Discover the Joy In Sharing God's Blessings

A Three-week Stewardship Emphasis



Weekly Themes:

- 1. "Jesus Is our Joy and Strength"
- 2. "Discover the Joy in Serving"
- 3. "Discover the Joy in Giving"

Ron Chewning Stewardship Advisors

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To Pastors and Stewardship Leaders:

I am pleased that your church is going to offer **Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings.** I am confident that the messages offered during these three weeks will enrich and bless your members.

About the author:

I have spent the past 22 years developing Scripturally-based, grace-centered stewardship resources. My stewardship materials have been used by over a thousand different churches. I have authored two books, *Becoming Money Wise* and *Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World*, several stewardship Bible studies, and many annual stewardship emphases. I serve currently on the Michigan District Stewardship Committee and as an elder at Our Shepherd Lutheran Church (LCMS) in Birmingham, MI. My wife, Phyllis, and I have three adult children along with their spouses. We are blessed with six grandchildren who live in Michigan and Texas.

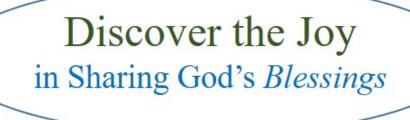
I pray that God is honored and that the members of your church are drawn closer to Him through this stewardship emphasis, "Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings"

Your Fellow Steward, Ron Chewning stewardshipadv@aol.com 248-644-6150

Thanks to John Mittelstadt for the binder cover and flyers. A special thanks to Rev. John Duerr and Rev. Daniel Meckes for their sermons.

Churches that purchase this emphasis are permitted to reproduce any of the materials in the binder or on the CD for use within your church.

Additional stewardship resources can be found at stewardshipadvisors.org.



Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings

Leader Tips:

A Three-week Stewardship Emphasis

- "Jesus Is our Joy and Strength"
- "Discover the Joy in Serving"
- "Discover the Joy in Giving"



Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are transformed into grace-filled stewards who seek to honor and serve the Lord with all He's entrusted to us. Through faith, we acknowledge that all we are and have are gifts from God. As we serve and give, we are filled with joy compelling us to serve and give even more.

Sunday Morning Bible Studies:

In order for your members to grow as Christian stewards, it is necessary to spend time reading and studying God's Word. The three Bible studies along with the answer guides are available on the CD and printed in this binder.

Testimonials/ Lay reader talks

There are three lay reader talks provided. Personal testimonials are more effective, but, if no member is willing 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. Audio lay reader talks for each week are available on the CD. I suggest that the audio versions be shared while the offering is received.

Trifold Brochures

You are encouraged to use all four of the trifold brochures. It is suggested that you send the first trifold with the letter and commitment form prior to the start of the emphasis. Having the commitment form a few days prior to the start of the emphasis gives the members time to pray and consider what their commitment will be. There is one trifold for each week of the emphasis.

Emphasis CD

All the material in the binder and on the CD may be copied.

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 (Commitment Weekend), which is the third week of the emphasis. It is a meaningful part of the service to give members the opportunity to bring their commitments forward to the altar. Every effort should be made to make Commitment Sunday (weekend) special and meaningful. To show the joy and importance of making a commitment to the Lord, you may want to have decorations

and 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.

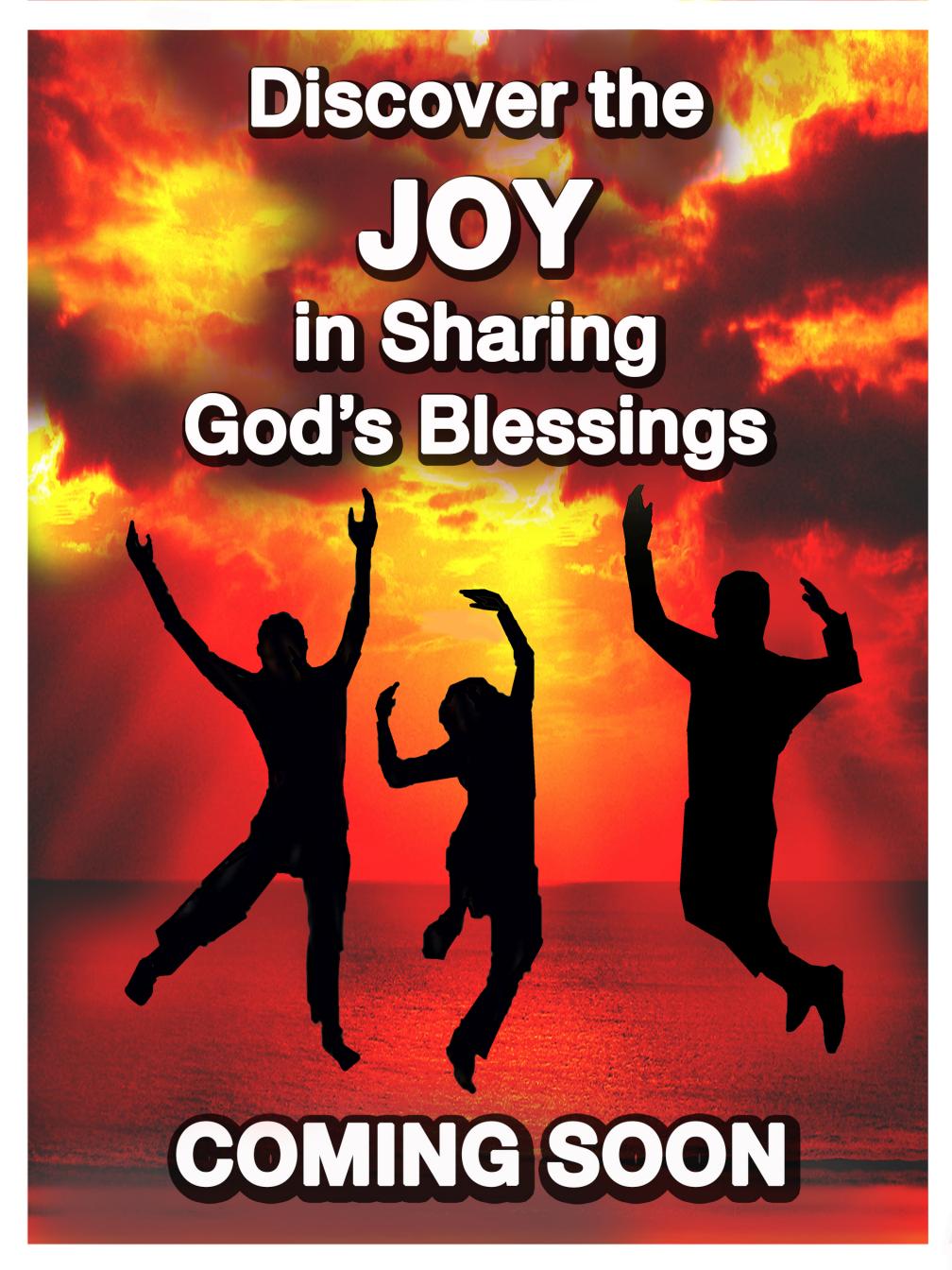
The commitment forms need to be available on Commitment Sunday (weekend). It is suggested that you mail the letter from the pastor and a commitment form just prior to the start of the emphasis. This will act as a reminder for members to think and pray about their commitments. If they fail to bring their commitment forms with them, it won't matter because there will be another form for them on Commitment Sunday (weekend).

Material Preceding Emphasis

Bulletin messages Newsletter articles Letter Trifold brochure Flyer (coming soon) Power point slide

Weekly Material

Bulletin messages Lay reader talk Power point slide Worship helps Children's message Sermon Bible study Trifold brochure





In Sharing God's *Blessings*



Discover the Joy in Sharing God's *Blessings*

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Discover the Joy in Sharing God's *Blessings*



Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings

Coming Soon...

Bulletin messages preceding emphasis

COMING SOON: "DISCOVER THE JOY IN SHARING GOD'S BLESSINGS"

The inner joy and peace that come from an intimate relationship with Christ will survive any trial and sustain us through all circumstances. The joy in this relationship will endure, no matter what comes our way. God has the answers for all our questions, all our needs, and all our doubts and fears in His Word. Through His Son, Jesus, we receive all of the Father's riches. What a beautiful thought that is! God chose us before time began to be His children! He adopted us. Because of Jesus, we belong, we matter, we are no longer outcasts, we are members of His family, and we receive Jesus' everlasting joy! Filled with Jesus' joy, we are prompted to share God's blessings.

Coming Soon: "Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings"

Because of God Grace, the joy of Jesus' may be in us and our joy may be full (John 15:11).



Coming Soon: "Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings"

Week 1:

Jesus Is our Joy and Strength Week 2:

Discover the Joy in Serving Week 3:

Discover the Joy in Giving



Bulletin messages preceding emphasis

"Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings"

JOY IS THE FRUIT OF FAITH.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).





<u>Discover the Joy!</u>

Jesus fills us up with His love and joy so His love and joy will flow to others.



Our Joy Comes from Jesus

Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). As we are filled with God's grace, love, and presence, joy is an everyday experience, and our joy is full. For periods of time, the world can provide happiness, but it does not last. When the thing or person that provides the happiness is gone so is our joy. Only the joy from Jesus is full and everlasting.

When Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you," He is referring back to the beginning verses in John 15. In those verses, we are told that Jesus is the Vine and we are the branches. Jesus likens our relationship with Him as a vine with its branches. Those branches that stay connected with the vine will thrive and do well. Those branches that become disconnected will die. Abiding in Jesus will cause us to bear fruit, because fruit just naturally flows from branches

Discover the JOY

in Sharing

God's Blessings

that are connected to and abide in the Vine, Jesus.

Fruit are works of love. Abiding in Jesus, the Vine, we receive the Holy Spirit Who prompts us to bear fruit that glorifies God. We do not bear fruit by our own efforts. We bear fruit because the Holy Spirit lives in us. Our fruit is seen as we minister to the needs of others. We feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, entertain the strangers, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and the prisoners (Matthew 25:37-39), all in the name of Jesus, the Vine. Jesus tells us that when we love and serve others in His name, we are serving Him.

Jesus said, "My joy be in you." That joy was manifested when, "for the joy that was set before Him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). His joy was to bring us to heaven by the way of the cross. To fill us with joy, He was shamed and died. As we abide in Him and bear the fruit of faith, our joy is made full.

During our stewardship emphasis, **Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings**, starting on _____ (Date) ____, we will learn more about the joy that comes from abiding in Jesus and bearing fruit.

Discover the Joy

Many try to find joy in the world, but true joy is found only in Christ. Joy in the world is really only temporary happiness that fades away. Joy in Jesus is constant and everlasting. Jesus is our chief joy. We can have fulfillment in our work, marriage, family, and hobbies, but none of these will give us joy that satisfies, lasts, or compares to our joy in Jesus.

In Jesus' High Priestly Prayer found in John 17, Jesus said, "But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves" (John 17:13). Jesus' joy was to complete the work which His Heavenly Father had given Him to do and then return to His glory. The disciples' joy came from knowing that Jesus succeeded in His work of redemption for them and all people. Trusting in Jesus' work on the cross and His resurrection, we express our gratitude by living our lives to please Him and by doing His will. Jesus said, "As You sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). Jesus sends us to share the good news of the Gospel. Filled with God's love, grace, and mercy, we want to share those blessings with others. We want others to experience our joy in the Lord. As we share our faith and joy in Jesus, we receive even more joy knowing that

we are being faithful in reaching out and helping others know Jesus.



Overflowing Joy

The thought of anything overflowing is normally seen in a negative light. When we fill containers to their limit and beyond, the contents will pour out of the container resulting in a mess to clean up. We've all experienced putting too much water, soda, or milk into a glass, causing an overflow. However, in a spiritual sense, an overflow is what we want. When we are filled with God's love and joy, His love and joy overflow from us to others. As God continues to fill us, there is a constant abundance to share with our family, friends, and all people.

An example of being filled to overflowing is found in the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. In the eighth chapter of 2 Corinthians, we read about Paul's encouragement to the people in Corinth to give generously to the needy brothers and sisters in Christ in Jerusalem. To encourage the

Corinthian people to give generously, Paul referenced the generosity of the people in Macedonia, who were filled to overflowing with an abundance of joy. Paul wrote, "We want you to know brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 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" (2 Corinthians 8:1-2). In these verses, we find four significant thoughts. There is severe affliction and extreme poverty, but, in the midst of these troubles, we find an abundance of joy that is overflowing in generosity. The joy of the Macedonians flourished even with "severe test of affliction" and "extreme poverty."



The joy of the Macedonians was in Jesus. They were filled with joy because they experienced Jesus' love. They knew that because of their faith they were forgiven. Their hope and security were in Jesus, and they wanted to share their blessings with others. Having been

filled by God, they had much to share. Their joy could not be contained. Their joy grew and became complete as they shared their joy in Jesus with others as they gave their money "beyond their means" (2 Corinthians 8:3).

Where and in what you and I find joy will determine how we view and use the blessings that we have. If our joy is in the things of the world, we will want to hold onto and keep enjoying what we have for ourselves. When our joy is in material things, we become protective and possessive of them. If our joy is in Jesus, as was the Macedonians, our joy will prompt us to want to share our blessings. We want others to have the joy that we have in Jesus.



Stewardship Emphasis

The stewardship emphasis for this year is titled **Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings.** By God's grace, joy is part of our lives. Knowing who we are and Whose we are, we are

empowered to live lives filled with joy. When we abide in Jesus and live in obedience to Him our joy is made complete. We are made eager to respond to God's grace to us by using our time, talents, and money in ways that help others and extend His kingdom. When we use our blessings in joyful obedience to God's will, we will experience even more joy. This emphasis offers the following weekly themes:

- "Jesus Is our Joy and Strength"
- "Discover the Joy in Serving"
- "Discover the Joy in Giving"

God will equip us to use our blessings in ways that give Him honor. God fills our hearts with love for Him and His Church, so we are energized to share our blessings with others. May God richly bless us through this emphasis and use it to draw us closer to Him.

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Joy in Sharing God's Blessings



Starting ___ (Date) ___

"Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings"

This year's annual stewardship emphasis is titled: "Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings." In this three-week emphasis, we will discover the joy that we as God's people can experience as we share the Gospel, as we faithfully use our time and talents to serve God by serving others, and as we give our money generously.

In the ESV Bible translation, the word "joy" or "rejoice" is used 57 times. As Christians, joy ought to be a characteristic of our lives. The Lutheran Study Bible notes, "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." In this definition, we understand that joy is not based on circumstances. It is more than happiness that we can experience from positive situations and activities in life. Joy comes from recognizing that God is in control and that He loves us, even when we don't feel happy. When we look at what God has done for us, we respond with gratitude and joy.

Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Each of the nine different fruit that are identified in the book of Galatians is given to us by God's grace. Joy is a grace bestowed on us by God. Someone once said, "The fullness of joy is to behold God in everything." Jesus tells us, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). When we abide in Jesus, we will have the fullness of His joy.

By God's grace, joy is part of our lives. Knowing who we are and Whose we are, we are empowered to live lives filled with joy. When we abide in Jesus and live in obedience to Him our joy is made complete. God's Word directs us to use our time, talents, and money in ways that help others and extend His kingdom. When we use our blessings in obedience to God's will, we will experience even more joy. This emphasis offers the following weekly themes:

- "Jesus Is our Joy and Strength"
- "Discover the Joy in Serving"
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for Him and His Church	, so we are energized	to share our blessings	with others.

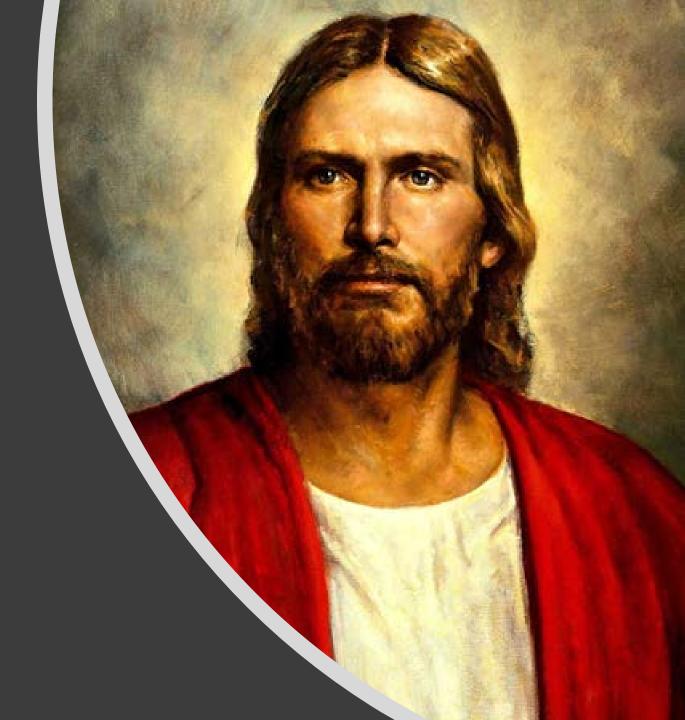
Letter to members					
Dear Member,					
Greetings in the name of our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus!					
It is with joy I inform you that beginning on(date) we will begin a three-week stewardship emphasis titled Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings . I pray these three weeks will be an enriching time for you as we see how the Holy Spirit leads us to experience joy in our lives. Joy is a grace bestowed in us by God. Because of what God has done and continues to do for us, we are filled with joy. Joy is constant as the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to experience God's love and to understand that He is in control, working for our good.					
The three weekly themes for Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings are as follows: 1. "Jesus Is our Joy and Strength" 2. "Discover the Joy in Serving" 3. "Discover the Joy in Giving"					
God showers us with many blessings and, as we act as faithful stewards in sharing those blessings, we come to know the joy of the Lord. We are filled with joy knowing that our hearts are right with God and that He is performing His good works through us. The joy of the Lord is evident in His faithful and obedient children.					
Knowing we are unworthy people and that God has created us and all things out of nothing, how can we not be filled with joy and a gratitude to Him Who has adopted us as His children (Galatians 4:5)! As part of God's family, we willingly and faithfully share the blessings God has entrusted to us with others. As God keeps blessing us with His gifts, giving us joy as we use them in service to others, we are equipped and willing to continue to witness, serve, and give.					
Commitment Sunday will be (date)					
It is my prayer that we will trust in the Lord for all things and that He will fill us with joy as we strive to be God-pleasing stewards of the blessings He entrusts to us.					
Serving Christ together,					
Pastor					

Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings

Week One:

"Jesus Is our

Joy and Strength"



Worship Helps

Week 1:

Jesus Is our Joy and Strength

Readings: First reading: Nehemiah 8:9-12

Epistle reading: Ephesian 3:14-21 Gospel: John 15:1-11

Hymns: Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee (803)

Great Is Thy Faithfulness (809)

Oh, That I Had a Thousand Voices (810)

Litany

Pastor: "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).

People: Joyfully, dear Father in Heaven, we thank You for the everlasting joy that

comes from knowing and following Jesus.

Pastor: Dear Father, help us to never forget that the "joy of the Lord is [our] strength"

(Nehemiah 8:10).

People: Joyfully, Lord, we thank and praise You for Who You are and all that You

do for us. Thank You for daily showering us with Your love and mercy.

Pastor: Dear Father, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with a

willing spirit" (Psalm 51:12).

People: Joyfully, Lord, thank You for Your promise that You will never leave us nor

forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

All: Let us never take for granted, dear Father, all that You give and do for us

day by day. Teach us to experience Your joy. Help us to discover the joy in

sharing our blessings with others.

Bulletin messages: Week one

Discover the Joy!

JESUS IS THE "GREATEST JOY THE HUMAN HEART CAN EXPERIENCE" (Martin Luther).

"You make known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11).



Today's Theme: "Jesus Is our Joy and Strength"

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). As we are filled with God's grace, love, and presence, joy is an everyday experience, and our joy is full. The world can provide temporary joy, but it does not last. Only the joy from Jesus is full and everlasting. Because we know that God is always with us, we can be joyful. When there is trouble in the world, we can rejoice, because we know that Jesus has overcome it and enables us to overcome as well. Nothing in this world can separate us from the love of God in Jesus (Romans 8:38-39). Being joyful always is not wishful thinking, but the relentless attitude of seeing all things in life from God's eternal perspective.

Discover the Joy!

May the joy of Jesus not only fill us up but overflow through us to others.





Jesus Wants Our Joy to Be Full

This is the first week of our stewardship emphasis titled **Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings**. 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). To have joy which is full goes beyond the pleasures that the world can offer. We appreciate worldly pleasures, but the deep and abiding joy of being loved by God through Jesus is what makes our joy full.

In the verse that I just read, Jesus said, "*These things I have spoken to you*." What are these things that were spoken? In the prior verses, Jesus tells His disciples, and us as well, that Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. In nature, the life and power of any plant is found in its vine. The vine uses the branches to bear fruit. The branch is simply a growth of the vine, produced by it, and appointed to bear fruit. The branch exists only because the vine makes its existence possible.

Jesus tells us that we are branches connected to Him Who is the Vine. As branches, we are to bear fruit. Fruit characterizes the life of Christian stewards. When we stay firmly connected to Jesus, through His Word and Sacraments, we will bear much fruit. Through these means of grace, we discover God's perfect will for us and are empowered to please Him by bearing fruit. God has created us to bear fruit, but only through Christ is it possible for us to do so. As we abide in Jesus and bear fruit, our joy is full. King David said, "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).

Defining Joy

Joy is a state of mind and an orientation of the heart. Joy is unaffected by circumstances. It is a settled state of contentment, confidence, and hope. Joy is something we all long for, but it often seems difficult to grab hold of. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit produced by God's work in us, and it is God's gift to us (Galatians 5:22-24). Joy is placed in us by the Holy Spirit through faith in God's Word. Jesus says that one of the reasons He came is so that His joy may be in us (John 15:11). The Apostle Paul wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4).

Phil Ryken, President of Wheaton College, wrote, "Joy is not so much happiness as contentment. Joy is the ability to take cheer from the Gospel...It is not, therefore, a spontaneous response to some temporary pleasure. It does not depend on circumstances at all. It is based rather on rejoicing in one's eternal identity in Jesus Christ."

Joy is both a gift of God as well as a response to the gift of God. Joy comes with an awareness of God's grace. We truly experience joy as we spend time getting to know God through His Word and participating in the Sacraments. 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 (John 15:1-11). 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).



Experience the Joy

Watching your favorite sports team win the big game is an exciting, joyful experience. If you are in the stadium, the joy is contagious. Everyone is clapping, celebrating, and singing. It is wonderful to be part of the crowd and share in the joy of the moment.

However, this joy can rapidly dissipate as you sit in your car, unable to exit the parking lot.

True and lasting joy is found in the Body of Christ as it is in process of being built up. Such growth progresses as the Church's various parts function to the glory of Christ as the Gospel is preached, people are served, and the members share their faith and love for Christ with one another and those outside the church doors.

Yet do we see such joy expressed often in the Church? Is such a demonstration. of joy out of place in the Church? Perhaps we would be uncomfortable with a "pep rally," but do we experience the joy of being about Christ's work, the joy of seeing others serve as the Holy Spirit has called them? Or are we programmed not to be joyful? Maybe we have come to view Christ's work as an obligation, as drudgery, and not as a thankful response to the grace which has called each of to the Body of Christ. Regardless of the reason for our lack of joy, Christ is always with us, ready to touch us with His joy. He constantly comes to forgive us and to empower us through the Holy Spirit to be joyful.

We can indeed sing along all year long with the Christmas choir, "Joy to the world, the Lord has come!" That joy is contagious in the church because the Body of Christ is truly being built up.

Jesus Is our Strength

Joy gives the confidence that we can do whatever God calls to do by His grace. Absence of joy kills confidence, causes doubt and even despair, leading to hopelessness and helplessness. The encouragement Nehemiah gave to the returning exiles applies to us as well: "The Joy of the Lord is your Strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).



By our own strength we can't accomplish the tasks God gives us. The good news for each of us is that, by God's grace, we are empowered by Him to serve, witness, give, and do the work of the Lord. It is God's grace that gives us the desire and strength to give our best in doing His will. God's rich

supply of grace is our source of strength. God not only forgives and saves us; He also gives us joy and strength for service to Him. By ourselves, we are powerless. In our sinful state, we are weak and foolish. God pours out His grace on us as He loves us, calls us, and gives us His work to do.

The Apostle Paul wrote "I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). When we abide in the Lord, we have the same strength that Paul had so we can do our best in service to the Lord. If the connection to Jesus is ever broken, our source of strength is severed. When we remain in Jesus, we share Christ's strength because He dwells in us. "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). May we all trust God's presence and strength in us to enable us to find joy in doing our best in service to our Lord.

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Jesus Is Our Joy and Strength



Week One of:
"Discover the Joy
in Sharing God's
Blessings"

Children's message (week 1)

Hi Boys and girls. I'm wondering how many of you think you're very strong? How can you tell if someone is very strong? What do you think?

(Some suggested answers)

- Muscles in their arms and legs
- Can lift heavy things
- Can do hard tasks like raking leaves or carrying groceries

How does a person get strong?

- Exercise
- Eating good, nutritional food

Then what makes us weak?

- Sitting around—not getting up to play or work
- Eating junk food

Do you know that, in the Bible, God's prophet, Nehemiah, told the people, "The joy of the Lord is your strength"? He was talking about being strong on the inside and on the outside. You belong to Jesus. He made you His own child when you were baptized. Through your Baptism and through His Word, Jesus makes you strong. Just like good food makes your body strong, the Bible makes you strong inside, strong in faith and love. We can be joyful when we are in church with Jesus and all His people, because we are getting stronger inside. Even when people get sick or break a leg and lose their strength, the joy we have in Jesus makes us strong inside, and that strength never goes away.

Let's pray. Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word that makes us strong. Keep us strong by never tiring of hearing Your Word. Give us joy in knowing that Jesus is with us and watching over us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

"Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings"

Sermon, Week One: "Jesus Is our Joy"

Text: John 15:1-11 (ESV)

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

This is the first week of our stewardship emphasis "Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings." The Word of God focused on for today is from Saint John, chapter 15, verses 1 – 11. I would like to highlight for you these words of Jesus from verse 11: "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

(Sing) "I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart; down in my heart; down in my heart; I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart; down in my heart to stay."

I sang that song many times as a little child. But there were days I didn't want to sing that song. I didn't always have joy in my heart. I had days I was sad. Days I was angry. Days I was confused. Days I didn't know what was what. Days I certainly did not have joy – joy in my heart. But the words of that song I have not changed. Where can I find that joy?

Maybe if I started a list? Have you ever made a list of things that bring you joy?

Maybe it's

(preacher: please feel free to add examples of things that give people joy. I would have mentioned the Detroit Tigers winning the World Series, but that hasn't and won't be happening for a long time!)

- When you see a smile on the face of a little child? You can't help but smile and be filled with joy.
- When you get something for "free". I love winning a free dessert at my local Burger King by matching my customer number with the number of the day! Joy with every bite!
- When you are shopping at the store and as you approach the checkout area, they open up a new line and call you over. And you are out the door quicker than ever expected.

But all of these kinds of joy have something in common.

- The little child is no longer smiling, or I cannot see their face anymore. And my joy seems to disappear also.
- The free dessert gets eaten. And I get hungry again. And that joy has worn off.
- The next time in the store. There is no extra checkout line opened up for you. And you wait and you wait, and you wait. Not so much joy.

They each wear out.

How true that is about the things of this world. So many things that can give us joy. But a joy that is temporary. And therefore lacking. Where can I find joy? A joy that is full?

Maybe you have heard it described this way:

If our joy is in our **work**, then when that is gone, so goes the joy. If our joy is in our **friends**, then when they are gone, so goes the joy. If our joy is in our **family**, then when they are gone, so goes the joy. If our joy is in our **health**, then when that's gone, so goes the joy. If our joy is in our **money**, then when that's gone, so goes the joy. **BUT WHEN OUR JOY IS IN JESUS, THAT JOY IS FOREVER!**

That's what we hear Jesus saying in John 15:11 - "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

So, what are these things that Jesus has spoken?

(To the preacher: consider using any or all the verses from John 15:1-10. I did not use all the verses when I delivered this sermon, but you may feel that certain ones will enhance the theme as you share that "Jesus is our joy!" Certainly, there are many examples of Law and Gospel that can be drawn out of these words that you can best apply to your people and their context. A few notes to consider:)

- v. 1 Jesus is the vine; the Father is the vinedresser. As the vinedresser, the Father has provided all the things and the care that are necessary for the vine to be fruitful. And the Father still does that today!
- v. 2 The vinedresser, in His care for His vineyard, will clear out the branches that
 do not bear fruit, and will also prune the branches that do bear fruit in order that
 they may even bear more! Unfortunately, some may see this from a human
 perspective that the vinedresser is rather demanding. But the vinedresser is
 seeking what is best.
- v. 3 "Already you are clean." The power of God's Word already revealed through Jesus is already making a joy filled difference.
- v. 4 The relationship that is needed between the branch and the vine = abide!
- v. 5 The strength of the branch relies on the vine. Be fed by it, nourished by it, and receive its sustaining life.
- v. 6 "thrown away; withers; thrown into the fire; burned." This is the part people don't want to hear or consider very often. Maybe because it doesn't sound so joyful. But when in reality, it is done so that there can be a FULL joy. The

warning is sounded – those that who do not abide in the vine, they will not have life. But it does not have to be this way! Because of the care of the vinedresser. Hebrews 12:2 – "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

- v. 7 As the Holy Spirit calls us through the Word to abide, He gives a wonderful relationship with our God and Savior. Joy!
- v. 8 In this joy filled relationship we have because of Jesus with the Father, He is glorified, and we are privileged to be His disciples.
- v. 9 Jesus shares that love is extended. And it is in this love that we abide.
- v. 10 The response of the branches is to continue to be fed and nourished by the vine.

(Preacher: following your points of emphasis from the text, continue here....)

Returning back to Jesus words from verse 11: "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

Jesus did not have in mind for us to experience only joys that are momentary. Though they may bring a temporary smile to our faces, they are not filling. He desires for us to have a joy that is constantly with us, and in us, and shining forth from us. And He is that joy.

No wonder the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking who he can devour. He does not want us to have this joy of Jesus. And so sometimes we are confused about what real joy is.

But Jesus comes to us anew this day through His Word and tells us that He wants us to have HIS joy. A joy that cannot be diminished. A joy that does not wear out. A joy that does not pass away. A joy that we do not have to wait for. A joy that He has made complete by His conquering of sin, death and the devil by His sacrificial death and resurrection.

To all of you branches out there this day. Abide to the Vine. And live in joy! Giving Him all honor and glory and praise by the things that you say, the things that you do, the things that you think. Bearing fruit that brings the full and complete joy of Jesus to others as you minister to the needs of others. Feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, entertain strangers, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and the prisoners (Matthew 25:37-39.)

(Sing) "I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart;

down in my heart; down in my heart; I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart; down in my heart to stay."

Thank You Jesus for giving us Your joy so that our joy may be full. Amen.



Discover the Joy in **Sharing God's Blessings**

Week Two:

"Discover the

Joy In Serving"

Worship Helps

Week 2

Discover the Joy in Serving

First reading: Acts 6:1-6
Epistle reading: 1 Peter 4:7-11
Gospel: Matthew 20:20-28

Hymns: Son of God, Eternal Savior (842)

Lord, Whose Love through Humble Service (848)

How Clear Is Our Vocation, Lord (853)

Litany:

Pastor: Your Word calls us "to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied

grace" (1 Peter 4:10).

People: Help us, Lord, to see the suffering and the needs of people. Grant us hearts

that are willing to respond as servants of Your love, grace, and mercy. Use

us as Your hands, feet, and mouth in service to others.

Pastor: Your Word exhorts us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39).

People: Lord, help us to love our neighbors and to show hospitality to all people.

Help us to be loving and serving people.

Pastor: Filled with Jesus' joy, prompt us to serve others in Your name with joy.

People Help us to discover the joy in serving others.

Bulletin messages: Week two

WEEK TWO: "DISCOVER THE JOY IN SERVING"

By the Spirit's power, we live in an intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father. No longer intent on serving ourselves, we realize that God pours out His blessings on us in order that we might pass His blessings on to others. When we stay in close fellowship with Jesus through His Word and Sacraments, He will use us as His channels through which His blessings flow. We become Jesus' hands that reach out in welcome, His mouth to tell others of His love and grace, and His feet to run and help someone in need, all without expectation of reciprocal action. Through that faithful service to others, Jesus fills us with His joy and peace.

BECAUSE OF GOD'S GRACE, WE WILL EXPERIENCE JESUS' JOY.



"These things I have spoken to you that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11).

Discover the Joy!

SERVING AND GIVING INFUSE LIFE WITH JOY.

"I thank my God...making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now" (Philippians 1:3-5).



A Life of Servanthood

This is the second week of our stewardship emphasis **Discovering the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings.** This week's theme is "Discover the Joy in Serving." Jesus said that He came "not to be served but to serve." As a servant to others, Christ showed God's goodness. Jesus did not take on merely the outward form of a servant; Jesus' whole being was a servant. His purpose in coming to earth was to serve (Matthew 20:28). The ultimate act of service was Jesus' work on the cross.

In contrast, we by nature are self-focused and not inclined to see, much less seek, opportunities to serve others. Through the indwelling and transforming power of the Holy Spirit, we can become servants who are enabled to live a life of servanthood.

Jesus calls us into servanthood not just because others need our service but because of what happens to us when we serve. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). We receive through our giving. In serving others we often gain more than those receiving our service.

As God's stewards, we are to serve all people, not just those who can bring us status or clout or return the favor. Helping others minimizes the problem of self-absorption or pride that interferes with a life of servanthood. When we do mundane, unnoticed acts of service for others, we receive the reward of knowing that it is really Christ we are serving (Matthew 25:40).

Being a servant means being available. It also means being willing. We may at times need to have our agendas interrupted for service opportunities. A true servant serves without thinking because it happens naturally. May God help us all find joy in serving others.

Jesus "came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). The entire life of Jesus was one of serving, but one act of servanthood that is most often referred to is His washing of the disciples' feet during the evening of the Passover Feast before His crucifixion (John 13:1-17). As he performed this duty of a servant, Jesus told them to do as He had done. Christ did not consider a life of servanthood to be beneath Him. Neither should we.

We follow Him in paths of service. Just as Jesus did, we serve when it might be inconvenient or when the person needing our service is unlovable. Just as Jesus did, we put others first. Just as Jesus endured the cross "for the joy that was set before Him" (Hebrews 12:2), we, too, will find joy and fulfillment in serving in Jesus' name.

As God's people, we are called to love God with all of our hearts, souls, and minds and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). The key to our service is to live with an attitude that is God-centered. With God as our focus, we will want to love and serve Him and others. Unfortunately, because we are by nature self-centered, our interest is in serving ourselves instead of serving others. When we succumb to the temptation of putting

ourselves first, we place ourselves in the center of life, and we become less interested in and ultimately unaware of the needs of others. God's grace turns us around. In Christ, He has put us first, so now we are freed to put others first.

Jesus said, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve" (Luke 4:8). Filled with the joy and love of Jesus, we put others first and faithfully respond to His call to serve.



Serving Is Faith in Action

Through service, we put our faith into action. As we rely on God's strength to serve, we desire all the more to put our faith into practice. James reminds us that faith and actions work together and that faith is made complete by what we do (James 2:22).

Speaking about our service to others Joan Rawlusyk wrote, "There is a great paradox in reaching out to someone—and that is, the more you reach out to others, the more you will be touched yourself. Joy and happiness in great measure are waiting for us if we will reach just a little further. In the reaching we become God's own hand." While serving others, we are equally blessed. Jesus, speaking about acts of service, said, "blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:17b).

Tapping into God's Strength

First Peter 4:10 is one of the Bible's most challenging and motivating verses: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." The verse outlines three truths. First of all, each one of us has received a gift. Second, we are to serve others. Finally, we are to be stewards in administering God's grace, which has been entrusted to us.

Scripture teaches us that these are things we as Christians ought to do, but, like the old hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" reminds us, "Jesus knows our every weakness. Take it to the Lord in prayer." Only by God's strength are we empowered to live as His servants (Philippians 4:13). Only

by His grace are we forgiven for our failures, our sinfulness. Truly, Jesus knows our weakness. That's why He lived the perfect life in our place. That's why He forgives and restores us. When we fall short, He urges us to "[forget] what lies behind and [strain] toward what lies ahead" (Philippians 3:13).



Using our Talents in Service

God gives us different abilities and talents in all areas of life so that we may do His work. Not only is God the source of our abilities and talents, He gives us motivation to develop them and opportunities to use them in His service. Whether we are given many or few talents, we are to be thankful for what we receive and use them to extend His kingdom and in service to others.

God wants us to be productive people. The Apostle Paul wrote, God wants people "zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14). He does not appreciate laziness, idleness, or fruitlessness. He calls us to bear fruit (John 15:16), to serve (Ephesians 6:7), to give (Matthew

10:8), to love (Matthew 22:37-39), to witness (Ephesians 3:7), and to obey (John 14:23). God seeks people through whom He can work. Through our lips, He tells others of His life-saving Gospel; through our hands and feet, He brings love and care to those in need; and through our minds, hearts, and checkbooks, He financially supports the work of the Church.

Serving Those in Need

In our faithful service for others, we are serving the Lord. Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40). When we help others and extend God's kingdom, we become channels through which He works. We are His hands, feet, and mouth.

God gives us both strength to do good and to find joy in our service. Solomon tells us, "Whoever brings blessings will be enriched" (Proverbs 11:25). Peyton Conway March writes, "There is a wonderful mythical law of nature that the three things we crave most in life—happiness, freedom, and peace of mind—are always attained by giving them to someone else."

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Discover the Joy in Serving

Jesus Taught us how to Serve Others

Ifesjourneytoperfection,blogspot.com 2

Week Two of:

"Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings"

Children's message (week 2)

Good morning! It's great to see you!

This morning we are going to talk about serving. I'd like to start by asking you some questions.

- How many of you help with cleaning or picking up your house?
- How many of you help to get the table ready for dinner?
- How many of you help rake the leaves?

These acts of helping your parents, your brothers and sisters, your grandparents, your neighbors, or anyone else are called serving. When we help others, we are serving.

Jesus was all about serving others. Jesus said, "I came not to be served but to serve." Jesus served people when He fed them. He served people when He healed them. Jesus' greatest act of service was when He went to the Cross to die for our sins. As God's children, we are called to be like Jesus and to serve and help others as He did.

Can you think of other ways that you serve your parents? (wait for answers)

I'm going to give each of you a sheet of paper. On the top of the paper, it reads, "Ways I can serve Jesus by serving others." Later today, sit down with your mom and dad and list some ways that you can serve your parents, your brothers, your sisters, your grandparents, your friends, your neighbors, or even people you may meet in a store.

Remember that when you serve people, you are really serving Jesus.

Let's pray: Dear Lord, grant each of us loving and serving hearts. Open our eyes and hearts to opportunities to serve others. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen.

Ways I can serve Jesus by serving others.

J	l	•	

2.

3.

4.

5.

Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings

Sermon – Week Two – "Discover the Joy of Serving" Scripture – Matthew 20:28

We begin in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This is second week of our stewardship emphasis "Discover the Joy in Sharing God's blessings."

<u>Introduction</u> – There are things in life that we know are right and good for us, but we avoid them like the plague. We know that exercise is good for us, but do we do it? We know vegetables, high fiber, and whole grains are what our bodies need, but that isn't what our mouth wants. We know that brushing and flossing each day is good for our teeth, but only about 15% of us actually do it. We also know that, as Christians, our greatest joys come in serving one another, but we end up serving ourselves. This problem is addressed by Jesus to His Disciples in Matthew 20:17-28.

<u>I – Finding Joy in Serving Just Seems Wrong to Sinners:</u>

- A. Jesus is leading His Disciples on their final trip from Galilee to Jerusalem. Knowing that this trip will be the last one, and that it is going to lead to the cross, Jesus becomes brutally honest with His Disciples. Hoping to prepare them for the trial of His impending suffering and death, Jesus says, We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"
- B. So what does Matthew record as the response to Jesus somber' news. Unbelievably, James and John's mother brings them before Jesus and asks if they can sit at Jesus' right and left in His Kingdom. How is it possible that Jesus' message could be missed so completely? Joy in serving and joy in suffering don't make sense to the natural human mind. Since the fall we humans are cursed by a fixation on glorifying and pleasing self. We are blinded to the many joys that serving others bring.
- C. The Disciples' reaction to the audacious request by James and John's mother is predictable. They are indignant. We can hardly be surprised by this. A couple chapters earlier they were arguing about which of them was the greatest, and come to Jesus asking who is the greatest? Ever since Adam and Eve were deceived by the serpent, we all have been inherently gullible to the lies of Satan, especially the lie that pleasing and satisfying self is the only way to find joy in life.
- D. Jesus' response is an object lesson. He uses Himself and says, *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*. Jesus knew that His actions of selfless suffering and death followed by the power of His resurrection would be the thing that would empower His followers to embrace the truth of joy in serving.

II – Taking a Closer Look at Jesus' Joy in Serving:

- A. Hebrews 12:21 reveals what was motivating Jesus. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. The JOY that caused Jesus to endure the cross was founded in His love for the world (John 3:16).
- B. Jesus' people and creation are so precious to Him that He not only found a way to restore and reconcile it to Himself, but He found His motivational joy in serving to the point of death on a cross. In so doing, Jesus opened the way for any and all of us to discover that there is real joy in serving. That kind of service, the kind that is done out of joy, has the power to work wonders of love and mercy. It has the power to changes lives, and our world is hungry for it. WE are hungry for it!

<u>III – Through Faith in Jesus we Discover the Joy in Serving:</u>

- A. While we may hunger for joy it is hard to find. There is no doubt that finding joy in serving is always going to be an uphill battle for us. We are sinful people living under the curse of sin, and our sinful nature wants to have nothing to do with serving others. We believe that we will find joy in pleasing ourselves, but it only brings a stronger craving for personal pleasure. Like hamsters on a wheel, we trust that it will finally bring us joy, but we never reach it. We end up feeling empty and disillusioned with life.
- B. There is another way, a better way, a way that actually works. It is the way that Jesus both modeled for us, and has given us through faith. Because Jesus trusted His Father to take care of Him, He could boldly go to the cross and grave certain He would rise and reign with His Father. That trust gave Him joy in the midst of His suffering and pain. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Heb. 12:21.
- C. Jesus' love for us, demonstrated in His suffering and death, allows us to trust Him. He loves us and promises to take care of us here and give us everlasting life with the Father. That kind of love is something we can trust. It gives me the courage to believe that I am OK no matter what comes my way. It gives me the courage to serve and care for others, because I am already being taken care of by God. As I serve others, there is a joy in serving that is unexpected, but sweet to the soul. It fills a need in all of us and it makes us want to serve more. That brings more joy and satisfaction in life. Soon, we are not powering the wheel, it is powering us into even greater acts of service.
- D. There is another joy in serving, and that is the one that you pass on to others. People are touched when they are served. They sense the joy that is serving them, and it brings them joy. It is contagious and prompts them to serve, and that joy spreads. How our world is missing that kind of joy in serving.

<u>Conclusion</u> – As we are *Discovering the Joy in God's Blessings*, I challenge you to try finding the joy in serving. Seriously, you have tried everything else over and over again, and you are still on the same wheel chasing lasting joy. Get off the wheel and try something else. Try looking to Jesus, trusting His Gospel love to take care of you, and then find the joy in serving! In Jesus name, Amen.



Week Three:
"Discover the
Joy in Giving"

Worship Helps

Week 3:

Discover the Joy in Giving

Old Testament reading: 1 Chronicles 29:10-22 Epistle reading: 2 Corinthians 8:1-7

Gospel: Luke 8:1-3

Hymns: Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us (851)

Lord of All Good (786) We Praise You, O God (785)

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 "discover the joy" as we return to

You a portion of what You have first given us. Through Christ Who gave

Himself for us, we pray. Amen.

Bulletin messages: Week three

WEEK THREE: "DISCOVER THE JOY IN GIVING"

God's grace provides the basis for all Christian stewardship. The grace given to us from our heavenly Father Who freely sent His Son should be our motivation to respond with an "abundance of joy" and "in a wealth of generosity." (2 Corinthians 8:2). It wasn't an overabundance of money or possessions that caused the Macedonians to give so sacrificially. No, it was God's grace that led them to beg earnestly to be allowed to contribute to the church in Jerusalem. The Macedonians found their joy and strength in Jesus (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). They truly understood that "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). True joy lies in the act of giving without an expectation of receiving something in return.

Discover the Joy!

Jesus fills us up with His love and joy so His love and joy will flow to others.



If our joy is in our **work**, then when that is gone, so goes the joy. If our joy is in our **friends**, then when they are gone, so goes the joy. If our joy is in our **family**, then when they are gone, so goes the joy. If our joy is in our **health**, then when that's gone, so goes the joy. If our joy is in our **money**, then when that's gone, so goes the joy. **BUT JESUS' JOY IS FOREVER!**

MAY THE JOY YOU PLANT IN THE HEARTS OF OTHERS BLOOM I

The Joy of Giving

The theme for the third and final week of our emphasis, **Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings**, is 'Discover the Joy in Giving.' There is a story of a woman who saw a poor barefoot child roaming the street of a large city. She took the child by the hand to the closest shoe store and bought the little girl socks and shoes. With "happy feet" the little girl ran gleefully from the store.

Disappointed that she had not even received a word of gratitude from the child, the woman paid for the socks and shoes. As she walked out the shop door, the little girl came back to the store, eyes bright with excitement. "Are you God's wife?" she asked the woman. Smiling, the woman said, "No, but I am God's child." The little girl said, "I knew that you were some kin of His."

As God's people, nurtured by Word and Sacrament, we are transformed into His likeness. Christ's character becomes our character, and we become more like Him. Because His goodness flows through us, we are able to offer shoes and socks to those who are in need. Our eyes are opened to opportunities that need our support and our hearts willingly share what we are able. We are stewards of God's love and generosity to the whole world. As Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35)

If you are not experiencing the joy of giving, ask God to change your heart so you can grow in your giving and become a cheerful giver. Through faith, you can take a leap of faith in your giving.

My __ (Year) __ Commitment for the Lord

"Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings"

Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy be full" (John 15:11). Jesus is not referring to the fleeting happiness or pleasures of the world but the deep and abiding joy of being loved by God through Jesus Christ. Filled with the joy of Jesus, we share His blessings with others.

To help me/us grow in the joy of giving,
my/our giving per week in 2019 will be
\$
(Prayerfully consider giving 1% more of your income than you did last year)
I commit to grow in the joy of knowing Jesus more by reading His Word daily, attending church and Bible studies regularly, and developing an active prayer life.
Name (s)
Please return on Commitment Weekend or send to the church office.
My (Year) Commitment for the Lord "Discover the Joy in Sharing God's Blessings"
My (our) weekly offering will be \$, totaling \$annually.
Discover the joy that comes from serving and giving

Please detach and keep for your records

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. 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 given You" (1 Chronicles 29:14).



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 (Ephesians 5:1-2)). 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 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.

Giving Faithfully

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 point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 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 9:6-8).

Give Beyond the Tithe

R. G. LeTourneau (1888 – 1969) was a Christian industrialist who dedicated his life to being a businessman for God. He was hugely successful, designing and developing his own line of earthmoving equipment. LeTourneau developed nearly 300 inventions and had hundreds of patents in his lifetime. As he succeeded financially, he increased his giving to the point where he was giving 90% of his income to the Lord's work.



LeTourneau wrote, "I shovel out the money, and God shovels it back—but God has a bigger shovel." You may be thinking, "I could give 90% too if I were a multi-millionaire." Maybe so, but LeTourneau didn't start out wealthy.

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Discover the Joy in Giving



Week Three of:

Children's message (week 3)

"Giving God our Best"

Text: Exodus 23:19— "The best of the firstfruts of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God"

Props: 2 plastic food containers

Hold up the food containers and ask the children what you're holding. Ask if they know what they're used for. If no one responds with "leftovers," ask "leading" questions to get to that answer.

Ask what their favorite leftovers are. Ask: "When you're having someone special for dinner, does your mom or dad pull all the leftovers out of the refrigerator to serve, or does your family make something special for that dinner?

Assuming you receive the appropriate answer "Something special." Ask, "Why?" Listen to their responses and then ask,

"Do you consider Jesus someone special?"

"If He were coming for dinner, would you make Him something special or serve Him leftovers?"

Discuss answers, concluding that definitely Jesus would not be getting leftovers.

Say, "You know, the Bible tells us that we should give the first and best of everything to God," (Read text verse.) "Now this verse was written to farmers who grew crops, but it really is talking about all of us. Whenever we get something—an allowance or a gift of money—we should give some to God before we do anything else with it. We should do this because the Bible tells us to and for another important reason as well: because we love Jesus. After all, He gave us everything. He even went to the Cross and died for us so that we can have eternal life with Him. Doesn't He deserve our first and best? Don't we want to show Him our love and our thanks by giving something back to Him? Today is Commitment Sunday (week), and your parents will be given the opportunity to make a commitment to Jesus. They will be asked to honor Him with regular and generous gifts—to give their first and best. I hope that you will do the same.

"Will you pray with me? Repeat after me: Dear Jesus, thank You for dying for my sins so that I can be in Heaven with You forever. Thank You for all You give me and do for me. Help me to be willing to share what I have with You. In Your name. Amen.

Sermon for Week Three: "The Joy of Giving"

Text: "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).

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

Did you notice in our text today how many times the word "all" is used? <u>All</u> grace, having <u>all</u> sufficiency, in <u>all</u> things, and at <u>all</u> times, you will abound in <u>every good</u> work.

A man wanders in the desert, nearly dead from thirst. Struggling against the wind and sand, he sees an oasis in the distance. Upon reaching the oasis, he discovers that this oasis is much different than any other oasis he has ever visited. There are palm trees, but there is no pool of water. Instead he finds a well with a pump. Near the pump is a jar of water. As he puts the jar of water up to his lips, he sees a piece of parchment with a note written on it. The note reads: "In this jar of water, there is enough water to keep you alive for a day or two; however, to have all the water you want, you must follow these directions carefully. Pour all the water from the jar into the pump. There is just enough water in the jar to soften the leather gasket in the pump. This softened gasket will allow you to pump all the water you want." He also notices that there is a P.S. on the bottom of the parchment. "When you are finished, please fill up this jar for the next traveler."

The man wandering in the desert questions whether he should believe the note. Does he drink the water from the jar or believe the words on the parchment? God, too, wants us to do something that seems counter-intuitive. In His Holy Word to us, God encourages us to take a part of the money that we have and to give it away or, in light of our story, pour some of it out. Not all of it, as was asked of the thirsty traveler, just part of it. Even though it seems we don't have enough money, God tells us to trust Him and give. He wants us to believe not only in His promise that He will provide for our needs (Philippians 4:10), but that through our giving He will fill us up to give even more. 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.

By grace, God grants us the ability to trust in His promises. He changes our hearts. He changes our focus and our purpose in life. He changes our giving from following rules and regulations to giving from a heart that is cheerful. Our giving changes from an obligation to an opportunity.

The note on the pump promised blessings if the directions were followed. In the same way, God's Word promises us blessings through our faithful giving. We read in Proverbs 3:9-10: "Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine." Just as the Israelites were to sacrifice to the Lord the firstfruits of their harvest, we give the first portion of our incomes to the Lord. We also read in Proverbs 19:17, "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his deed." God promises us blessings through the generous giving of our earthly gifts. Through our generosity, we express our gratitude to God for all that He entrusts to us.

God's Word clearly directs us to use the blessings we receive from Him to bless others. We are blessed to be a blessing. In Christ's name, we are to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, shelter the

homeless, and help the sick (Matthew 25:35-36). God blesses us not only to take care of our needs; He blesses us so that we can use what we receive to bless others. Paul wrote "So then as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the family of faith" (Galatians 6:10).

A review of the teachings of Jesus could almost be summarized in one word: give. There is a blessing in giving. In Luke 6:38 we read, "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." The joy and blessing of giving are echoed by the Apostle Paul. In the 20th chapter of Acts, Paul is saying his goodbyes to the people with whom he had been in ministry for the past three years. It is a sad farewell, because Paul is bound for Rome for imprisonment, and perhaps eventual execution. As he says his farewell, he is not talking about the weather or his favorite sports team. No, he shares what God wants him to share. He shares the words of Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

An important part of living the life that we want to live is to give. We are blessed in giving. We hear and believe the truth that there is joy and blessings in giving, yet, at the same time, we doubt its veracity. Why is that? It seems that we get caught in believing, or we have the illusion, that if we buy and own something new—that the new purchase from Amazon or the mall—can make us into something new and better. It is difficult to ignore these false gods, which clamor for our adoration. Yet, instinctively, we know that great living comes in giving—giving of our time, our energy, or our possessions, including our money.

Do you ever wonder why Jesus talks so much about money? Why do many of Jesus' parables discuss the appropriate and inappropriate use of money? Because money has the power to help or hinder us from enjoying the quality of life that God wants to give us. Money has the power and the lure to take us away from serving God. Money can easily become overly important in our lives.

Through faith, we can all take this adventure in faith and give the first portions of our income faithfully and generously. The path of giving generously is the path that God encourages us all to take, knowing we are blessed in giving. This is the path that Jesus modeled for us. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Jesus gave of Himself. He died for our sins. He died to forgive, but His death also shows us how to give.

Our biggest take away from this message is that we are blessed in giving. Say it aloud with me. "We are blessed in giving."

Let's pray. "Dear Heavenly Father, help us to loosen the grip that we have on our money and possessions. Grant each of us giving and generous hearts." May we see that money is not only to be used to take care of our needs, but it is a tool to help those in need and to extend Your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Bible Study 1

Jesus Is our Joy and Strength

Prayer: Dear Lord, we thank you for the opportunity to study Your Word. Use this time to draw us closer to You. Help us to understand that the only true and everlasting joy is found through Jesus. May Your Joy fill us every day. In Jesus' holy and precious name, we pray. Amen.



Where Is Your Joy?

People look for joy in many different places. We may look for joy in friends, family, pets, health, or wealth. Also watching your favorite sports team win the big game is an exciting, joyful experience. The joy is very contagious for those celebrating the victory. However, when the people or things that give us joy are no longer around our joy ceases.

As believers, we understand that true lasting joy can only come from Jesus. Jesus is always with us, ready to give us His joy. He constantly forgives us and empowers us through the Holy Spirit to be joyful. We should be singing all year round, "Joy to the World, the Lord Has Come!"

The Apostle Paul wrote, "*Rejoice always*" (1 Thessalonians 5:16). To be joyful always means that we are to be joyful in all circumstances. Because we know that God is always with us, we can be joyful. When there is trouble in the world, we can rejoice, because we know that Jesus has overcome it and enables us to overcome as well. We can be joyful knowing that God's hand is in all our temporary situations. Nothing in this world can separate us from the love of God in Jesus (Romans 8:38-39). Being joyful always is not wishful thinking, but the relentless attitude of seeing all things in life from God's eternal perspective.

- 1. How would you define joy? Can joy and happiness be confused?
- 2. How does the joy that the world provides differ from your joy in Jesus?
- 3. What things of the world give you joy? Is that thing or person too important to you?
- 4. How is it possible to "rejoice always"?

Jesus Wants Our Joy to Be Full

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). As we are filled with God's grace, love, and presence, joy is an everyday experience, and our joy is full. As was stated above, the world can provide temporary joy, but it does not last. Only the joy from Jesus is full and everlasting.

When Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you," He is referring to the beginning verses in John 15. In those verses, Jesus says He is the Vine, and we are the branches. Those branches that stay connected with the vine will thrive and do well. Those branches that become disconnected

will die. Abiding in Jesus, like branches attached to the vine, will cause us to bear fruit, because fruit just naturally flows from branches that are connected to and abide in the Vine, Jesus.

Fruit are works of love. Abiding in Jesus, the Vine, the Holy Spirit Who came to us at Baptism prompts us to bear fruit that glorifies God. We do not bear fruit by our own efforts. We bear fruit because the Holy Spirit lives in us. Our fruit is seen as we minister to the needs of others. We feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, entertain the strangers, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and the prisoners (Matthew 25:37-39), all in the name of Jesus, the Vine. Jesus tells us that, when we love and serve others in His name, we are serving Him (Matthew 25:40).



Jesus said, "that My joy may be in you." That joy was manifested when, "for the joy that was set before Him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). His joy was to bring us to heaven by the way of the cross. To fill us with joy, He was shamed and died. As we abide in Him and bear the fruit of faith, our joy is made full.

If our joy is in our **work**, then when that is gone, so goes the joy. If our joy is in our **friends**, then when they are gone, so goes the joy. If our joy is in our **family**, then when they are gone, so goes the joy. If our joy is in our **health**, then when that's gone, so goes the joy. If our joy is in our **money**, then when that's gone, so goes the joy. **BUT JESUS' JOY IS FOREVER!**

- 5. Read John 15:1-5. Identify the Vinedresser, the Vine, the branches. Describe their roles. What is necessary for you to bear fruit?
- 6. How do you abide in Christ?
 - Psalm 119:28, 107
 - Matthew 18:20; Hebrews 10:25
 - John 6:53-56
 - Romans 10:17
 - Galatians 3:26-27
- 7. Read Philippians 4:4. What is this verse telling you to do?
- 8. Why is Ephesians 3:14-20 so empowering to all who abide in Christ and He in them?
- 9. Read Psalm 16.11. Why do you have fullness of joy?
- 10. Read Isaiah 61:10-11. What gives you constant joy?

11. Read Jeremiah 15:16. What gives God's people joy?

Prayer: Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Holy Spirit Who transforms us into people who are filled with the joy of Jesus and want to share that joy with others. May the joy of the Lord be our strength. In Jesus' most holy name we pray. Amen.

Bible Study Answer Guide

Study 1

- 1. The *Pocket Bible Dictionary* defines joy as follows: "Great delight or positive feelings. Joy attended Christ's birth (Luke 2:10) and resurrection (Matthew 28:8). A believer's spiritual joy is produced by the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:21; Philippians 4:4)." As the text in our study has stated "true lasting joy can only come from Jesus." Regardless of our circumstances, challenges, or the conditions that we face, with Jesus we can be joyful. The world can give us joy but that joy can't be sustained. The world provides only temporary joy and happiness. Psalm 16:11 tells us that in the presence of God there is "fullness of joy."
- 2. The world's joy is based on circumstances, activities, relationships, or events. With the right circumstances, activities, relationships, or events in this world, we find joy and happiness. Unfortunately, life doesn't stay positive causing our joy to change to sadness. When we have an intimate relationship with Jesus, we can be joyful always knowing that He loves us, is with us, and in control.
- 3. We find joy in the things that we treasure. What is your treasure? A. W. Tozer suggested that we may discover the answer by responding to four basic questions: "What do we value most? What would we most hate to lose? What do our thoughts turn to most frequently when we are free to think of what we will? And finally, what affords us the greatest pleasure?"

Personal response

- 4. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, so it is a gift from God. We know that God will never leave us nor forsake us. We know that God is faithful, and we can place our hope in Him. Through faith, we live lives centered in Him and controlled by Him. We understand that all that we are, have, and will have are gifts from our Heavenly Father by His grace through Jesus.
- 5. John 5:1-5. The Vinedresser is God.

The Vine is Jesus

The branches are we.

God, as the Vinedresser, is the creator and owner of all things. As the Vinedresser, He prunes the branches (you and me). When God prunes us, we are enabled to bear more fruit. Our pruning may not be enjoyable, but God does it to strengthen our faith and to make us more fruitful.

In order for the branches (you and I) to bear fruit and for our joy to be full, we need to stay connected to the Vine (Jesus). Through spending time in God's Word and receiving the Lord's body and blood in Holy Communion, we abide in Jesus, which enables us to bear fruit.

6. Psalm 119:28, 107. God's Word

Matthew 18:20. Gathering with fellow believers

Hebrews 10:25. Meet together and encourage one another

John 6:53-56. Partaking in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. "Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me."

- Romans 10:17. Hearing the Word of God. Galatians 3:26-27. Being baptized into Christ, thus putting on Christ
- 7. Philippians 4:4. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice."
- 8. Ephesians 3:14-20. Strengthened in the love of Christ, we are empowered to do "far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us." Jesus works in and through us.
- 9. Psalm 16:11. David credits God for placing him on the path of life. Through faith, David knew that God was the source of all good things. When God is with us, we have the assurance and hope that He will protect us in our lives today, and we have the hope of being with Him forever in heaven. Luke tells us that we are to rejoice because our "names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). Aware that God is in control gave David (and us) the "fullness of joy."
- 10. Isaiah 61:10-11. We have abiding joy knowing that Jesus has "clothed [us] with the garments of salvation; He has covered [us] with the robe of righteousness." This He does all by grace, not through any merit or works of our own.
- 11. Jeremiah 15:16. As Jeremiah read, studied, and heard God's Word, he internalized and assimilated God's Word. It became part of him. We eat things to be physically strong. Jeremiah tells us that he ate God's Word, and God's Word became his joy and the delight of his heart. As food is absorbed and fills our bodies, God's Word fills our innermost beings.

Bible Study 2

The Joy of Serving



Prayer: Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, You are the provider and source of all

good things. Grant us joy in serving You by serving others. Bless our study today. We ask this in the name of Jesus, Your Son, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Living as a Servant

We are reminded by the words of Matthew 20:28, "... Even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many," that the life of Jesus was one of total sacrifice. By this remark, Jesus makes it clear that He wanted to develop a servant spirit in His disciples as He does in us. Being conformed to the image of God, we take on the role of servants.

The concept of serving rather than being served is not a natural one. We have an inborn desire to be served ourselves and to have our own needs met rather than to see to the needs of others. It is our nature to want to be "number one." God's love changes our mindset from wanting to please ourselves to a desire to serve others. Seeing others as our brothers and sisters in Christ helps us to follow God's command to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31).

In 2 Corinthians 12:15, Paul writes, "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?" Because of our desire to serve Jesus, we begin to identify with the interest that He has in other peoples' lives. We forego selfish interests and are freed to live lives of Christian service. "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13).

Our freedom should express itself in the form of service. God brings us into a proper relationship with Himself, so we can understand what service He expects from us. He continually served the hungry, handicapped, and homeless, and we are called to be His imitators (Ephesians 5:1). When we commit to serving others, it is not done for our own satisfaction or to put ourselves on pedestals. We serve out of love for Christ and His people and to be worthy of His calling.

Finding Joy in Serving

It is interesting that the more we reach out in service to others, the more we are the ones being blessed. Joy and happiness in great measure are waiting for us if we will reach just a little further. In the reaching, we become God's own hands. While serving others, we are equally blessed. Jesus, speaking about acts of service, said, "…blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:17b).

When we commit our time, talents, and money in faithful service to Him through our service to others, we feel blessed and joyful. We are most fulfilled when we reflect the nature and attributes of God Who created us. Being and doing what we are called to be and do gives us joy.

Studies have shown that if we want to be happy and joyful, we need to stop focusing only on ourselves and serve others. The key to happiness is to labor for the happiness of others. God has made us in His likeness, so we receive joy when we reach out in service to others. Selfless service is an antidote to living a self-indulgent and self-serving lifestyle.

- 1. In what ways did Jesus serve? Why did He serve?
- 2. What prompts you to serve?
- 3. Read Matthew 25:37-40. Whom are you serving?
- 4. How would you contrast true service with self-serving service?
- 5. Read Luke 10:25-37. What acts of service did the Good Samaritan provide?



Called to Do Good and to Be Rich in Good Works

The Apostle Paul wrote, "[The rich] are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share" (1 Timothy 6:18). Paul is encouraging all people, but especially the wealthy, to

serve and to share. He wants us to be generous with our time and our money. With God's help, we can be caring and serving people, and, when we give our time in service to others, we change the center of our attention

Serving is the natural outflow of the thankful heart.

from ourselves to others. A life dedicated to serving others leads us away from our own self-importance.

- 6. What does serving and giving do for you?
- 7. Whom are you serving right now? Is there someone who needs what you have to offer?

Putting our God-given Talents to Work

God gives us different abilities and talents in all areas of life so that we may do His work. Not only is God the source of our abilities and talents, He gives us motivation to develop them and opportunities to use them in His service. Whether we are given many or few talents, we are to be thankful for what we receive and use them to extend His kingdom and in service to others.

God wants us to be productive people. The Apostle Paul wrote, "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). God wants people to be "zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14). He does not appreciate laziness, idleness, or fruitlessness. He calls us to bear fruit (John 15:16), to serve (Ephesians 6:7), to give (Matthew 10:8), to love (Matthew 22:37-38), to witness (Acts 4:20), and to obey (John 14:23). God seeks people through whom He can work. Through our lips, He tells others of His life-saving Gospel; through our hands and feet, He brings love and care to those in

need; and through our minds, hearts, and checkbooks, He financially supports the work of the Church

As Christians, we are called into ministry. Through faith, we become more than just spectators.

We are God's representatives who are called to serve, just as our Master, Jesus, ministered to the people of His time. "For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done for you" (John 13:15). Our ministries take place wherever we are.

- 8. Read John 13:1-20. What did Jesus do? Jesus said, "For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (verse 15). What is this verse telling you to do? How are you to serve.
- 9. What does 1 Peter 4:10 say about the use of your talents?
- 10. Do you know which talents you possess? Are you using them? Do you have any underdeveloped talents or abilities? List your talents:
- 11. What does 2 Corinthians 9:8 mean to you?
- 12. What does Matthew 28:20 promise that will equip you to use your gifts properly?
- 13. According to 2 Corinthians 9:13 what is the ultimate result of your service?

Prayer: Dear Lord, open our eyes and hearts to opportunities to serve others in Your name. Use us as Your hands, feet, and mouth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Bible Study Answer Guide

Study 2

- 1. Jesus' whole life during His three-years on earth was a life of service. He "came not to be served, but to serve..." (Matthew 20:28). Jesus healed people who were blind; He healed lepers; He rid people of demons; He comforted the lonely; He fed the hungry; He rescued people from drowning; He came to the rescue of a couple getting married, etc. His greatest act of service was when He willingly went to the cross to take upon Himself the sins of the world.
 - Jesus' nature is to love and serve. He is faithful and obedient to His Heavenly Father. Out of His love and obedience to His Father, He served and continues serving us today.
- 2. By God's grace through Christ Jesus, we are empowered to serve. The Holy Spirit changes our hearts, so we see others as brothers and sisters in Christ. With God's help, we can serve as He wants us to serve. The Holy Spirit prompts us to live a life of service to others.
- 3. Matthew 25:37-40. Jesus tell us that when we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, tend to the sick, or visit those in prison, we are doing it unto Jesus. Jesus said, "*Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to Me*" (Matthew 25:40).
- 4. A self-serving service would be service that seeks something in return. If we serve for recognition, we aren't serving out of love for Jesus and others. If we serve to receive service in return, it is serving for the wrong reason. True service is prompted by God's grace and love.
- 5. Luke 10:25-37. The Good Samaritan bandaged up the wounds of the beaten man, "pouring on oil and wine." He put the injured man on his animal and took him to an inn where he paid for his lodging and any further care he may have needed.
- 6. Serving helps us to focus on others. By nature, we are self-centered people, but God has made us to love and serve others. Created in God's image, we have been created to love and serve. Doing what we were created to do gives us joy.
- 7. Personal response.
- 8. John 13:1-20. He shared a Passover meal with His disciples, and then He washed their feet, the lowliest task of their time. He directed His disciples to follow His example and wash the feet of others. He encouraged them, and us as well, to show humility and do all that is necessary to serve others. Nothing should be beneath us in our service.
- 9. 1 Peter 4:10. God gives His people different gifts that are to be used in service to others and to extend His kingdom. This verse tells us that each of us has received a gift to serve one another.
- 10. Personal response.

- 11. 2 Corinthians 9:8. By God's grace, He gives us the desire and ability to serve others. "[Having] have all sufficiency in all things at all times, we may abound in every good work."
 - all grace
 - all sufficiency
 - all things
 - all times
- 12. Matthew 28:20. "I am with you always, to the end of the age." God works through us in our service to others. He is with us. We are His hands, feet, and mouth through whom He works.
- 13. 2 Corinthians 9:13. God will be glorified.

Bible Study 3

The Joy in Giving

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, every animal in the forest is Yours. You are the owner of all things, and You hold all things together. Help us to live in gratitude for the beauty



and majesty of Your creation and especially for our redemption through Jesus. Grant us loving and generous hearts and joy in our giving. Please bless this study that we are about to begin. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

More Blessed to Give

It has been said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." This statement communicates the blessedness of giving. In the words of Billy Graham, "God has given us two hands—one to receive with and the other to give with." As rewarding as it is to receive gifts, it is even more meaningful to give them. When we give faithfully and generously, we discover the true joy in giving. We have all experienced the excitement and thrill of giving someone a special birthday, Christmas, or anniversary gift. We can't measure the joy of watching the happiness that our gifts bring to others.

In Acts 20:35 Jesus says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Jesus knew that the act of giving returns more to us than what we give. God only wants the best for us when He asks us to give. He uses our generosity to build His Kingdom, support those in need, and to strengthen and bless us as givers. We are fulfilled and enriched through a generous, giving spirit. Giving is a privilege and a joy and can change our lives.

In the matter of God's gifts, we can choose to be channels or terminals. What we do with God's money demonstrates our spiritual maturity. Some share sacrificially with God and others, others give proportionately from their incomes, and still others hoard what they receive. God wants us to be channels of His blessings, and He enriches us so that we can be blessings to others. We are blessed to be a blessing. "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). Lasting joy and contentment come from employing our lives and possessions in service to God and others.

- 1. Read Luke 6:38. What is Jesus saying?
- 2. Read 1 Corinthians 16:2. What giving points are made in this verse?
- 3. What kind of blessing for giving do you read about in Proverbs 3:9-10?
- 4. Read Genesis 4:2-7 and Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:12. Why was God pleased with Abel's gift and not with Cain's?

Giving Is an "Act of Grace."

As Christians, we understand that all we are and have are by God's grace. Life itself is a gift. "And from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace" (John 1:16). By the grace of God, we have life now and the life to come. The acronym for grace so aptly states what we have received: "God's Riches At Christ's Expense." "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Giving expresses our love and gratitude to God. Giving to others and to extend God's Church is evidence of God's grace in our lives. Giving is a fruit of grace. Without God's grace, we are not able to give up our resources generously or to give at all. To unbelievers, giving is foolish and unnecessary. In contrast, believers are empowered by the working of the Holy Spirit to give willingly and joyfully to fellow believers who need support. We're eager to comply with Paul's

urging "Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality" (Romans 12:13).



In writing to the church in Corinth, Paul referenced the example of the Macedonians who gave so generously to the needy Christians in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:1-9). They were empowered to give because of God's generosity to them. Paul referred to giving as an "act of grace" (verse 6). By grace, the Macedonians in their extreme poverty gave "beyond their means" (verse 3). They were so eager to give that they pleaded for the privilege of sharing with the needy in Jerusalem. Their giving, while they were in such a difficult economic position,

gave witness to God's grace in their lives. God's grace makes it possible for people to have very little and yet want to give generously.

- 5. Read 2 Corinthians 8:12. What does it mean to give proportionately of your blessings? In the Old Testament, God commanded His people to tithe (give one-tenth) of their income. As New Testament Christians, should you give more or less under grace?
- 6. The Macedonians are evidence that hard times are not barriers to giving. Why were the Macedonians able to give so much (2 Corinthians 8:5)?
- 7. Read Luke 21:1-4. Why did Jesus commend the widow who gave only two small coins while others gave large sums of money?

Serving God or Money

Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). Will we choose to serve the Lord with our lives and resources or be choked by the materialistic ways of the world? (Matthew 13:7, 22). There is no middle ground. Jesus didn't say it is difficult to serve both God and money. He said it is impossible to serve both (Matthew 6:24). Our treasure is either in heaven or on earth. We can't live our lives with a disclaimer that says, "Lord, I'll serve you with my heart but not with my money." Our relationships with Christ should impact everything

we do, including how we handle our money. Jesus directs us to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to [us]" (Matthew 6:33).

- 8. In what ways does your giving indicate the spiritual condition of your heart?
- 9. Read Luke 12:32-34. How do you store up treasures in heaven?
- 10. Read Malachi 3:8-10. How is God asking to be tested? Have you ever tested God in your giving? If so, what have you learned? If not, what's keeping you from giving God a chance to show what He can do for you?

The following poem "The Joy of Unselfish Giving" was written by Helen Steiner Rice, who was a well-known writer of religious and inspirational poetry.

"Time is not measured by the years that you live But by the deeds that you do and the joy that you give— And each day as it comes brings a chance to each one To love to the fullest, leaving nothing undone That would brighten the life or lighten the load Of some weary traveler lost on Life's Road— So what does it matter how long we may live If as long as we live we unselfishly give."

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, grant us loving and giving hearts, so we can experience the joy in giving. Help us to use the money that You've entrusted to us as a tool to help others and extend Your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Bible Study Answer Guide

Study 3

- 1. Luke 6:38. With the measure you use it will be measured back to you. This verse is telling us that if we give a cup, we will receive a cup of blessings. If we give a bucket, we will get a bucket of blessings. If we give a barrel, we will get a barrel of blessings and more because it's "pressed down, shaken together running over."
- 2. 1 Corinthians 16:2. Each of us is to put aside an offering on the first day of the week in proportion to our blessings.
- 3. Proverbs 3:9-10. God directs us to give the first portion of our income to God through our church just as the Israelites were to give the firstfruits of their grain from the harvests. God promises to bless those who give faithfully and generously. We are certain of spiritual blessings as we honor God with our giving. We may also receive material blessings.
- 4. Genesis 4:2-7; Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:12. Abel's gift was from the heart. He gave his first and best, the fat portion from his produce. In contrast, Cain's offering was given out of obligation with the absence of faith. God wants our giving to be an act of worship. Giving is a response of gratitude for Who God is and what He has done and continues to do for us.
- 5. 2 Corinthians 8:12. As we are blessed, we are to give. We return to God a portion of our blessings that have come from Him. The proportion that God commanded in the Old Testament was the tithe, which is giving one-tenth of our incomes. As New Testament Christians, we are prompted to give under the grace of God in Christ Jesus. The many examples in the New Testament far exceed the tithe, such as the Poor Widow, Zacchaeus, Barnabas, and the Macedonians. Matthew 23:23 suggests that the tithe should be honored even today. God wants us to give cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7, and He calls us to excel in the grace of giving (2 Corinthians 8:7).
- 6. 2 Corinthians 8:5. They first gave themselves. God had their hearts. Their giving was evidence for their love and trust in God.
- 7. Luke 21:1-4. Because she gave all that she had, giving evidence to her trust in God for her needs.
- 8. As someone has said, "You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving." Giving is evidence of a faithful and loving heart. God wants His people to have compassion and a giving spirit. When we give, we break the grip that money and possessions can have on us.
 - When Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector, gave half of his possessions to the poor, Jesus said, "*Today salvation has come to this house*..." (Luke 19:9). Zacchaeus' giving indicated a new heart. The giving revealed his heart. Zacchaeus saw his money as a tool that could be used to help the poor. His giving reflected his love for Jesus and his brothers and sisters in Christ.

- 9. Luke 12:32-34. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that we are not to store up treasures on earth but to store up treasures in heaven. We store up treasures on earth when we do things through faith. These verses in Luke tell us that we store up treasures in heaven when we give our money to help other people. Following God's direction, we store up treasures in heaven.
- 10. Malachi 3:8-10. This is the only example in Scripture where God asked His people to put Him to the test. God assures His people that, when they give faithfully and generously, they will be blessed.

 Personal response.







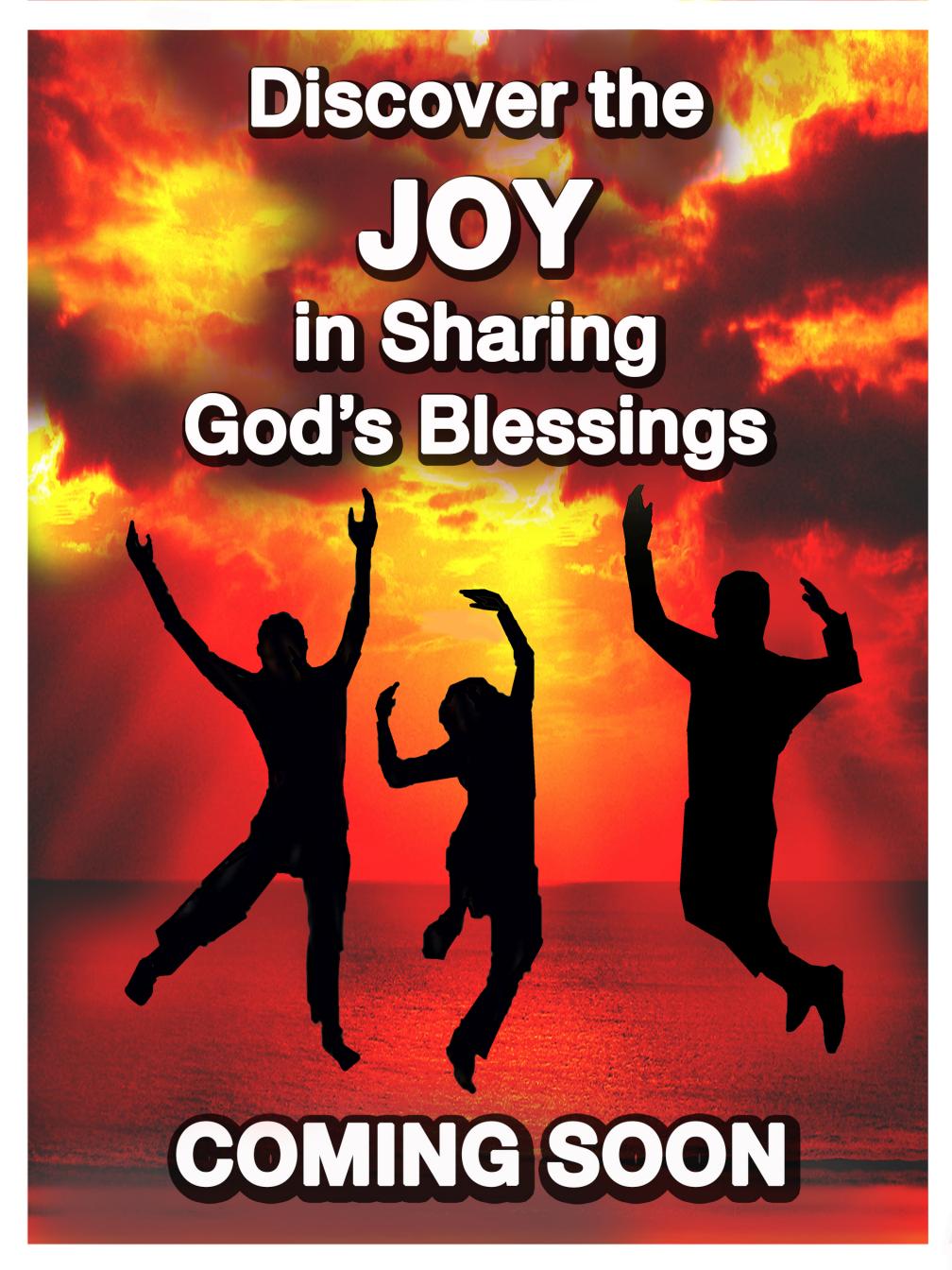


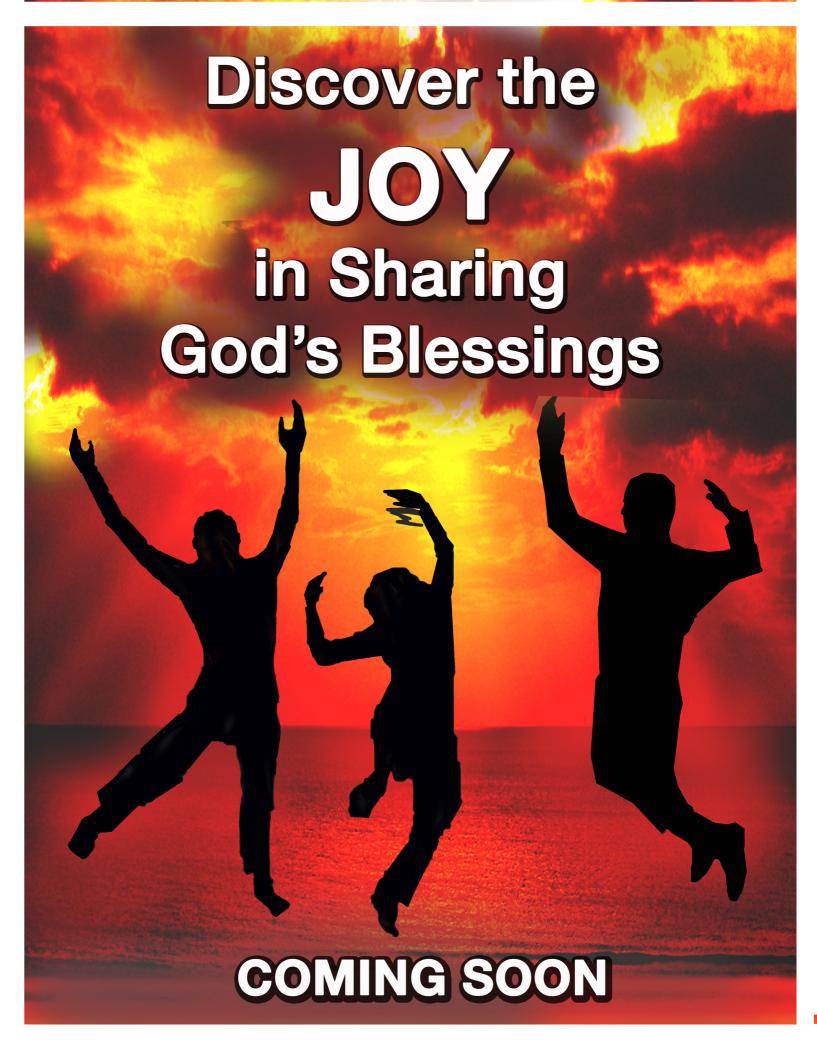


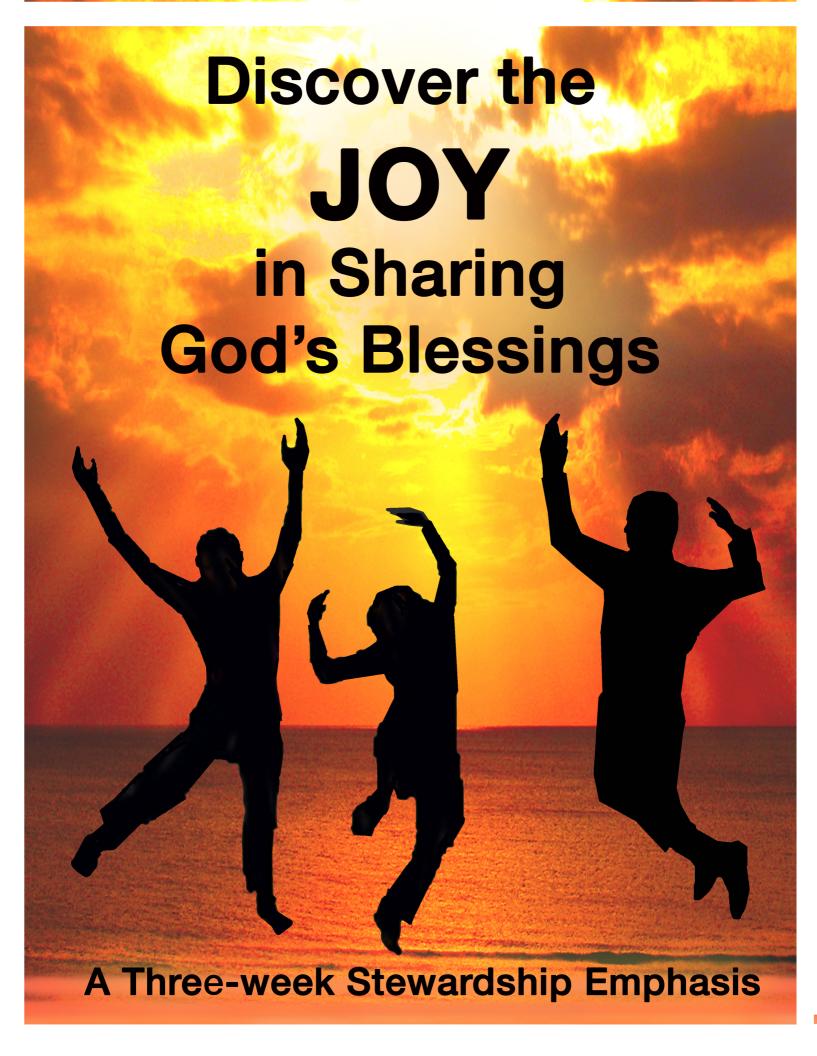












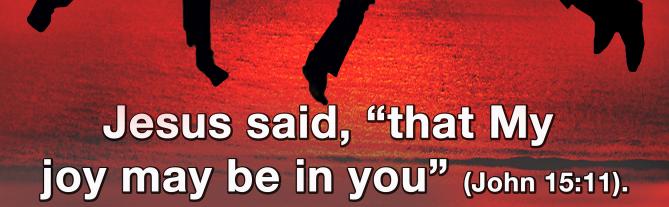


In Sharing God's

Blessings











"Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4).