a spiritual gift. *“Let us use [our gifts]...the one who contributes, in generosity”* (Romans 12:8).
- Synonyms for generosity:
Goodness, largesse, unselfishness, altruism, liberality, open handedness, all heart, free-giving, charity, philanthropy.
- The mind grows by what it takes in—the heart grows by what it gives out.
- “We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give” (Winston Churchill).



Discussion Questions:

1. Read Matthew 28:16-20. What treasure did God entrust to His disciples? What were they to do with the treasure? What are you to do?
2. Read Matthew 25:31-40. As you serve your neighbor, what else is happening?
3. The giving of Cain and Abel is the first story about giving in the Bible (Genesis 4:2-4). What was the difference between Cain's offering and Abel's? (Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:12). Can giving provide evidence of what is in a person's heart? What does your offering reflect?
4. Firstfruits giving is giving the first portion of your income to God (Proverbs 3:9). What made firstfruits giving in the Old Testament so dependent on God's promises?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-7. How did the Macedonians give? What was the motivation for their giving?
6. Where are you on the journey toward generosity? How does God use your giving to change you? How does your giving affect your relationship with God?
7. Read 2 Corinthians 9:11. How is it, that by giving more of what you have, you receive even more to give?
8. God owns "*the world, and all who live in it*" (Psalm 50:10-12). If God doesn't need your gifts, why does He want you to give?

"To be smart, spend carefully. To be wise, save regularly. To be genius, give extravagantly."
(Rev Chip Ingram)
9. Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-17; 8:1; 9:8; How do you move from hoarding money to giving sparingly, to giving more, to being generous?
10. Rev. Chip Ingram gives four reasons generosity is important:
 1. Generosity is genius because it changes our lives. How?
 2. Generosity connects us with others. How?
 3. Generosity helps invest in what matters. How?
 4. Generosity frees our hearts. How?
11. What is the world's view of money? On the other hand, what does Scripture tell you? (Matthew 6:19-24; Luke 16:10-12; 1 Timothy 6:6-19)
12. Read Malachi 3:10-11; Proverbs 3:9-10; Proverbs 11:24-25; Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:6. What special blessings does God's Word promise to those who give faithfully and generously?
13. How can there be more blessing in giving than in receiving? (Acts 20:35).

Closing Prayer:

Answer Guide for “Experiencing the Joy of Generosity”

Bible Study 1: “The Joy of Receiving God’s Blessings”

We cannot give until we have first received. We cannot bless others until we first receive for ourselves God’s blessing. And out of that receiving, we give—most importantly ourselves [*“They first gave themselves to the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 8:5).]

1. John 3:16 – God gives His one and only Son that we might be saved.
Romans 10:17 – God gives us His gift of faith through His Holy Word.
Ephesians 1:7 – God has redeemed us from sin, death, and the devil and forgiven us
“according to the riches of His grace.”
2 Corinthians 9:8. God is able to make all grace abound to you.
2. Matthew 7:11 – God wants to give you good gifts.
3. 1 Corinthians 2:12-16 – God gives us His Spirit that we might understand the things of God. He has given us *“the mind of Christ.”*
4. Philippians 1:1-3 – The book of Philippians is a love letter to the Philippians. Was the Apostle Paul writing this from the comforts of a pastor’s study? No. He was in a Roman prison in chains. He was tied to a different soldier every so many hours. not knowing if he would be released or killed. Nevertheless, Paul had learned how to live above his circumstances and experience joy no matter what he was going through. Over and over in this letter, he talks about rejoicing in the Lord always.
Verse. 1: *“Paul and Timothy, servants, of Christ Jesus.”* We are all servants in the sense of being duty bound to carry out the will of the master.
Verse 2: Why does grace always precede peace? We never experience peace until after we’ve experienced grace.
Verse 3: Paul maintains his joy despite difficult circumstances by having gratitude for God’s blessings. *“I thank my God in all my remembrances of you.”* Paul is saying in essence, “I’m not thinking about my terrible circumstances right now. Instead, my dear Philippians, I’m remembering you.” There is a direct relationship between how we think and how we feel. And one of the most powerful ways to maintain joy in life is to change how you’re thinking and what you’re thinking about.
Remembering God’s gifts, whether tangible or intangible, whether events or people, is one way that God brings joy to our hearts. Remembering why you should be grateful. Thank God for everything He does for you. You cannot be depressed and grateful at the same time.
A key to maintaining joy and living above your circumstances is to be overcome with gratitude. **Gratitude for God’s blessings!!!! Life is a gift. All that we are and have are gifts from God**

Matthew Henry, who wrote a commentary on the Bible, was robbed on his way home. That's pretty depressing to get robbed. But that night, before he went to bed, he took out his diary and wrote these words:

"Let me be thankful—first, because I was never robbed before, second, because although they took my wallet, they did not take my life; third, because although they took my all, it was not much, and fourth, because it was I who was robbed and not I who robbed."

5. Philippians 1:6. Despite our circumstances, we can have joy because we can have confidence that God has a purpose for our lives, and God is using every circumstance to accomplish His purpose for us. What was God doing in Paul's life? Paul was in prison. But instead of being depressed and letting his circumstances drain his joy, he was telling his friends in Philippi, I am joyful because I am confident that God is at work my life. Even though my visible circumstances don't have any evidence of it. I am confident that God hasn't given up on me. He has a work He's doing in my life—and He has a work that He's doing in your lives too.
6. 1 Chronicles 29:1-19 – David rejoiced that God had blessed him and the nation of Israel that they were able to provide above and beyond what was needed for the building and furnishing of the temple.
Personal response
7. Genesis 1:27 – God has created us.
Psalm 90:12 – He has given us wisdom.
Romans 12:6 – He has given a diversity of gifts to the Church.
Ephesians 1:7 – Christ has redeemed us through His blood and forgiven our sins "*according to the riches of His grace.*"
Hebrews 12:2; Romans 10:17 – Jesus is "*the founder and perfecter of our faith*" Who has endured the cross on our behalf. Faith is also God's gift which He brings us through His Holy Word.
1 John 4:19 – Because He has first loved us, we are enabled to love others.
8. Genesis 49:28 – God blesses each person with a blessing suitable for that person.
9. Ecclesiastes 5:18-19 – God wants us to enjoy our work, our wealth, and our possessions as gifts that God gives to us.
10. Personal response. For the Christian, joy is found when he/she delights in the Lord.
11. Psalm 104:27; 145:15 – These passages tell us that God gives us what we need at the right time.
Personal response.
We don't always know what God knows is for our best. We may be willing to settle for what is good when, if we wait for God, He will give us just what we need. In that way, a perceived blessing could turn out to be a curse. (For example, marrying the wrong person instead of waiting for the right person God has yet to bring into our lives.)

12. Philippians 4:19 – God will provide for every need that arises “*according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*” God sees our needs for eternity and for this life as well.
13. Habakkuk 3:17-19 – The prophet’s joy comes from: “*the God of [his] salvation.*” Regardless of what his earthly circumstances are, he knows God is the salvation of his people.
14. Personal response.
God gives blessings of all kinds, both material and spiritual. God’s blessings are always given for our good. Of course, our greatest blessings come through Jesus Who brings us salvation. At times, can trials and tribulations be a blessing?
15. Acts 5:41; Hebrews 12:7-10 – Acts is the account of the blessing the disciples received in the form of persecution for Christ’s sake. Hebrews affirms that God, because we are His children and He loves us, disciplines us for our good. Yes, blessings can hurt, but the hurt is temporary and works for our eternal good.

Bible Study 2: “The Joy of Managing God’s Blessings”

1. In order for us to be faithful with the blessings God entrusts to us, we need changed hearts filled with God’s love. Thomas Jefferson said, “When the heart is right the feet are swift.” Faithful stewardship is a matter of the heart. The word “heart” is used in the Bible hundreds of times. While this may refer to the organ that pumps blood through the body, usually the word is used figuratively. We speak to someone “from the heart” or learn a hymn by “heart.” In God’s Word, the heart represents one’s very being, the full spectrum of emotions and the center of one’s person. When we hear that “home is where the heart is” we get a feeling for the sense of the word.

The Bible presents a picture of the heart that combines all aspects of our human existence. That is why we betray our true interests, concerns, and loves with the heart. Jesus said that “*where you treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Matthew 6:21). What is important to me? How do I spend my efforts and time and money? Where are my priorities, and are they pleasing to God? What kind of steward, manager, am I of the gifts God entrusts to me? These types of questions help identify and explain that **stewardship is a matter of the heart.**

When our hearts are right with God and He is doing His good works through us, we, as God’s stewards, know the joy of the Lord. This joy draws us closer to the Lord and compels us to bear the fruit of good works. Our good works are possible only because the grace of God fills our hearts with love for Him and His Church.

2. Personal response. Television, cell phones, and tablets could be high on the list of time wasters. Are you daily reading and meditating on God’s Word? Do you have an active prayer life? Are you attending church and Bible studies?

3. Ephesians 5:15-17 - God wants us to avoid the evil ways and the luring of the world. We are called to be wise and follow the ways of the Lord. We find the will and ways of the Lord in His Word.
4. 1 Peter 4:10 - The Holy Spirit gives different gifts to each one of us. These gifts are to be used in the service of others, not to keep for ourselves.
5. Psalm 24:1; Haggai 2:8 – Everything belongs to God. All we are and have are His gifts to us out of His grace. Therefore, in gratitude for God’s grace to us, we are compelled to use His gifts in ways that honor Him.
Read 1 Corinthians 4:2. God not only requires us to be trustworthy stewards, He enables us and equips us for responsible stewardship.

A Christian sees a bigger and better purpose for the management and use of his/her money. The following story illustrates how people see their purpose differently:

A man visited a stone quarry and asked three workers what they were doing. The first said irritably, “Can’t you see, I’m cutting a stone and no one is really helping me at all! The second said matter of factly, “I’m making \$100 an hour. The third said proudly, “I’m building a cathedral!” Yet all were doing the exact same work.

Knowing our lives and our money belong to God, we see a purpose for our money that goes beyond our needs and interest.

6. Matthew 24:45-51 – Faithful and wise managers are always carrying out the work God gives them to do, being ready at any moment to account for His blessings and their management of them.
The neglectful servants will be punished severely for their mismanagement.
7. 1 Timothy 5:8 – Heads of households are required to provide for their families, even extended families. This verse offers a harsh rebuke for one who does not: he/she “*has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*”

8. Personal response. With all of our hearts and minds, we need to understand that it is God’s money that we are managing. We seek to do His will and honor Him with how we manage what He entrusts to us.

Are you acting as an owner or manager (steward) of the money God has entrusted to you? If you view your money as a gift by God’s grace, you will want to please the Lord in how you spend, save, and give it. You will see your money as a tool to help the needy and spread the Good News to others.

- How we view money: God’s Word tells us that everything comes from God and everything belongs to God. (Psalm 24:1; 39:11).
- How we feel about money: God’s Word tells us that we are not to love money for the love of money a root of all kinds of evil (Matthew 6:24, 1 Timothy 6:6-10).

Rev. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church was paid 30 pounds, of which he lived on 28 pounds and gave the difference.

Some time later, his salary was raised to 50 pounds, but he continued living on 28 pounds and gave the difference.

Later his income was increased to 100 pounds, but he continued living on 28 pounds and gave the difference.

Pastor Wesley viewed his money as a gift from God to be used for God's purposes.

Billy Graham said, "If a person gets his attitude toward money straight, it will help straighten out almost any other area of life."

How do some people mismanage their money other than circumstances involving health problems or job loss?

- Keep up with the Joneses
- No plans or budgets
- No goals
- Ignorance
- Foolish investments
- Greed
- Lack of contentment
- Pride
- Lack of discipline
- Compulsive shopping
- Too much debt
- Need immediate gratification

9. When we build up a surplus, God can use those funds for ministry to help and support others and to extend His kingdom.
10. Proverbs 30:8-9; Matthew 19:23-24; 1 Timothy 6:6-10 - God's Word shares more concerns for those who are wealthy. There is the tendency to think that, if we are wealthy, we don't need God. This idea of wealth affects many people. It is not just the super-rich like the Bill Gateses and Warren Buffets. In comparison to the rest of the world, we are the rich. Thomas Carlyle wrote, "99 people out of 100 can handle adversity, but only one out of 100 can handle prosperity." Scripture again and again warns us about money. Rich people can be faithful and be saved, but riches can be an impediment. The wealthy have the opportunity to use their wealth in many wonderful ways to help the needy and extend the kingdom.
11. Joy comes from having a right relationship with God. Managing our money and time for God's purposes and according to His will gives us joy.
12. Matthew 25:14-30 – The Master is God. We are the servants. A talent is an amount of money.
The servants were given varying amounts of money in relation to their varying abilities to manage it. Each, however, was charged to be faithful with what he received. The servant who received five talents and the one who received two were both faithful.
The two servants who were given the most also earned the most because they were wise and resourceful in how they managed (invested) it. They found joy in having pleased the Master. The master commended the two faithful servants with the words "*Well done, good and faithful servants.*" They were also rewarded with more responsibility and were welcomed into the joy of the master.

Because the third servant did not have a good relationship with his master, he buried his talents. He seemed to blame his own failure on the master. The master tells the unfaithful servant, “*You wicked and slothful servant!*” The third servant was unproductive with the gifts he received and was severely criticized by his master who, in effect, fired him.

13. Luke 12:15 – This verse warns us of the dangers of covetousness and greed and reminds us that our lives should not be wrapped up in the abundance of material possessions.
14. Personal response. The main purpose of wise money management is that, by it, we can give honor and glory to God. We can be His instruments to care for our families and help those who are in financial need. We can have funds to support our churches and their ministries. Money is to be used as a tool to help others and extend the kingdom.
15. How and where we spend our money is an indication of where our interests and priorities lie. Does the first portion of our incomes go to the Lord or for our own needs and wants? After we’ve given our tithes and offerings, are we still saving, spending, and giving prudently? Selfishly? Haphazardly?
16. Matthew 6:33 – When God comes first in our hearts and minds and hearts, everything else will fall into place.
17. 2 Corinthians 9:13 tells us that through the generosity of the Corinthians and other Gentiles God is being glorified. The same holds true of generous givers today.

Bible Study 3: “The Joy of Sharing God’s Blessings”

1. Our greatest treasure is the Gospel, the Good News that tells us that, through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, He gives us victory over sin, death, and the devil. We have the promise of eternal life. We are to share and spread the Gospel to all people. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching.
2. Jesus is with us in such a way that we are serving Jesus when we serve others.
3. Genesis 4:2-4; Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:12 – Abel offered his gift in faith. Abel gave the “*firstborn of his flock, and of their fat portions.*” Cain’s heart was not right toward God. Cain offered some of his harvest.
Yes, just as how we spend our time is a reflection of what’s important to us, so does how we spend our money. Do we give first to the Lord? That indicates that He and the Gospel and the salvation of souls are our utmost priority.
4. Proverbs 3:9 – Old Testament givers gave the first of their crops, trusting that the remaining 9/10 would be good grain, not moldy, not destroyed by insects or bad weather, or any other such malady.

5. 2 Corinthians 8:1-7 - By God's grace in Jesus, the Macedonians gave generously. In spite of their afflictions and economic challenges, they gave above their means. They first gave themselves. Knowing and experiencing God's love, they gave from their hearts.
6. Personal response. Giving causes us to trust in God, and He promises to supply all our needs (Philippians 4:19). Jesus said, "*Where your treasure is your heart will be also*" (Matthew 6:21). Our selfishness or the lack of giving can cause a roadblock to our spiritual growth. Hoarding prevents us from being the channels through which God works. Through our faithful and generous giving, we become more Christ-like. We were created in God's image, although through sin, that image in us was changed. God's nature is to love and give, and we are to imitate Him (Ephesians 5:1). Through our generosity, we experience the joy that comes from doing what God has called us to do which is to share with others.
7. 2 Corinthians 9:11 – God will always provide for what we need and give us even more to share with others. The result is that thanksgiving will be given to God.
8. Psalm 50:10-12 – Personal response.
 - Giving keeps us dependent on God.
 - Giving strengthens our connection with God and the church
 - Giving brings joy to the giver and the receiver.
 - Giving is a deterrent to greed and covetousness.
 - Giving is one way we can serve God and others.
 - God makes us channels for the gifts He wants to give to His children.
 - Giving as a priority reduces our anxiety regarding money. By God's grace, we follow God's will not our own, and we place our trust in Him.
9. 2 Corinthians 5:14-17; 8:1; 9:8 – As we grow in faith, coming to understand the great love Christ has for us, we want to respond in thankful giving. His love flows through us and we are compelled to act toward others as Christ has acted toward us. It is by God's grace alone that we can become generous givers.
10. Giving gives us a purpose. God uses us as His channels to help and support others, and, in the process, we draw closer to Him and become more dependent upon God. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we stop seeing money as an end, but rather as a means or as a tool to be used for God's purposes. Through our generosity God blesses us spiritually (sometimes materially). We experience the joy of giving.
 2. Through our giving we are extending God's love. Jesus said, "*Where your treasure is your heart will be also*" (Matthew 6:21). Those we support not only receive our gifts; they receive our love and compassion.
 3. Scripture tells us that we bring nothing into this life and take nothing with us at the end. The only investing that will last for eternity are those gifts and investments we make into others and into God's kingdom. Helping and supporting other people (especially Christians—Galatians 6:10) are storing up treasures in heaven.
 4. Our human tendency is to be self-centered and selfish. With God's help, we can overcome our desire to hoard and keep what we have by giving freely to others. We stop

seeing our money as our money and begin to see what we have as God's money that has been entrusted to us.

11. Personal response.

The world sees money as the answer to all our problems, the giver of status and power, one of the most important things in life, if not at the top of the list. People believe that to be happy they need money and the things money can buy, and the world both initiates and perpetuates that attitude.

Matthew 6:19-24; Luke 16:10-12; 1 Timothy 6:6-19 – Money is a fleeting commodity, especially compared to treasures in Heaven that are eternal. Money can be a trap which will cause our “*ruin and destruction*.”

In Matthew 6:24, Jesus tells us that we can't serve two masters. Serving money can be so subtle that we may not be aware it has become overly important to us. We may not realize how important our success and material comforts have become. Money and possessions can challenge our relationship with Jesus. Who or what is receiving our energy, time, and thoughts?

In the Luke 16:10-12 reference, Jesus is telling us that it is important to be obedient and faithful with the lesser things such as money. If we are not faithful with little things, like money, God will not entrust us with true riches which refers to people.

12. Malachi 3:10-11; Proverbs 3:9-10; 11:24-25; Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:6 – God tells us through these passages that we will never be in want because He will “*open the windows of Heaven for [us]*.” God continually blesses His people, but He promises even more blessings through our generosity. The most important blessings are spiritual, but, at times, He blesses us materially.

13. Acts 20:35. There is joy in making others happy through our generosity. Nothing is more enjoyable than to see someone who appreciates the gifts they have received from us. It is discouraging to give to those who aren't grateful and may even spurn our gifts. Let us then remember our Savior Who bore humiliation, torture, and death in order to bring us the gift of salvation. During those very hours, He was ridiculed and His gift spurned, but He did not withdraw it. Throughout the centuries and still today, there are those who do not value His gift, but He continues to reach out to them, joyfully, in love. Through our giving, we imitate God's giving nature, which gives us joy. Giving is joyful and fulfilling. If we search our hearts and our memories, we are sure to find joy flooding our emotions upon remembering those occasions when we gave without reservation, without thought of getting something back, without any motive other than to bless another as we have been blessed.

Answer Guide

Tithing: An Unexpected Joy

Bible Study 1: “What is Tithing?”

1. Personal response

2. In the Old Testament, God commanded the Israelites to tithe (Leviticus 27:30). It was the duty of His people to tithe, although many gave their gifts willingly out of love, trust, and faith in God. As New Testament Christians, we are not commanded, but we are motivated by God’s grace to give generously and to use the tithe as a Biblical guide for our giving.



3. Giving is not an option for Christians. Just as God gave, we are called to give. Through faith, we give out of gratitude for who God is and what He has done for us through His Son, Jesus. Because of Christ’s love for us, we are compelled to give (2 Corinthians 5:14). In the Old Testament, people gave their tithes, and, for special needs, they gave offerings. As New Covenant Christians, who live under grace, we are empowered to give even more. As we grow spiritually, we will, with God’s strength, aim to become tithers and even go beyond the tithe.

4. The tithe is the first portion of our income which we give to the Lord through our church contributions. Our tithes or weekly contributions are what churches use to support the church budget. Offerings are special gifts that are given in addition to the weekly contributions. Offerings are normally less frequent, and their purposes will vary.

5. Exodus 25:1-2: “You are to receive the offering for Me from each man whose heart prompts him to give.

Chronicles 29:3-6: “. . . the officials in charge of the King’s work gave willingly”

The people gave not because they were commanded to give, but because of an inward desire to give.

Consider asking, “Where does God want you to give your tithe?”

Whereas Scripture gives us definite giving principles or truths, it is less clear as to where the tithe should be given. In the Old Testament, one of the tithes was given to support the Levites, so we can infer that part or the entire tithe today should go to our churches for the support of our pastors and the ministry of the church. In addition, the Old Testament storehouse provided for the needy as does many churches today. In our churches, we receive God’s Sacraments and are fed spiritually. Because of the importance and need of our churches, we can encourage our members to give most or their entire tithes to their churches. Offerings can be given wherever the hearts of people lead them to give.

6. The three giving principles found in 1 Corinthians 16:2 are:

- We are to give regularly--Systematically (on the first day of every week)
- We each have a personal responsibility to give (each one of you)
- We are to give in proportion to the income that we receive (in keeping with his income)

6. Genesis 28:10-22. If God would watch over him, provide for him, and give him safe travel on his journey, Jacob vowed to give God a tenth. The giving is conditional. Personal response. His motivation for giving appears to be for his own well-being. Yet it is a step of faith.

7. Amos 4:1-5: They followed the law closely such as tithing, but they foolishly bragged about it. They neglected what God loves and that is goodness, kindness, mercy, and justice. Because of their unfaithfulness, God warned the people that He withhold His blessings and cause them hardships.

8. Malachi 3:8-10: Malachi rebuked the people and the priests for their unfaithfulness. His message to them urged them to repent of their rebellious and sinful ways so they could receive God's blessings. As an indication of their hardened hearts, they were bringing injured, crippled or diseased animals and offering them as sacrifices (verse 1:13). They were robbing God by not giving Him their tithes and offerings (3:8).

9. Verse 10 reads, "*See if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessings that you will not have room enough for it.*" God blesses all people, but He promises extra blessings to those who give Him faithfully their tithes and offerings. In verse 11 we read, "*I will prevent pests from devouring your crops . . .*" Most of us don't worry about pests devouring our crops, but we are concerned about problems with our cars, appliances, or our housing. God can make the things that we own last longer with fewer repairs.

Consider asking, "What were the three tithes the Israelites were commanded to give?"

First tithe: Support of God's house and work (Leviticus 27:30-33; Numbers 18:21-26).

Second tithe: A festival tithe for ceremonial feasting and celebration (Deuteronomy 12:5-19; 14:22-27).

Third tithe: This tithe was a collection for the needy (Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 26:12-15).

10. Personal response

Bible Study 2: "Whose Money Is It Anyway?"

1. If we fail to acknowledge that God is the source and owner of all things, we will believe that we are the owner and not the manager or steward of God's blessings to us. Through faith, we understand that we are merely managers of God's money and possessions that He has entrusted to us. As managers of God's money, we will use it in ways that give Him honor and glory. We will give priority to sharing our money with the needy and use it to extend His kingdom here on earth.

2. We live in a very materialistic and consumer-driven society. There is constant encouragement and pressure to acquire more things. People are convinced that happiness can only be found by owning the newest and best of things. As Christians, we are to be in the world but not of it. Certainly, God wants us to live in some comfort, but we need to seek a balance. By God's grace, we can seek first His righteousness and then all that we need to provide for our needs will be given to us (Matthew 6:33).

3. Rich Young Ruler (Luke 18:18-25): He loved his money, and he viewed it as his own. His security and his god was in his wealth.

Poor Widow (Luke 21:1-4): She loved and trusted in Jesus. She willingly gave all that she had away.

Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37): Barnabas committed his life to telling others about Jesus. Through faith, he gave his property to help support the spreading of the gospel.

Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11): They promised to give to the Lord, but they lacked the commitment and had a change of heart because they either never meant to give at all or they just wanted to look good. After they had lied, they were struck dead.

4. The Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21): The rich farmer was focused on the good life. His goal was to “Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry” (Luke 12:19). Jesus calls the rich farmer a “fool” because he was interested only in himself. He gave God no credit for his material success. He had no compassion for the needy. He was very selfish and self-centered.

5. God is not critical of our success. Whether we are wealthy or poor, we, through faith, can serve the Lord with our lives and blessings. Whatever position that we find ourselves in, God wants us to be faithful and obedient which the Rich Fool was not. Therefore, the bigger barns were not the issue in this parable. The problem was the Rich Fool’s hard heart.

6. If things become too important, they will occupy too much of our time and thoughts. Jesus said, “*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Matthew 6:21). Whatever receives our attention, priority, and time will become our treasure.

7. Matthew 6:33: By God’s grace, we are called and enabled to seek Him first. If we seek Him first, He promises to provide for our needs. From His rich supply, He will not only give to us what we need for ourselves, but He will equip and fill us so we can help others.

8. It begins by having the attitude that all that we are and have are gifts from God. God’s grace makes all of life possible. We are trustworthy with our worldly wealth when we give joyfully and generously to others. We are to be trustworthy in our giving and in the faithful management of God’s money that we keep for ourselves. As stewards, we acknowledge God’s ownership and that we are accountable to Him for His blessings to us. We should understand that our money and possessions are tools to use in God’s service.

9. Personal response.

Bible Study 3: “Why Tithing Is Relevant Today”

1. In the story of the poor widow, Jesus praised the widow for giving her two mites. Because she gave all that she had, the amount that she gave was unimportant. Jesus was critical of the wealthy who gave much but gave only their leftovers. The attitude or the motive for the giving is much more important than the size of the gift. The sacrifice is determined by what we have after we give. God wants our giving to be a response of faith out of gratitude for who He is and all that He does for us. If we give for recognition, as an obligation, or for tax purposes, we are giving for the wrong reasons.

2. In Matthew 23:23, Jesus is critical of the Pharisees who were so focused on their duty to tithe that they were neglecting “*the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness.*” He is not telling them to stop tithing; rather He exhorts them to continue their tithing and practice justice, mercy, and faithfulness as well. Tithing worships and praises God when it is given from the heart. The Pharisees tried to earn God’s love and their salvation through their deeds such as tithing. Tithing can dishonor God when it is done for the wrong reasons.

3. The giving of our money (and time) is a good indicator of our spiritual maturity. Giving is a spiritual issue more often than a money issue. As our faith grows so will our giving. If money becomes too

important, we will want to keep it for ourselves. Keeping it for ourselves indicates that money is controlling us rather than we controlling it.

The giving of money, for most people, is the hardest thing to give, but there are many ways and things to give. The giving of time can be a wonderful gift. Our compassion for others can be expressed in smiles, cards, telephone calls, giving rides, etc.

4. We are compelled by Christ's love to give, and it is faith that enables us to put ourselves in God's hands, trusting His promise to provide for our needs when we are obedient to His command to give. When we look at our asset and debit columns, we will always find reasons to give or not to give generously. However, when we, with eyes of faith, look at the riches God pours out on us and His promise (2 Corinthians 9:8) to give us enough to share with others, we will be cheerful, generous givers.

5. In our tithing, we give regularly which, for most of us, is weekly. Our weekly tithe is a constant reminder of God's sovereignty. Our tithe creates a dependence on Him instead of our money. Our tithe reminds us that we are God's children who have been created and redeemed by Him. When we give Jesus the first part of our income, we acknowledge Him as the Lord of all.

6. 2 Corinthians 8:1-7: The Macedonians were facing extreme trials, but, in spite of their poverty, they gave beyond their ability. They gave sacrificially to the distressed Christians in Jerusalem. They gave so generously that Paul used the giving of the Macedonians as an example to the Corinthian people. They were able to give generously because "they gave themselves first to the Lord."

We give ourselves to the Lord when we, through faith, believe and follow Jesus. Our relationship grows as we spend time in His Word and participate regularly in the Lord's Table.

7. God promises to bless His people through their faithful giving. We give Him our first and best, we will receive His joy and peace. There is no assurance of material blessing, but He may choose to bless us materially. We don't give to receive His blessing, but we believe in His promise of blessings.

- Proverbs 3:9-10: *"your barns will be filled to overflowing"*
- Malachi 3:10: *"see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing"*
- Luke 6:38: *"give and it will be given to you"*
- 2 Corinthians 9:6: *"whoever sows generously will also reap generously"*

8. What we spend our money on and what we give to indicate what is important to us. Your checkbook register, bank statement, and credit card statement will reveal where your money is going. What is important to you will receive your money, time, and energy.

9. Make giving a priority: God does not want our leftovers. He wants us give Him the first portion of our income (Proverbs 3:9).

Give proportionately: God directs us to give Him a proportionate amount of our income (2 Corinthians 8:12).

Give sacrificially: God is pleased when our giving affects our lifestyle (1 Kings 17:7-16; Luke 21:1-4).

Give regularly: God wants us to give to Him on the first of each week (1 Corinthians 16:2).

10. We give because *"Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that One died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him Who died for them and was raised again"* (2 Corinthians 5:14). Because of Christ's tremendous sacrifice for us on the cross, we, who live under grace, should be willing to give more. God desires total

devotion and commitment to Him from those who call themselves His followers. The Law does not motivate us to give. As new people in Christ, we are transformed into giving people. Through faith, we give out of gratitude for who God is and what He has done for us through Jesus.

(Place Church's Name Here)

Stewardship Emphasis 2015



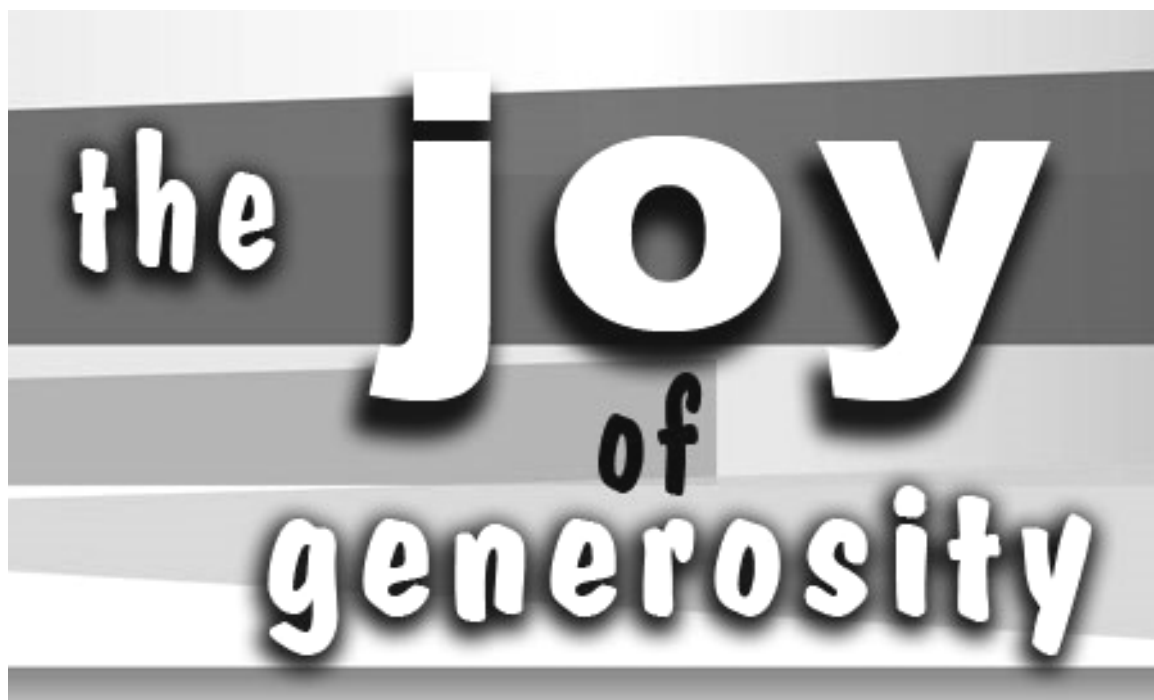
Daily Devotions

for

(Week of ____date____)

(Place Church's Name Here)

Stewardship Emphasis 2015



Daily Devotions

for

(Week of ____date____)

Daily Devotions

for the whole family!

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

Week 1: The Joy of Receiving God's Blessings

Theme verse: "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Weekday Devotions:

Monday:	Appreciating What We Have
Tuesday:	What Belongs to God?
Wednesday:	How the Steward Is Supported
Thursday:	Receive with Thanksgiving
Friday:	And Be Thankful

Week 1—Monday—Appreciating What We Have

Scripture: *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will in Christ Jesus for you."*
(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Epicurus, a Greek philosopher in the third century BC said, "If you want to make a man happy, add not to his riches but take away from his desires." When we desire less, we are more content with what we do have. Coveting puts us in a state of discontentment with an insatiable appetite for more, making contentment impossible. Those who are content enjoy what they have rather than complain about what they don't have. They are joyful for what they have received from God knowing that all of life is a gift.

The apostle Paul writes, *"Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment..."* (1 Timothy 6:6). Our happiness is not dependent on what we have or own. Asaph, the Psalmist had an intimate relationship with God Who enabled him to be content with what He had provided. We would do well to meditate on his words, *"Whom have I in heaven but You? And earth has nothing on earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever"* (Psalm 73:25-26).

Follow Paul's directive in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will in Christ Jesus for you."* As you pray, thanking God for all His blessings, especially the gift of His Son and His Word and Sacraments, you will find your heart and mind being filled with more and more reason to give thanks to our wonderful Lord.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for Your generosity to me. Help me to receive with a thankful heart. Amen.



Week 1—Tuesday—What Belongs to God?

Scripture: *“What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Corinthians 4:7)*

A Sunday school teacher gave a bunch of stickers to each of her students. The stickers read, “This belongs to Jesus.” They were to place the stickers on everything at home that they owned such as radios, bicycles, roller blades, etc. These stickers were to remind them that all of these things actually belonged to Jesus and to encourage them to use them in ways pleasing to Jesus.



As stewards, we acknowledge that who we are and what we have are gifts received from God. God’s Word tells us that nothing actually belongs to us. *“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein...”* (Psalm 24:1). The air we breathe, the water we drink, the land we live on are gifts we enjoy out of the overflow of God’s love. The love of God, the gift of God’s Son, Jesus, the forgiveness of sins, the comfort of the Holy Spirit, and life eternal are gifts to us from God. This understanding that all of life is a gift and that God owns everything prompts a shift in our understanding of stewardship. Through faith, we see stewardship as receiving joyfully, managing responsibly, and sharing generously all that God entrusts to us. What a privilege it is to receive, manage, and share what belongs to God.

What if we as adults were given that same sticker exercise as the Sunday school students? How many of us would put stickers on the money in our purses or wallets to show that God is the owner of our money? How many of us would put stickers on our calendars to show that this time belongs to Jesus? Everything ultimately belongs to God. It isn’t the other way around at all. We only think it is.

Prayer: Dear Father, You are the source of every good and perfect gift for which I thank You. Amen.

Week 1—Wednesday—How the Steward Is Supported

Scripture: *“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him Who called us to His own glory and excellence” (2 Peter 1:3).*

God, the Father, the Giver of *“every good and perfect gift...”* (James 1:17) has provided for us everything we need to carry out His commission to *“make disciples of all nations...”* (Matthew 28:19). This He does by His Word and Sacrament through which we receive forgiveness of sins and life eternal. His Word shows us His love expressed through His Son’s sacrifice on the Cross, His power which has conquered sin and death, and His grace freely given to undeserving sinners.



We are God’s instruments through which He works. *“Therefore, My dear friends...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God Who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure”* (Philippians 2:13). Tapping into His strength, we can fulfill His purposes for our lives. As we receive our Lord’s body and blood in Holy Communion, we are assured of our forgiveness and empowered to *“walk in a manner worthy of the Lord...”* (Colossians 1:10).

Prayer: Dear Lord, You have indeed provided everything I need to support my body and life. Help me to stand on Your Word and partake of Your Sacrament with gratitude for all Your blessings to me. Amen.

Week 1—Thursday—Receive with Thanksgiving

Scripture: *“For every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...”* (James 1:17).

The world is full of heartache. Heartaches of all kinds: financial difficulties, health problems, broken relationships, job stresses. You can name more. Look around you, and often you can see hurt in people’s eyes. More often, we learn to mask our hurt and present a “happy face.” The apostle Paul had plenty of heartaches, too. He was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, without a home of his own, in danger from the elements, from enemies, and, sadly, in danger from false brothers. He suffered from hunger, the cold, and lack of clothing. He felt the pressure of concern for the new churches he established and served. (See 2 Corinthians 11:16-33.)



In spite of his challenges, Paul knew that God was in control, and he taught the new Christians to depend on God for all their needs: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God”* (Philippians 4:6). That two-word phrase in the middle is easy to miss: *“with thanksgiving.”* And why should we not pray with thanksgiving, knowing we have a gracious God Who delights to bless us! Why should we not pray with thanksgiving, knowing we have a God Who has spared not even His own Son (Romans 8:32)! Should we lose all, we still pray with thanksgiving that nothing can separate us from our Savior (Romans 8:38-39).

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for Your promise to be with me and protect me. Help me to depend upon You. In Jesus’ precious name I pray. Amen.

Week 1—Friday—And Be Thankful

Scripture: *“Give thanks in all circumstances”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

What have you had to give up in order to be a Christian? Have you lost any friends because you’re a believer? What about your job? Are your children barred from getting an education because your family goes to church regularly? Have your parents disowned you because you follow Christ?



A wealthy native of India came to faith in Christ. Almost immediately after becoming a Christian, all that he owned was taken from him, and his wife and children would no longer have anything to do with him. He was asked how he could bear these losses. He replied that many people had asked him that question, but that none had asked how he could bear his joys. Certainly, this man found his joy in Christ and found reason to be thankful. Those who belong to Christ always have a reason for gratitude, for, with Christ, we have everything while, apart from Him, we are destitute. The Apostle Paul tells us to let Christ’s peace reign in our hearts *“And be thankful”* (Colossians 3:15).

Too often, when we pray we put an agenda before God. We tell Him what we want Him to take care of: find that person a job, heal that other person, solve our money problems, and keep our kids safe. We add our thanks as an afterthought. Try spending your whole prayer time offering thanks. The Bible tells us, *“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18). As His stewards, we humbly and joyfully give Him thanks.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to express my gratitude to You by what I say and do. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

Daily Devotions

for the whole family!

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

Week 2: The Joy of Managing God's Blessings

Theme verse: "Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy" (1 Corinthians 4:2).

Weekday Devotions:

Monday:	Being a Faithful Steward
Tuesday:	Attitude toward Money
Wednesday:	Being Rich toward God
Thursday:	Learning to Be Content
Friday:	Keeping our Focus

Week 2—Monday—Being a Faithful Steward

Scripture: "Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

What if your pastor asked you to give a testimonial about your life as God's steward? If you were asked to share how you manage and care for God's property, what would you say? Perhaps you'd say that, as a God-pleasing steward, you acknowledge God as the creator and source of all things. As the creator of all, He owns everything. God's property is on loan to us. As stewards, we are to manage what He has entrusted to us responsibly, joyfully, and for God's purposes. You would go on to say that, as God's

stewards, we are not to be passive managers but active and involved, that we are caretakers and managers of God's gifts so we are accountable for what we do with His gifts of time, talents, and money. You'd sum up your thoughts by declaring that stewards live lives expressing gratitude to God for both our created and redeemed lives. We live a life of saying "thank you" to God for His love and mercy. Stewardship is faith in action.

To answer the question, "Are we being faithful stewards with our lives and gifts?" we may want to check our calendars and check registers. Faithful stewards would have times marked on their calendars for helping others, church meetings, and Bible studies. We would be spending time in prayer and attending worship services. Through faith, we try our best to use our time doing God's will. Our check book registers would show weekly offerings being made to God through our church, and there would be some checks written to help the needy. Our calendars and check registers will show us where our priorities lie.

God has blessed us stewards with many blessings, but the decision is ours whether or not we will use those gifts for the work of the Lord. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God enables us to use our gifts faithfully and joyfully for His purposes. May God help us all to be the faithful stewards that He wants us to be.

Prayer: Lord, grant me faith to be a committed and joyful steward of all You entrust to me. Amen.



Week 2—Tuesday—Attitude toward Money

Scripture: “You cannot serve God and money” (Matthew. 6:24).

The primary issue with money is attitude. While it is important to have good spending plans, to be wise investors, and to control credit, what matters most is our attitudes toward money. Do we possess possessions or do possessions possess us? Acknowledging God as the owner of our money and we as the caretakers of what He entrusts to us is a first step toward ensuring that our possessions are tools for our use rather than things that control us. As Christians, we are not honest if we use the disclaimer, “Jesus can have our hearts but not our money.” We can’t compartmentalize the Christian life. Our relationship with Christ impacts everything we think and do, including our money management. Money, more than anything else, can separate us from our heavenly Father. Money can be Satan’s best tool to deceive God’s people. Money has the power to change us and may win the battle for our hearts as we are deceived by the thought that more money is the answer to our financial problems instead of God. Having money and possessions can make us proud, crowd out the real God, and cause us to place our security in our financial well-being instead of our God (Proverbs 30:8-10).



In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus said: “...the thorns (deceitfulness of wealth) grew up and choked [the Word]” (Mark 4:7). In Matthew 6:24 Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters...You cannot serve God and money.” As God’s people, we can’t have a foot in each kingdom. It is impossible to have two masters, so we must choose between God’s kingdom and the kingdom of the world. It is one or the other, not both.

The world sees money as life’s report card and source of all happiness and security. In contrast, we, as faithful stewards, see money as a means to provide for our needs, to help others, and to further God’s kingdom.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help me to hold money loosely and to have a proper attitude toward it. Amen.

Week 2—Wednesday—Being Rich toward God

Scripture: “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15).

In the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21), Jesus warns us about the problem of greed. In this parable, Jesus tells about a wealthy and successful farmer who produced such a big crop that he made plans to tear down his existing barns and build bigger ones to store his abundant harvest. Basking in his success, he had no worries about his future as he looked forward to an easy retirement of eating, drinking, and being merry. We might admire him for his success, but God called him a fool, because God saw him as selfish and greedy. He ignored God as well as his neighbors, and God called him to account for his greed. The Rich Fool forfeited his life. “So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God” (verse 21), Jesus said.



Jesus did not condemn the rich farmer because he had wealth, but He did condemn his wrong attitude toward his riches. His wealth had become the most important thing in his life. Through this parable, God is warning us about the problem of greed and our need to use our wealth properly. Rather than being rich toward money, God wants us to be “rich toward God.” In Luke 12:21, Jesus is telling His listeners that, if we store up things only for ourselves and are not “rich toward God,” we will have the same fate as the Rich Fool. In order to be “rich toward God” with our money, we need to acknowledge that God is the source of all that we have and to glorify God through the use of our money.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to be rich toward You in how I view and use my money. Amen.

Week 2—Thursday—Learning to Be Content

Scripture: “...in whatever situation I am to be content” (Philippians 4:11).

The Apostle Paul had learned the secret of contentment, of being satisfied in every circumstance in which God placed him. Paul was in prison when he wrote the book of Philippians. He had been at the point of death several times. If anyone could have said he was in need or want, it was Paul. He had suffered much, yet he learned to be content “*facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need*” (Philippians 4:12). Like Paul, we, too, can learn contentment. The secret of contentment is gratitude for what God gives.



Because many people are infatuated with things and have the desire to acquire more and more, they fall victim to discontentment. There is a correlation between “having more” and “wanting more.” Even though we are surrounded by material abundance, we don’t believe we have enough, so we are discontented.

There are two ways we can strive to have enough. We can try to accumulate more, or we can learn to be satisfied with less. If we pursue the first way, accumulating more, we will discover that more is never enough. Those who have followed that route have found that money can’t buy lasting satisfaction. As hard as it is, we need to curb our desire for more by concentrating on the blessings we do have. Being satisfied with less and being willing to use what we have in God-pleasing ways are attitudes that contribute to our contentment. Those who have less and are content are better off than those who have much and always want more. But how can we be satisfied? The answer is found in the words of Jesus: “*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33).

Prayer: Lord, thank You for the wonderful blessings You have given to me. Help me to be content. Amen.

Week 2—Friday—Keeping our Focus

Scripture: “... for it is the time to seek the Lord...” (Hosea 10:12).

Have you ever felt that life is so full of distractions and that there are such pulls on your time that you have lost your focus? As God’s stewards, our goal is to live our lives for God’s purpose according to His grace given us by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament. Getting our priorities straight and sticking to them is one of the most difficult tasks we face. We are called to be faithful and not misdirected by the world, our flesh, or Satan. “*As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as He Who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do*” (1 Peter 1:14-15).



It is challenging, but, with God’s help, it is possible to keep God at the center of our busy lives. Because God promises that, when we call on Him, He will give us the strength to overcome any temptations, we are able to say “yes” to Him and “no” to the temptations of the world. God does not shield us from temptations, but He sustains us while we are facing them (1 Corinthians 10:13). With God’s help, we are able to recognize that much of life is meaningless when compared to the times we spend in God’s Word, prayer, and worship.

We may ask ourselves the question, “Does the way I live my life reflect the importance of my relationship with God?” We may also ask, “Does my faith help focus my life or does my faith get lost in the blur of busyness and day-to-day routine?” Our goal is to keep “the main thing the main thing,” which is to love, serve, trust, and obey our heavenly Father.

Prayer: Lord, Help me to use my time wisely so I may glorify You. Guide me in Your path. Amen.

Daily Devotions

for the whole family!

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

Week 3: The Joy of Sharing God's Blessings

Theme verse: "You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God" (2 Corinthians 9:11).

Weekday Devotions:

Monday:	Blessings through Giving
Tuesday:	Giving from the Heart
Wednesday:	Overcoming Selfishness
Thursday:	Giving Honors God
Friday:	The Spiritual Discipline of Giving

Week 3—Monday—Blessings through Giving

Scripture: "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9:6).

Every command God gives us is for our good, for the building up of the Church, and for the honor and glory of His name. God's command to give, to share with others the resources with which He has blessed us, follows the pattern of command linked to blessing. Throughout Scripture, when a command to give is stated, along with that command is a reference to the rewards that the giver will enjoy. These blessings come in many forms.



"When Jesus was at Bethany...a woman came up to Him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, which she poured on His head (and feet)..." (Matthew 26:6). Can we imagine the thoughts going through Jesus' mind as this woman gave such a precious, costly gift to Him? His disciples thought it was too expensive, extravagant, and wasteful. Sometimes it takes something out of the ordinary, something impractical to show our gratitude, to offer encouragement. We know Jesus was encouraged. "She has done a beautiful thing to Me," He said and then rewarded her with words that did more than compliment; they lifted her up. The incident is recorded for our benefit as well, for her example of encouragement is a lesson for us. Her selfless act of giving resulted in her being encouraged in her faith, even as she had encouraged her Lord.

This account truly illustrates Proverbs 11:25. "Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered." As Christians, we should give without reservation, without expectation of receiving anything in return. However, our gracious God, Who loves us so much, thrills to reward us. He has put within us the joy of giving and finding reward in another's pleasure.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, as You are generous with me, grant me the joy of giving. Amen.

Week 3—Tuesday—Giving from the Heart

Scripture: *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35).

In God’s Word, we find many examples of people who gave faithfully, generously, and joyfully. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, Paul uses the Macedonians as an example of people who, in their extreme poverty, gave beyond their ability. Because of the famine in Macedonia at the time, they didn’t have a surplus to give from; however, they put God first and trusted in Him to provide. Out of overflowing joy, they gave from their hearts.



For another example of giving from the heart, we can look at the account of the Widow’s Offering found in Luke 21:1-4. In this story, the Pharisees gave from their excess and for recognition, whereas the widow quietly dropped in two small copper coins which was all she had. She gave from the heart. From this sacrificial gift, it is evident that she placed her total trust in God. She was relying on Him for her future care. Although the Pharisees gave larger gifts than the widow, they were chastised for having hardened hearts. Even though the widow gave only a small gift, Jesus praised her for her generosity because He knew she gave from a loving heart.

A third illustration of one giving from the heart is Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). When Jesus changed Zacchaeus’ heart, he cheerfully gave away half of what he had and four times to those from whom he had cheated. Before he met Jesus, his money was his god so he hoarded it. With a changed heart, he gave generously and joyfully.

God wants our giving to come from hearts filled with gratitude for who God is and for all that He has done and continues to do for us. As we spend time in God’s Word and participate often in the Lord’s Table, our attitudes toward giving will change from seeing it as an obligation to being a privilege. May God fill our hearts with gratitude so we can experience the joy of giving to our Lord and Savior.

Prayer: Dear Lord, open my eyes to opportunities to share what I’ve been given by You with others. Amen.

Week 3—Wednesday—Overcoming Selfishness

Scripture: *“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work”* (2 Corinthians 9:8).

By nature, we are selfish people. At an early age, we voice our selfishness with the word “Mine!” Unfortunately, this selfish attitude often carries forward into our adult years. Many people live with the attitude, “What is mine is mine, and I’m going to keep it.” Because of our selfishness, we look at life in terms of our money, our things, and our achievements. We focus on ourselves and give little thought to those around us.



A selfish attitude is obviously not conducive to giving joyfully. Believing that we need and deserve all we have, we have little interest in giving generously. Because of our sinful, self-oriented natures, we fail to exercise generosity in our daily lives. The Bible depicts our fallen condition: “. . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). As self-centered people, we accumulate things for ourselves. When God changes our hearts, though, our selfishness is no longer an obstacle to our giving. With hearts right with God, we acknowledge God as the owner of all things and trust in Jesus rather than our money for our security and salvation. By the working of the Holy Spirit through His Word, God can remove our selfishness.

Prayer: Dear Father in Heaven, I pray for a giving spirit. Enable me to give joyfully and generously. Amen.

Week 3—Thursday—Giving Honors God

Scripture: “You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God” (2 Corinthians 9:11).

God wants us to honor Him with the first portion of our incomes. He exhorts us to give in proportion to how we are blessed. He encourages us to give regularly and cheerfully. He wants us to excel in the grace of giving. God tells us that our giving tests the sincerity of our hearts and that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Through our giving, we worship and honor God, and, through our faithful giving, God blesses us.



When we give to God first, He is honored. We dishonor Him when we give our leftovers and when we give haphazardly. In Proverbs 3:9 we read, *“Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.”* Because most of us don’t farm for a living, we don’t give the firstfruits or the first portion of our crops, but we can give the firstfruits of our incomes. In an agricultural society, the first part of the crops was given before farmers had harvested the rest of their crops. They truly trusted that God would provide as they gave the first part to Him. God asks us, too, to place our faith and trust in Him to provide for us as we give the first part of our incomes as well. God promises His people that He will bless them if they give faithfully and generously. In Malachi, God tells us that He wants to be put to the test by our giving, so He can prove to us that He is faithful in His promises.

Satan, the world, and our flesh tell us we should spend our money on ourselves and give only minimally, if at all. As you prayerfully consider what you will give, ask God for a joyful and generous heart.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for Your faithfulness to me. Help me show my faithfulness through my giving. Amen.

Week 3—Friday—The Spiritual Discipline of Giving

Scripture: *“On the first day of each week, each of you is to put something aside...”* (1 Corinthians 16:2).

Jesus said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). We receive much joy from giving. Through the discipline of faithful giving, we give witness to our relationship with the Lord. In our giving, we acknowledge Who God is and what He has done for us.

Giving requires discipline. Discipline is the key for success in every area of life. God’s people become more faithful in their giving through spiritual discipline. With God’s help, we can develop a discipline of systematic giving. Putting God first in the managing and giving of our money is a part of the stewardship journey of faith.



In practicing the spiritual discipline of giving, we learn to make giving a priority. Jesus said, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:21). Money goes to what we love most or, in Matthew’s words, to where our hearts are. By making out the first check to the Lord’s work, we affirm that Jesus is our treasure. Our gifts represent our love and gratitude to Him. We also learn to give cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7), not begrudging the offerings we bring to the Lord. We learn to be faithful in our giving, making it a priority, and providing consistency in our stewardship lifestyle (1 Corinthians 16:2). By giving our money, we break the grip that money can have on us, freeing us to be devoted, instead, to our Lord.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, forgive me when I’ve not given faithfully. Grant me a giving spirit. Amen.

***THE JOY OF
RECEIVING
GOD'S BLESSINGS***



***THE JOY OF MANAGING
GOD'S BLESSINGS***



***The Joy of
Sharing God's Blessings***



Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

GOD-HONORING GENEROSITY GIVES BIRTH TO JOY AND CONTENTMENT.

“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6).



Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

A CHEERFUL GIVING HEART IS A GIFT OF GOD.

“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).



Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

GOD’S LOVE AND GRACE COMPEL US TO GIVE.

“You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God” (2 Corinthians 9:11).



Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

BY GOD'S GRACE, GENEROSITY IS A WAY OF LIFE.

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8).



Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

BEING GENEROUS IS JOYFUL AND FULFILLING TO US AND PLEASING TO GOD.

“Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38).



Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

GIVING GENEROUSLY HELPS US SEE EARNING, SAVING, AND SPENDING THROUGH GOD'S EYES.

“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:9-10).



Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

FAITHFUL STEWARDS FIND JOY IN LIFE IN GIVING BACK WHAT GOD HAS FREELY GIVEN.

“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6).



Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

STEWARDSHIP CAN BE DEFINED AS “A GRATEFUL RESPONSE TO GIFTEDNESS.”

King David prayed: “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from You, and of Your own have we given You (1 Chronicles 29:14).



Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

There is joy in helping others through our giving.

Understanding Joy

Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

“The fullness of joy is to behold God in everything” (Brendon Doyle)

“Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God” (Pierre de Chardin)

“Joy is an intermezzo of gratitude that interrupts the routine motion of life” (Lewis B. Smedes)

Joy is not the ephemeral happiness that worldly pleasures bring, but the deep and abiding joy of being loved by God through Jesus Christ. It is an emotional appreciation for good things received. A result of God’s grace toward believers.” (The Lutheran Study Bible)

“Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words become to me a joy” (Jeremiah 15:16).

“When we understand that we are giving away God’s money for God’s work, we will discover joy” (anonymous)

Experience the joy and freedom that come from fully surrendering everything we have to God and recognizing that it is all His anyway.

The state of the blessed is the state of joy.

Faith is the key to experiencing the joy of giving. God invites us to share His joy in giving generously.

In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus admits his faithful stewards in to His joy (Matthew 25)

When God puts grace in the heart, He puts gladness in the heart; inward, solid, substantial joy.

How do we express our joy?

- Songs of praise
- Behaving as God desires
- Giving generously
- Living with an attitude of gratitude
- Thanking God

Ebenezer Scrooge initially had an empty, stingy heart. When his heart was changed, he became joyful in building relationships and sharing his wealth.

Understanding Generosity

The Apostle Paul wrote, “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35).

Have you ever met an unhappy generous person?

Giving infuses life with joy. Giving is to be joyful and fulfilling.

Grace is the action; Giving is the reaction.

Generosity is a life overflowing with care and concern for others.

Generosity is an essential quality of spiritual maturity and growth.

“Through our generosity, God can do extraordinary things. Through our giving, God changes lives, and in changing them, transforms us.” (Rev. Robert Schnase)

“The practice of generosity describes the Christians unselfish willingness to give in order to make a positive difference for the purposes of Christ.” (Rev. Robert Schnase)

“People give because generosity helps them achieve God’s purpose for themselves. By giving, we develop the inner qualities of generosity. Generosity is not a spiritual attribute someone acquires apart from the practice of giving. It becomes a discernable only through visible behavior. We cannot become generous and hold on to everything we have for ourselves without letting go. The opposite of generosity is greediness, selfishness. These are not the qualities that lead to life, and so by our giving we cultivate a different nature inside ourselves.” (Rev. Robert Schnase)

“The less I spent on myself and the more I gave to others, the fuller of happiness and blessings did my soul become.” (Hudson Taylor)

Generous people give proportionately to the way God has blessed them.

Generosity is a fruit of the Spirit, a sign of our spiritual growth (Galatians 5:22-23).

Giving generously is one of the smartest, most intellectually sound and emotionally satisfying decisions you will ever make.

Generosity is a spiritual gift. “The one who contributes, in generosity” (Romans 12:8).

Synonyms for generosity:

Goodness, largesse, unselfishness, altruism, liberality, open handedness, all heart, free-giving, charity, philanthropy.

Stories:

The story is told that one day a beggar by the roadside asked for alms from Alexander the Great as he passed by. The man was poor and wretched and had no claim upon the ruler, no right even to lift a solicitous hand. Yet the Emperor threw him several gold coins. A courtier was astonished at his generosity and commented, "Sir, copper coins would adequately meet a beggar's need. Why give him gold?" Alexander responded in royal fashion, "Copper coins would suit the beggar's need, but gold coins suit Alexander's giving."

There were once two young men working their way through Leland Stanford University. Their funds got desperately low, and the idea came to one of them to engage Paderewski for a piano recital and devote the profits to their board and tuition. The great pianist's manager asked for a guarantee of two thousand dollars. The students, undaunted, proceeded to stage the concert. They worked hard, only to find that the concert had raised only sixteen hundred dollars. After the concert, the students sought the great artist and told him of their efforts and results. They gave him the entire sixteen hundred dollars, and accompanied it with a promissory note for four hundred dollars, explaining that they would earn the amount at the earliest possible moment and send the money to him. "No," replied Paderewski, "that won't do." Then tearing the note to shreds, he returned the money and said to them: "Now, take out of this sixteen hundred dollars all of your expenses, and keep for each of you 10 percent of the balance for your work, and let me have the rest." The years rolled by—years of fortune and destiny. Paderewski had become premier of Poland. The devastating war came, and Paderewski was striving with might and main to feed the starving thousands of his beloved Poland. There was only one man in the world who could help Paderewski and his people. Thousands of tons of food began to come into Poland for distribution by the Polish premier.

After the starving people were fed, Paderewski journeyed to Paris to thank Herbert Hoover for the relief sent him. "That's all right, Mr. Paderewski," was Mr. Hoover's reply. "Besides, you don't remember it, but you helped me once when I was a student at college and I was in a hole."

What does being generous do?

- Helps those in need
- Extends God kingdom
- Strengthens the relationship with God
- Reminds us who God is
- Gives joy to the giver

The Joy in Receiving God's Blessings

Thoughts on the Joy of Receiving God's Blessings:

Life is a gift. God is the giver and owner. We are the recipients of all His gifts and blessings.

"What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

“But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and your own have we given you” (1 Chronicles 29:14).

“Know that the Lord He is God! It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture” (Psalm 100:3).

We receive the gift of faith

“...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2).

“...each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned” (Romans 12:3).

“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17)

We receive the gift of forgiveness

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which he lavished upon us...” (Ephesians 1:7)

We receive the gift of eternal life

“For God so loved the world...” (John 3:16)

We receive the ability to love

“We love because He loved us” (1 John 4:19). We are able to love one another only because we have received love from Jesus, Who loved us first. Our love springs from the foundation of divine love. Being held in the love of Christ, we live out our lives honoring and pleasing Him.

We receive the ability to give

In 2 Corinthians 9:8, we see that God gives us the capacity to give. *“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work”*

Notes from Leonard Sweet:

Most people in the pews have one of the greatest spiritual problems anyone can have. They are better givers than receivers. Many are very awkward in receiving gifts. For the joy is in the giving, not the getting. My soul is in mortal danger every day. I pray daily over this spiritual disease that imperils my very soul. Why? What is my fundamental category in relationship to God? What is God’s fundamental category in relationship with me? God is the giver. I am the receiver. The very best thing about Len Sweet are what I have received. The very fact that I can love is because “Christ first loved me.” The fact for me the joy is in the giving, not the receiving, means that I don’t like my category of receiving. I’d much prefer God’s category of giving.

In other words, I have a “god-complex.” And there are few more dangerous spiritual conditions than this.

The modern world built a “stewardship ethic” on a deeply flawed foundation: the theology of giving. The fact that the phrase “the joy is in the getting” grates on our spiritual nerves testifies to the very nature of our problem with basic theological doctrines of divine grace, love and

providence. It is time to build a “Stewardship ethic” on a theology of receiving foundation rather than a theology of giving.

Here is the most fundamental insight of a faith that is postmodern: All is a gift. Everything. Here is the most elemental attitude toward life: God is the owner. I am the owner.

God owns everything. You and I own nothing. The best things about us are not what I am able to give, but what I have already received.

The second major problem with a theology of giving is that it deludes us into believing that what we are giving God is ours to begin with.

Presentation to Church Leaders on Stewardship

“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”
(John F. Kennedy)

“A leader is the one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.” (John Maxwell)

“For the Lord gives wisdom, from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.” (Proverbs 2:6)

Pastors and stewardship leaders are encouraged to offer this PowerPoint presentation to help your elders, council members, and committee members grow as stewards and to become familiar with the three-week stewardship emphasis, **Experiencing the Joy of Generosity**. This PowerPoint focuses on receiving, managing, and sharing God’s blessings joyfully. This presentation to the church leaders should be offered just shortly before **Experiencing the Joy of Generosity** is shared with the congregation. You may offer this 33-slide PowerPoint presentation in one or more sessions. The PowerPoint presentation is **FREE**!



To order:

Send an email to: stewardshipadv@aol.com

Or call: Ron Chewning (Stewardship Advisors) @ 248-644-6150 to have the material emailed.

Tithing

An Unexpected Joy

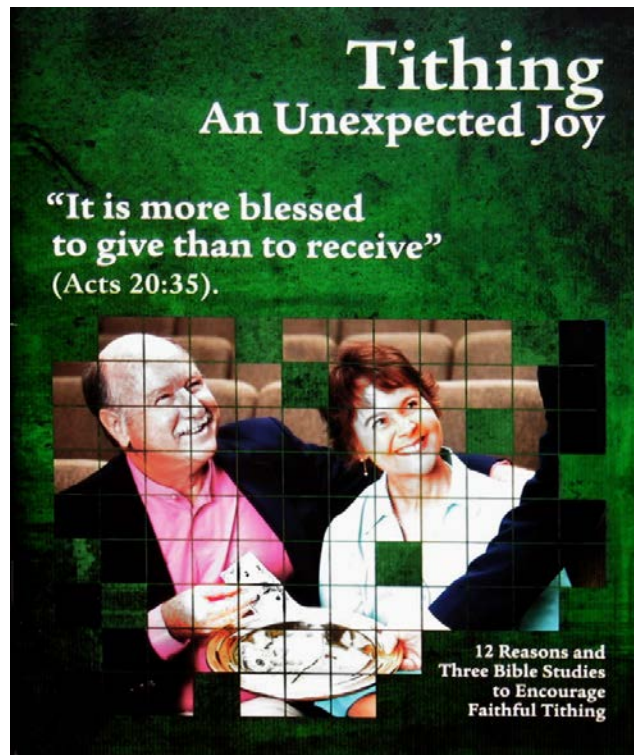
**“It is more blessed
to give than to receive”
(Acts 20:35).**



**12 Reasons and
Three Bible Studies
to Encourage
Faithful Tithing**

Small Group Bible Study Book: “Tithing: An Unexpected Joy”

Gathering together in small group Bible studies provides a wonderful opportunity for people to grow in their knowledge of and in relationship with their Lord and to develop relationships with others. The resource “Tithing: An Unexpected Joy” provides excellent discussion opportunities and helps people examine where they are in their giving life. The material will help your members discover the joy that comes from giving generously to the Lord through your church. The book contains three Bible studies and 12 readings.



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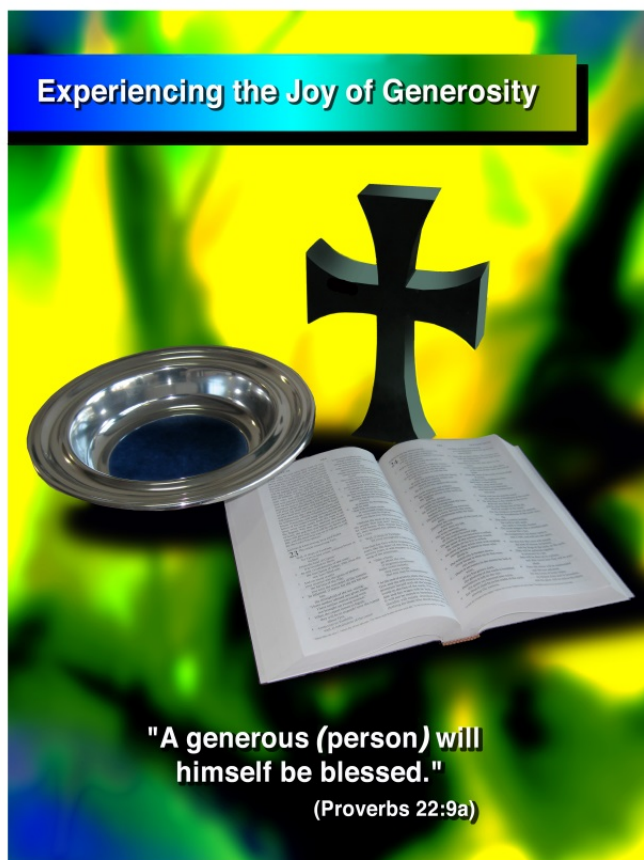
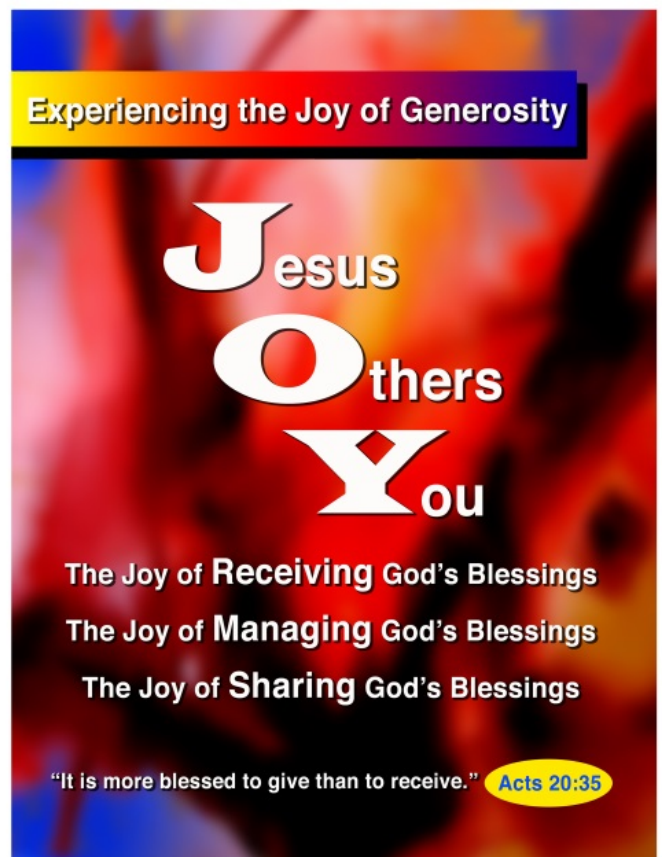
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