

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts



**A Three-week
Stewardship Emphasis**

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

A Three-week Stewardship Emphasis



Weekly Themes:

Week One: “Stewards of God’s Varied Grace” (1 Peter 4:10).

Week Two: “As We Have Opportunity, Let Us Do Good to Everyone” (Galatians 6:10).

Week Three: “Generous and Ready to Share” (1 Timothy 6:18).

Ron Chewning
Stewardship Advisors
32842 Bassett Woods Ct.
Beverly Hills, MI 48025
248-644-6150
stewardshipadv@aol.com

To Pastors and Stewardship Leaders:

I thank you for your interest in **Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts**. I pray that God is honored and that the members of your church are drawn closer to Him through this stewardship emphasis.

Author background

I, along with my wife Phyllis, have spent the past 22 years developing Scripturally-based, grace-centered stewardship resources. Our stewardship material has 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 a trustee on the Lutheran High School Association of Michigan. My wife and I are both active members of Our Shepherd Lutheran Church (LCMS) in Birmingham, MI. Our three adult children along with their spouses and our six grandchildren live in Michigan and Texas.

Your Fellow Steward,
Ron Chewning
32842 Bassett Woods Ct.
Beverly Hills, MI 48025
stewardshipadv@aol.com
248-644-6150



Thanks to John Mittelstadt and Katie Priskorn for the art work on the flyers.

Churches that purchase this emphasis are permitted to reproduce any of the materials in the three-ring binder and on the CD for use within their church.

Additional stewardship resources can be found at stewardshipadvisors.org.

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

Leader Tips:

A Three-week Stewardship Emphasis

Week One: "Stewards of God's Varied Grace" (1 Peter 4:10)

Week Two: "As We Have Opportunity, Let Us Do Good to Everyone" (Galatians 6:10)

Week Three: "Generous and Ready to Share" (1 Timothy 6:18)



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.

Daily Devotions:

There are daily devotions for each of the three weeks. They can be printed out in booklet form as provided on the CD.

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.

Trifold Brochure

The trifold brochure should be distributed one to three weeks prior to the emphasis

Commitment Sunday (weekend)

Members are 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 or the following weekend. (The weekend following is slightly preferable because your members will have heard the sermon on giving, and they have one more week to think and pray about their commitment.)

It is suggested that you give your 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 should 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

Trifold brochure
Bulletin messages
Newsletter article
Letter
Flyers
Power point slide

Weekly Material

Bulletin messages
Daily devotions
Lay reader talk
Power point slide
Worship helps
Children's message
Sermon
Bible study
Commitment Form (for Commitment Sunday)

Material Following Emphasis

Bulletin messages
Thank you message



Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts



**...be steadfast, immovable, always
abounding in the work of the Lord
...your labor is not in vain.
(1 Corinthians 15:58).**

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts



FAITH

**"As each has received a gift,
use it to serve one another,
as good stewards of
God's varied grace"
(1 Peter 4:10).**

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts



COMING SOON

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts



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

Coming Soon:
Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts
Six Important Activities of Faithful Stewards



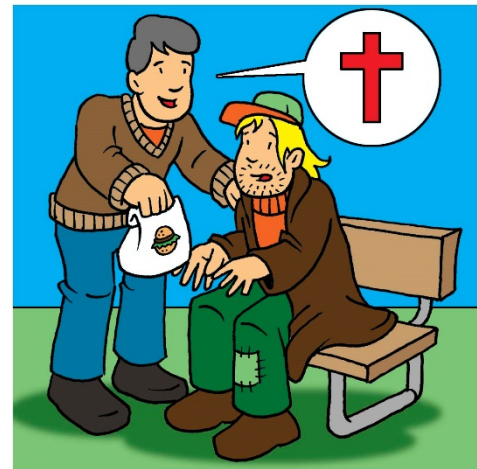
Praying



Reading God's Word



Worshipping



Serving



Building Relationships



Giving

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:10).

Gift of Jesus



Gift of Faith



Gift of Relationships



Gift of Time



Gift of Talents



Gift of Money



Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:10).

Gift of Jesus



Gift of Faith



Gift of Relationships



Gift of Time



Gift of Talents



Gift of Money



Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Peter 4:10).

Gift of Jesus



Gift of Faith



Gift of Relationships



Gift of Time



Gift of Talents



Gift of Money



Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Peter 4:10).

Gift of Jesus



Gift of Faith



Gift of Relationships



Gift of Time



Gift of Talents



Gift of Money



Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Peter 4:10).

Gift of Jesus



Gift of Faith



Gift of Relationships



Gift of Time



Gift of Talents



Gift of Money





“Faithful
Stewards
of God’s
Gifts”

Coming
Soon!

FAITHFUL  STEWARDS
OF
God's Gifts

FAITHFUL  STEWARDS
OF
God's Gifts

FAITHFUL  STEWARDS
OF
God's Gifts

FAITHFUL  STEWARDS
OF
God's Gifts

FAITHFUL  STEWARDS OF *God's Gifts*

FAITHFUL  STEWARDS OF *God's Gifts*

FAITHFUL  STEWARDS
OF
God's Gifts

Bulletin messages (Preceding emphasis)

Coming Soon: Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

As God's stewards, we are to devote our lives and gifts to fulfill His purpose. However, our human nature seeks the possession of things, wants to be important, and desires to be in control. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we understand that God is in control and that He owns everything. *"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof..."* (Psalm 24:1). With transformed hearts, we can be God's stewards who express our faith in the way we live our lives. Through faith, God provides motivation and power to live the Christian life in a growing awareness of God's redeeming grace. In the coming weeks, we begin a stewardship emphasis titled **Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts**. In these three weeks of sermons and Bible studies, we will understand that being a Christian steward is a wonderful privilege. God calls and chooses us to be His stewards, and He acts in and through us. We are God's hands, feet, and mouth to the world.

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

**STEWARDS ARE TOOLS IN
GOD'S HANDS TO DO HIS
WORK.**

"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).



Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

**AS GOD'S REDEEMED CHILDREN,
WE ARE HIS STEWARDS BY HIS
CALL AND THROUGH HIS GRACE.**

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last." (John 15:16).



“Faithful Stewards of God’s Gifts”

I’m excited to inform you that our stewardship emphasis for this year is **Faithful Stewards of God’s Gifts**. I’m confident that the three weeks of messages and Bible studies will help you grow in your spiritual and stewardship journeys.

The three-weekly themes are:

Sunday ____ (Date) ____: “Stewards of God’s Varied Grace” (1 Peter 4:10)

Sunday ____ (Date) ____: “As We Have Opportunity, Let Us Do Good to Everyone”
(Galatians 6:10)

Sunday ____ (Date) ____: “Generous and Ready to Share” (1 Timothy 6:18)

In our short time on earth, we are called by God to take care of His things. Through faith, we understand that all we have belongs to the One Who created us. Being a steward is faith in action. The following quote from Thom and Art Rainer in their book *Simple Life* will help us better understand what it means to be God’s stewards:

Stewardship is a word we often hear from behind the pulpit but rarely outside the walls of the church...A steward is traditionally one who takes care of another’s household. A steward watches over the domestic affairs so that the master may focus on whatever he deems most important. Much trust is placed in the steward by the master. He is expected to act in the best interest of his master, with or without his oversight. So stewardship consists of managing those obligations given to the steward. By nature of the word, stewardship requires some type of higher authority. It is a position of submittal to a greater good. It is the denying of oneself and the exalting of another. It is commitment to the well-being of another, knowing that his happiness will result in your happiness.



What a privilege and honor that God Who has created us and recreated us in Baptism chooses us to be His stewards! In this honored position, we are expected to be responsible and accountable. The Apostle Paul wrote, “*Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy*” (1 Corinthians 4:2). With the help of the Holy Spirit, we become **Faithful Stewards of God’s Gifts**.

I pray that our stewardship emphasis, **Faithful Stewards of God’s Gifts**, will be a blessing to us all. May God continually bless us as faithful stewards of the many blessings He has entrusted to our care.

Your fellow steward in Christ,

Pastor _____

Letter

Dear Member,

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

This year's stewardship emphasis, **Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts**, which begins on ____ (Date) ____, will help us better understand what it means to be God's stewards. God is the creator and the owner of all things, and He created us to be the stewards of His creation and the gifts that He entrusts to us. As God's stewards, we act in His best interests, and we seek to please Him and do His will. What a wonderful privilege and honor it is that God has given us this responsibility to be His stewards.

Through faith, we understand that our stewardship activities originate in the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does this by the Gospel, and, when our lives as stewards begin and end in the Gospel, we act as faithful stewards. At birth, we become stewards, but, at Baptism, we become God's stewards. The Holy Spirit, Who comes to us at our Baptism and continues to come to us through Word and Sacrament, does His work of sanctification, empowering us to take on God's purpose and find our identity as His stewards. As our faith matures, we learn to view our stewardship as a privilege rather than a duty.



Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts is a three-week program that will help us understand that being a steward is more than a part-time activity. It consists of much more than isolated deeds of stewardship. We are God's stewards each and every hour throughout the day. Being a steward is who we are.

The three weekly themes of **Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts** are:

- Sunday ____ (Date) ____: "Stewards of God's Varied Grace" (1 Peter 4:10)
- Sunday ____ (Date) ____: "As We Have Opportunity, Let Us Do Good to Everyone" (Galatians 6:10).
- Sunday ____ (Date) ____: "Generous and Ready to Share" (1 Timothy 6:18).

Commitment Sunday is ____ (Date) ____ . God's blessings as you consider prayerfully what He wants you to give to Him through your church offering. Please bring the enclosed commitment form to church with you on Commitment Sunday.

May God help you be a faithful steward of the gifts that He has entrusted to you.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor _____

Stewardship: It's about **TIME**

Our time is an important gift from God.

David said, “*My times are in Your hand...*” (Psalm 31:15). Are you using your time in wise and fruitful ways? Of all the gifts God gives us, time is one of the most valuable, because it's not something we can reclaim. Therefore, we must make the most of it while we have it. All the time we have is a trust from God to be used for doing the things that bring Him honor and praise.

God gives long lives to some, short lives to others, but all of us are given the same 1,440-minute or 24-hour day. Our concern is not how many of these days God will give us, but to use every hour God does give us to please Him and accomplish the tasks He sets before us.

What is important to us is indicated by how we spend our time. If we acknowledge God as the Giver of time, will we not want to make time for Him? The amount and quality of time we spend with God determines the relationship we have with Him. How we spend our time shows what is important to us.



Stewardship: It's about **TALENTS**

Our talents are important gifts from God.

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 “*eager to do what is good*” (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 (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 the needy; and through our minds, hearts, and checkbooks, He financially supports the work of the Church.

Stewardship: It's about **MONEY**

Our money is an important gift from God.

Money is an integral part of our lives, because so much of life revolves around money. We can use it for good, or we can choose to use it as a tool for immoral and/or improper purposes. In God's Word, we find many references to money and possessions. In fact, it is one of the most discussed topics in Scripture. The Bible helps us see that our faith influences how we handle money, and we also see that how we handle money influences our faith. Faith and money intersect constantly. Jesus tells us that we are to serve God rather than to be slaves to money and possessions. We can't worship the Almighty and the almighty dollar.

Through faith, we understand that God has given us the ability to earn our money (Deuteronomy 8:18), and He provides money for our needs and the needs of others both physically and spiritually. God enriches us to be a blessing to others. Jesus said, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (Acts 20:35).



Faithful Stewardship

Our stewardship is the expression of our faith as we manage our lives and resources for God's purposes. It is the wise management of who we are and all that we have. God has chosen us as His stewards and grants us the wonderful privilege to serve Him. He also equips and empowers us for service. As He molds and transforms us into His stewards, we acknowledge that everything in this life is a sacred trust from Him. God is the source and owner of all things. He allows us to use His creation and intends it for our good.



Our stewardship is seen in our deeds and actions. Our acts of stewardship become more Christ-like as

our relationship with Jesus grows. Out of love and gratitude for our Savior Who has redeemed us, we are eager to perform our stewardship activities. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we become faithful stewards who respond willingly and joyfully to God's love, goodness, and mercy. Through faith, we are empowered to do as God directs us in 1 Peter 4:10: *"As each has received a gift, use it serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."*

A Lifestyle of Stewardship

In a lifestyle of stewardship, we commit our lives, gifts, and resources to serving the Lord and fulfilling His will for our lives. Being a Christian steward involves the way we view life, our whole human vocation, the ordering of our lives, and the deployment of all of God's blessings. Jesus said, *"I have come to do Your will, O God"* (Hebrews 10:7). Just as Jesus came to do His Father's will, we are also called to do His will.

Because our sinful nature no longer controls us, our lifestyles reflect the presence of the Holy Spirit. Our minds are set on doing what the Spirit desires. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, we are taught to put off the old self, *"and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness"* (Ephesians 4:24).

Thoughts to Ponder:

- How are you expressing your gratitude to God for all the blessings He gives you?
- Is God honored by the way you use your time, talents, and money?
- As a called and equipped steward, how are you using your blessings to help others hear the life-saving Gospel?

Stewardship Advisors
248-644-6150
Copyright © 2020

GOD CALLS AND EQUIPS US TO BE HIS STEWARDS



Coming Soon:
"Faithful Stewards
of God's Gifts"

Bulletin messages following emphasis

First week following emphasis:

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

Through faith, we understand that our stewardship is God working in and through us. It is not what we do, not what we give, not how we serve – but what God does, what God gives, how God serves, and our response to His love and gifts to us. God has shown us His plan for our lives. *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”* (Ephesians 2:10). This is the definition of stewardship: doing the good works which God has prepared for us to do. God empowers and equips us to be faithful stewards. God has chosen us to carry out His work on earth. *“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last”* (John 15:16).

Second week following emphasis:

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

As stewards, we have the responsibility to be knowledgeable and wise. In order to be effective in our stewardship, we need to seek God’s wisdom. *“For the Lord gives wisdom and from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding”* (Proverbs 2:6). God’s Word illustrates the poor consequences that result when we think and act foolishly. For example, in Matthew 6:26-27, we read of the man who built his house on the sand, and, when the rain come, the house came crashing down. Wisdom teaches us to build our houses on solid ground. As God’s stewards, we can best fulfill our calling when we seek and use His wisdom. With God’s wisdom, we will build on solid ground; we will acknowledge God as our source of all things, and we will be prepared for Christ’s coming again. Because God grants us His wisdom, we can be God-pleasing stewards.

Third week following emphasis:

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

There are thousands of occupations in today’s world, each requiring a special talent. There is a need for carpenters, cooks, mechanics, tailors, pastors, teachers, farmers, servers, students, police officers, etc. The important thing to note here, however, is that for every need, God has given to someone the ability to fulfill that need. Since some will be unbelievers, believers can let their lights *“shine before others, so that they may see [their] good works and give glorify to your Father Who is in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16). It is important how we do our jobs. What a beautiful opportunity to witness to those around us! So, let us be **Faithful Stewards of God’s Gifts**. Let’s begin and live each day with the joy and vigor that come from hearts filled with thanksgiving to God for His love, His guidance, His presence, and His strength in whatever we do. The world does notice how we work, does hear how we speak, and does watch how we behave. Let us let people see the love of the Lord through us.

Bulletin messages following emphasis

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

ALL OF OUR GOOD WORKS FLOW OUT OF HEARTS THAT TRUST IN JESUS.

“A greedy man stirs up strife, but the one who trusts in the Lord will be enriched” (Proverbs 28:25).



Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

EACH OF US RECEIVES UNIQUE TALENTS AS GIFTS FROM GOD. GIFTS ARE TO BE USED TO GLORIFY HIM AND FOR THE GOOD OF MEN.

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied Grace” (1 Peter 4:10).



Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

IN SPITE OF OUR UNWORTHINESS, GOD HAS CHOSEN US IN CHRIST TO BECOME HIS STEWARDS.

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last” (John 15:16).



Bulletin message following Commitment Sunday

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

Thank You for your Commitment

We received many Commitment Forms last Sunday. If you have need of a Commitment Form, you can find copies in the narthex. Please complete the form and place it in the church office.

Your faithful and generous giving is appreciated. Your church staff and church leaders will do everything possible to be faithful stewards of the money that you've given. God bless us as we strive, by God's grace, to grow as God's stewards, who give faithfully and generously.

*Thank
You*

Or

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

Members Respond to Annual Stewardship Appeal

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

Lay reader talk

(Commitment Sunday/Weekend can be the third week of this emphasis or the Sunday following the emphasis. You may want to consider using this talk on Commitment Sunday.)

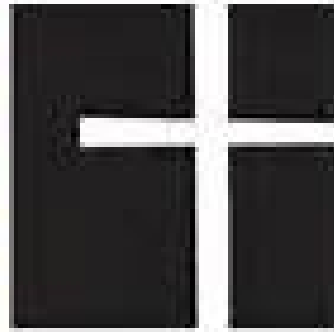
Should I Make a Financial Pledge to My Church?

Later today, we are asking our members to make a financial commitment to the mission and ministry of our church. What is your answer to the question: “Should I make a pledge to my church?” Life is full of examples of financial commitments that we make. We make commitments to make our house, apartment, and car payments. We pledge to make timely payments to our utility suppliers and our insurance contracts. Our way of life depends on our willingness to pledge.

As God’s children, we should have an even greater willingness to provide financial support of God’s Kingdom through our churches than those financial commitments we make outside of the church. Many Christians find no obstacles in their decision to commit to a pledge. Others struggle so, with those few who find themselves in this category, let me share the following thoughts as to why I recommend to people that they pledge:

1. When we pledge, we give careful thought to our giving. A pledge commits us to a predetermined amount of weekly giving rather than making weekly giving decisions in haste.
2. Pledging tends to safeguard our decision not to let our love of money overcome our love for the Lord. The commitment of the pledge helps us overcome the temptation of giving less when our financial situations get a little tough.
3. Pledging is an affirmation that we will do it God’s way. It says that we are taking a definite stand on the side of God. To make such an affirmation in word and deed is part of living the new life we have in Christ.
4. We pledge because it follows in the tradition and spirit of many Biblical examples. For example, Abraham and Jacob pledged to give the Lord a tithe of all their resources. Zacchaeus pledged to give away half of his assets to the poor.
5. Our pledge is based on the blessings God will entrust to us. The pledge is not a contract that can’t be changed. As our blessings change, so can the pledged amount that we will give change.
6. A pledge each year to the work of the Lord through our churches is a statement of faith.

May God help us all to understand why it’s important to pledge and give us the desire to commit financially to the work of God’s kingdom here at our church. May God’s blessings remain with us as we continue the faithful stewardship of the many blessings God has entrusted to our care.



Stewardship

a way of life

Faithful Stewards
of God's Gifts

Week One:

“Stewards of
God’s Varied
Grace”

(1 Peter 4:10).

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

The theme for the first week of our stewardship emphasis is "Stewards of God's Varied Grace." In our short time on earth, we are called by God to take care of His things. He has made us His stewards. A Christian steward is a child of God who realizes his/her role in life as a partner, a trustee, a manager, a caretaker, a temporary custodian of gifts that belong to God. Through faith, we understand that all we have belongs to the One Who created us. Being a steward is faith in action. What a privilege and honor that God, Who has created us and recreated us in Baptism, chooses us to be His stewards. In this honored position, we are expected to be responsible and accountable. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy"* (1 Corinthians 4:2). With the help of the Holy Spirit, we, by God's grace, become God-pleasing stewards. who receive God's precious gifts gratefully, manage God's gifts carefully and responsibly, share God's precious gifts with others generously, and return God's precious gifts joyfully with increase.

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

STEWARDS LIVE FOR THE OWNER, THE REDEEMER OF THEIR LIVES.

"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).



Faithful Stewards of God's Grace

PLACING OUR TRUST IN JESUS THROUGH OUR FAITHFUL SERVING AND GIVING, WE GIVE EVIDENCE TO OUR FAITH.

"You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve" (Matthew 4:10).



We Are God's Stewards

What joy it is to know the heart of our Creator has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ. What joy it is to know that our lives are of inestimable value, that we were created for a high and noble purpose, that we are called to a dynamic and meaningful existence, that our future is certain and full of promise. That is what defines us. This the good news that we are called to spread to the world

- It is this God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—Who calls us to be stewards.
 - It is this God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—Whose resources we are called to steward.
 - It is this God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—Whose creation we are to care for and use.
 - It is this God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—Who defines for us who is our neighbor and how we are to respond to our neighbor's need.
 - It is this God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and none other to whom we are accountable.
- (R. Scott Rodin, *Stewards in the Kingdom*)



FAITHFUL STEWARDS OF *God's Gifts*

Worship Helps (week 1)

Hymns:

Opening hymn: "O God, My Faithful God" 696
Sermon hymn: "Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me" 722
Closing hymn: "Forth in Thy Name, O Lord, I Go" 854

Readings:

Old Testament: Psalm 50:1-15
Epistle: 1 Peter 4:1-11
Gospel: Luke 12:22-34

Stewardship Litany:

Leader: Lord God, we thank You that You have chosen and called us to be stewards of Your abundance, the caretakers of all You have entrusted to us. We ask that You would bless us with zeal to be Your stewards.

People: Lord, by Your grace, we pray that we will be the faithful stewards You want us to be. Help us understand that all that we have is received from Your hand.

Leader: Lord God, direct us always to use Your gifts to us wisely and teach us to share them generously. Send the Holy Spirit to work through us, bringing Your message to those we serve.

People: Lord, may our faithful stewardship bear witness to the love of Jesus Christ in our lives.

Leader: Lord God, we thank You for Your grace which enables us to understand that we were created for Your purpose, not ours. Change our mindset from what we want to do to what You want us to do.

People: Lord, place in us a desire to please You in all that we think, say, and do.

Leader: Lord God, You direct us in Your Word to give freely because we have received freely. By Your grace, make us channels through which Your blessings can flow.

People: Help us to be **Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts.**

Lay reader talk (week 1)

Stewards Led by the Holy Spirit

This is our first week of our stewardship emphasis, **Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts**. Because we are uplifted and sustained by the Holy Spirit, we can be faithful stewards. Without the Holy Spirit, we could not acknowledge Jesus as the Lord of our lives or live our lives as God-pleasing stewards. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit"* (1 Corinthians 12:3). By grace, then, as called and equipped believers, empowered by the Holy Spirit to be stewards, we can willingly serve as Sunday school teachers, sing in the choir, serve as ushers, give generously, and spend time with the lonely and sick. By our own reason or strength, we can't be the stewards God wants us to be. In Christ, we are new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). We may look the same on the outside, but inside we are different. The Holy Spirit continually reminds us that God initiates all things. Our stewardship is a response to what God has already done for us in Jesus.

As faithful stewards, we are guided by the Holy Spirit. Our faithful stewardship begins when the Holy Spirit indwells us, and we respond with a personal commitment to consecrate ourselves to Christ. In Christ, we can become faithful stewards. Our stewardship goes beyond adherence to laws and traditions. We delight in serving our Lord. We do not see our stewardship as being compulsory; rather we see it as a privilege. Because the Holy Spirit transforms us, we respond in a spontaneous manner. We do not have to be coerced into giving our time, talents, and treasures. We give our gifts and ourselves cheerfully. As God's stewards, our eyes are opened to see opportunities to serve. We no longer see what we have as belonging to us but as tools to be used to help those in need and to extend God's kingdom. As we spend time in God's Word and receive the Sacrament, He fills our hearts with His Spirit, and we stop putting ourselves first. God is now in control, and we become **Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts**.

Children's Message (week 1)

Good morning boys and girls! I am so happy that you are here today!

Today we are going to talk about being a steward. The word steward is not a word that we talk about much, but it is important to understand. You and I are stewards. A steward is someone who takes care of someone else's property.

Let me give you an example: Has your mom and dad ever taken care of someone else's dog for a few days? What responsibilities do your parents and you have for the dog ?

(wait for answers)

- Feeding the dog
- Walking the dog
- Bathing the dog
- Loving the dog
- Playing with the dog

When the dog's owner came back, what happened to the dog? Did you keep it? No? Why not? When the owner returned and wanted that dog back, even though you may have loved the dog, you must give the dog back. Right! It wasn't your dog! You were just taking care of it! You were being a steward!

It's the same way with things God gives us. We are only stewards of those things because they are really God's property. For example, we are to be good stewards of our bodies that God gives us. We are to be good stewards of our possessions—our toys, books, video games—all those things. We are to be good stewards of the time that God gives us. The list can go on and on.

We are God's stewards, and, as His stewards, our goal is to please God.

Let's pray. Dear Jesus, thank You for loving me. Thank You for making me Your steward. Help me to want to please You. In Jesus name. Amen.

SERMON for First Week:

“Good Stewards of God’s Varied Grace”

Text: 1 Peter 4:1-11

Grace, mercy, and peace be to all of you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and may His Spirit fill your heart and your mind in the hearing of His Word.

Today is the first week on the theme **Faithful Stewards of God’s Gifts**. Our text is taken from 1 Peter 4:1-11, in particular verse 10 which reads: *“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”* I hope and pray that the message today titled “Good Stewards of God’s Varied Grace” as well as those messages you’ll hear over the next two weeks will help us become people who live as **Faithful Stewards of God’s Gifts**.

Unfortunately, some people feel uncomfortable during stewardship sermons. Many Christians have misconceptions and misunderstandings and have been misdirected about what stewardship is, so they often react negatively when it’s talked about. One of the major misconceptions is that we associate stewardship only with encouraging people to give more money in support of the church. As I speak to you today, it is my hope and prayer that I can help you disconnect stewardship from the idea that it is only about “paying the bills.” At the heart of stewardship is a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus. I am convinced that there is little in life that can help us grow in our relationship with Jesus more than good, solid, intentional Biblical stewardship. The goal of the stewardship ministry in our church is to help us grow in our relationship with Jesus through the use of the time, talents, and treasures that God has entrusted to us.

If we as God’s people are going to understand stewardship, we need to have an understanding of what God’s Word is telling us about our role as God’s stewards.

First of all, God has called and chosen us to be His stewards. We have been given this privileged status of being a steward purely by God’s grace. A steward is a person who manages the assets of the owner according to the owner’s will and purpose. God has placed us in the role and has given us our identity as His stewards. It is first being a steward before it is doing stewardship. Who we are determines what we do. Everything we do, everything we say, and everywhere we go emanates from our sense of identity. Understanding who we are and our identity as God’s stewards, we seek to please Him by faithfully doing His will.

As stewards, we oversee or manage everything that the Lord has given us, which is everything that we are and have. Then we are to see to it that our gifts are used in the most useful and efficient manner possible according to God’s will to help build His kingdom. Stewardship, then, is service to God from the perspective of being a manager or steward of what He has given us. The stewardship department of the LCMS defines stewardship as follows: “Christian stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and the church in managing all of life and life’s resources for God’s purpose.” It’s the response of our entire lives to Christ out of gratitude for His amazing love for us that meant death on the cross. It is giving of everything we are and everything we have to Him, as He directs. It’s total commitment. It’s the fruitage of our lives. It’s faith in action.

We can see from that LCMS definition that what we give to the church monetarily speaking is only a small portion of the overall stewardship picture. Stewardship is living out the Christian life. It is a response to God's gracious act of sending Jesus to suffer and die that we might have life in His name. Through faith, we understand that it is the Gospel that motivates and empowers us to be Christian stewards. The Law instructs and informs the Christian steward.

The biggest challenge that we face in being God's stewards is that by nature we don't want to be stewards. Our natural desire is to be owners. We want to possess things. This attitude to be owners and wanting to possess things works against our calling to be God's stewards. We have an inborn tendency to be self-centered, selfish people. In our sinful state, we seek our own interests, and we are ultimately concerned about ourselves. Without God's help, we think little about the interest or needs of others.

Martin Luther defined sin as man turning in on himself. He described sin this way, "It enjoys itself and uses everyone else, even God; it seeks itself and its own interests in everything; it brings it about that man is finally and ultimately concerned only for himself. This is the idolatry that determines all he does, feels, undertakes, thinks, and speaks. Good is only what is good for him and bad only what is bad for him."

Selfishness is seen in how we use our time.

It is often said that time is more precious than money. Because of the busyness of our age few of us think we have much if any discretionary time. How easy we forget that it is God Who gives us our time. He wants us to bear one another's burdens and to use every opportunity to *"do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith"* (Galatians 6:10). We all have our given duties at work and home but we are to go beyond our duties and bear each other's burdens.

Another area of selfishness involves money.

Studies show that the Christian households give approximately 2.5 percent of their incomes to religious causes. If we as God's people truly believed that all that we have has been entrusted to us by God, we would be eager to give more to help those in need and to extend God's kingdom. Every dollar that we receive is a gift from God. We are to be faithful stewards of our money and not consume it only on ourselves. God shows us opportunities to help people who are less fortunate.

Another area of selfishness involves inconsiderateness.

An inconsiderate person does not think about the impact of his or her actions on others. The person who is always late and keeps others waiting is inconsiderate. The person who talks loudly on his or her cell phone to the disturbance of others nearby is selfishly inconsiderate. When we don't think about the impact of our actions on others, we are being selfishly inconsiderate.

William Gladstone, who many years ago, served as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom wrote, "Selfishness is the greatest curse of the human race." Selfishness in its many forms has been around since sin entered the world and we are no strangers to it. It is this sin, with all the others, that we lay at the foot of the cross and receive the forgiveness won for us there. Our lives as children of God are marked by repentance and forgiveness and the desire to live as God would

have us live. God's Word encourages us away from self-centeredness and toward generosity. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God Who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share"* (1 Timothy 6:17-18).

As God's children and as His stewards, we are accountable for all that He entrusts to us. How do you answer the following questions?

1. Do we have a right to use our time as we see fit? The right answer is "No."
2. Do we have a right to use our money as we determine? The right answer is "No."
3. Do we have a right to use our bodies as we please? The right answer is "No."
4. Do we have a right to use our intelligence only to gain fame and comfort for ourselves? The right answer is "No."

In spite of our sinful and selfish ways, God has chosen us to be His stewards. By His grace, God transforms us into stewards who seek to follow His ways rather than our own. With changed hearts, we embrace His love and plan for our lives. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, we surrender our desires and plans to follow and serve Him. God empowers us to put aside our need to be owners who are in control as we become faithful stewards who seek to do His will.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can be **Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts**. May God help us all be the stewards that He wants us to be. Amen.

SERVANT'S HEART

1 PETER 1:22



Faithful Stewards
of God's Gifts

Week Two:

“As We Have
Opportunity,
Let Us Do
Good to
Everyone”
(Galatians 6:10).

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

TO SERVE IS TO BECOME CHRIST-LIKE, BECAUSE SERVANTHOOD WAS THE ESSENCE OF CHRIST'S EARTHLY MISSION.

"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

**Jesus Taught
us how to
Serve Others**

thejourneyofgracefiction.blogspot.com 2019

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

Our focus for this week is "As we Have Opportunity, Let Us Do Good to Everyone." The Apostle Paul wrote the following to the believers in Ephesus. *"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). With changed hearts, we are enabled to render help and service to others. We are the instruments through which God works. Through our hands and feet, He brings love and care to the needy; through our lips, He tells others of His life-saving Gospel; and through our minds, hearts, and checkbooks, He supports the work of the Church. As God enables us, we can give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord. *"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain"* (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

AS NEW PEOPLE IN CHRIST, WE FOREGO SELFISH INTERESTS TO LIVE LIVES OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE.

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10).

God's
Love
Never
Fails



Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

This is our second week of our stewardship emphasis, **Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts**. This week's theme is "As we Have Opportunity, Let Us Do Good to Everyone." In His three years of ministry on earth, Jesus lived a life of service to others. He is the ultimate example of humility. He washed His disciples' feet. He modeled servanthood. He humbled Himself, even onto the death on the cross. In the same way, we are to live a life of service. Robert Kolb, in his book *The Christian Faith*, wrote, "Christ bestows peace upon us by putting us to death as sinners and raising us up to newness of life... We can relax in His presence, and we can turn our focus to the lives of our neighbors, where He wants us to focus, so that we can carry His love and care to them. Thus, our trust in his love inevitably produces deeds of love for others."



Worship Helps (week 2)

Hymns:

Opening hymn: "Let us Ever Walk with Jesus" 685
Sermon hymn: "Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us" 851
Closing hymn: "May we Thy Precepts, Lord, Fulfill" 698

Readings:

Old Testament: Psalm 119:33-40
Epistle: Galatians 6:6-10
Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

Stewardship Litany:

Leader: Lord God, we praise You for creating the world and everything in it.
People: Father, we know every animal in the forest is Yours and the cattle on a thousand hills. You have called us to be stewards of Your creation. At birth, we became stewards and, in our Baptism, we become Christian stewards.

Leader: Lord God, we thank You that You've made us stewards without any merit or worthiness in us.
People: Father, as Your stewards, we understand that we have a wonderful privilege and an awesome responsibility to manage all that You entrust to us with joy and generosity. Equip and motivate us to be **Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts**.

Leader: Lord, just as Jesus came not to be served but to serve, help us to be servants to others. Give us courage and strength to bring the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ to those living without Him.
People: Lord God, enable us to respond to Your love and to serve You where You have called us.

Leader: Help us, Lord, to be faithful instruments through which You work. Through our hands and feet, You bring love and care to the needy; through our lips, You tell others of Your life-saving Gospel; and through our minds, hearts, and checkbooks, You support the work of Your Church.
People: Help us to be **Faithful Stewards of God's gifts**.

A Life of Servanthood

This is our second week of our stewardship emphasis, **Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts**. Jesus said that He came "*not to be served but to serve*" (Matthew 20:28). 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, the ultimate act of service being His 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. Richard Foster wrote, "Nothing disciplines the inordinate desires of the flesh like service, and nothing transforms the desires of the flesh like serving in hiddenness. The flesh whines against service but screams against hidden service. It strains and pulls for honor and recognition." 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, first of all, 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. As we become servants who seek to serve the Lord through others, we are conforming to God's ways and not the world's. Serving others in Christ's name captures what it means to be **Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts**.

Children's Message (week 2)

Hello boys and girls. It is great to see you today.

Today we are going to talk about serving. The Bible is full of people serving other people. How many here know the story of the Good Samaritan? Raise your hand. Who would like to tell me the story? (Fill in portions of the story that were omitted by the respondent.)

After Jesus told this story, He said, "Go and do likewise." Do you know what Jesus is asking us to do? "Likewise" means "the same way." Jesus wants us to act toward others the same way the Good Samaritan acted toward the man who was robbed and beaten, Jesus is telling us that we should have compassion toward others.

Not very often will we be walking down a road and find someone beaten and robbed, so how can we act like a Good Samaritan? (Listen and validate responses.)

Jesus is asking us to be servants for others. This is how we show love to Jesus. Jesus loves all people and came to serve them. When He returned to Heaven, He asked us to continue the work of serving He did when He was on earth. He wants us to serve others even if we don't like them! He wants us to serve others if they don't thank us. He wants us to serve others even if we need to do things we don't like to do. We can't do that by ourselves, so we must ask Jesus for His help.

Let's pray: Dear Jesus, we thank You for telling us about the Good Samaritan. Help us to be Good Samaritans to others. May the love that You give to us make us want to help others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

SERMON for Second Week:

“As We Have Opportunity, Let Us Do Good to Everyone”

Text: Galatians 6:6-10

Grace, mercy, and peace be to all of you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and may His Spirit fill your heart and your mind in the hearing of His Word.

This is the second week of our stewardship emphasis **Faithful Stewards of God’s Gifts**. The theme today is “As We Have Opportunity, Let Us Do Good to Everyone.” The theme is taken from the Apostle Paul’s words to the church in Galatia when he wrote, *“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So, then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”* This is our text for today.

A number of years back, a young and very successful executive was travelling down a suburban street in his brand-new black jaguar. Suddenly a brick was thrown from the sidewalk, thumping into the side of the car.

Brakes slammed! Gears ground into reverse, and tires madly spun the Jaguar back to the spot from where the brick had been thrown. The driver jumped out, grabbed the kid who had thrown the brick and pushed him up against a parked car. “What was that all about?!” he screamed. “That’s my new Jag, that brick you threw is gonna cost you a lot of money!”

“Please, mister, please...I’m sorry! I didn’t know what else to do!” pleaded the youngster. “I threw the brick because no one else would stop!” Tears were dripping down the boy’s chin as he pointed around the parked car. “It’s my brother, mister,” he said. “He rolled off the curb and fell out of his wheelchair and I can’t lift him up.” Sobbing, the boy asked the executive, “Would you please help me get him back into his wheelchair? He’s hurt and he’s too heavy for me.”

The mood was transformed in a moment as the young executive realized what had occurred. He lifted the young man into the wheelchair and took out his handkerchief and wiped the scrapes and cuts. He then watched as the younger brother pushed him down the sidewalk toward their home. The young exec never did fix the dented side door of his Jaguar. He kept the dent to remind him not to go through life so fast that someone has to throw a brick at him to get his attention.

Today our attention is focused on serving. God created us to serve. We should not need a brick thrown at us to get our attention to remind of our need to be serving people. God has placed in our hearts that our purpose is bigger than just living for ourselves. The Christian faith isn't meant to sit unused. We need to take it out and use it for the good of others if it's going to remain healthy and vibrant and strong. And so, we see in Galatians that God encourages His disciples to carry the burdens of others. By God’s grace, we can do good to everyone, especially believers.

So, here's what I want to do today. First, I want us to consider three Biblical principles that go to the heart of why we serve. And then we'll close by considering a couple practical thoughts about how we serve.

1. Biblical principle one: Jesus calls us to follow Him into a life of serving others.

In the Gospel of John, we read, *“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him...”* (John 13:3-5).

This passage really goes to the heart of what Biblical serving is about. Jesus knows that God the Father has given him all authority in heaven and earth. Jesus' response is to take His robe off, wrap Himself in a towel, and begin washing His disciples' feet. That was the lowest of jobs, the job that no one else wanted to do. Power usually has the opposite effect on us. We get a little power, and it goes to our heads. We want other people to serve us. But to Jesus, power and serving went together - the higher He was exalted, the lower He stooped to serve others. Jesus didn't come to be served, He came to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. Jesus lowered Himself even to the cross and a criminal's death to save us from our sin and that we might be reconciled with God.

And then He calls His disciples and He calls us to follow in His footsteps. We read in verses 12 and following: *“When He had washed their feet and put on His outer garments and resumed His place, He said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. (vv. 12-15).*

The Lord calls us to lay down our pride and take up the towel and serve others. This goes to the heart and motive as to why we serve. Some people come into a church and right away want to serve, but they don't have a heart for people; they have a heart for position. Jesus calls us not only to imitate his actions here, He calls us to imitate His heart. Biblical serving isn't about promoting ourselves; it's about promoting love and the good of others. Jesus calls us to follow Him into a life of serving others.

2. Biblical principle two: Serving others is God's path to a great life.

This may surprise you, but God wants you to have a great life. He does. He defines what a great life is. How would you define a great life? Is it when you have everything you want? Is it when you are able to do whatever you want? Is it a life where everything comes easy and there's little hardship? Is it a great life when you have a lot of money, or when you do something that causes your name to be remembered for posterity?

There is something inside of us - it's called sin - that wants to bend everything in on ourselves. Sin's concept of a great life is, invariably, in one way or another, a life bent in on ourselves. A life lived for self rather than God and others.

Jesus said, *“whoever would be great among you must be your servant”* (Matthew 20:26). God's path to a great life is a life lived in service of others. And by the way, when Jesus says the path to being great is serving others, I don't think he means that, if we serve others, one day we'll be remembered as being great. It's thinking, "I'll serve people now, but I can't wait until everyone

says what a great guy I was. I hope it's soon." Many people serve quietly and in obscurity and no one ever knows their names or how they served and the world never considers them great. So, what does Jesus mean that the servant will be great?

He must mean that when we go to heaven we'll be applauded as great. I'm not so sure that's what Jesus means either. Yes, the greatest commendation we can ever have will be hearing Jesus say to us, *"Well done, good and faithful servant."* But I think that's about all we'll hear. I don't think Jesus is going to be saying, "Hold it everybody! Could you quiet down for a minute? I appreciate that you want to worship Me, but ___ (Place name) ___ is coming before my throne and I just want to take this moment to point out what a great guy he is. Let's give a round of applause for ___ (Place name) ___ as he comes up to the throne." I don't think it's going to be like that. So, what is greatness? What is a great life?

I think it's a life is being used for what God created us to be used for. You've got a song in you that God put in you. You've got a melody that is uniquely yours to play. There are ways that you are shaped and gifted, and grace that Christ has given you, to serve His kingdom and purposes.

See, this understanding of a great life takes that inward curve of sin and bends it outward. Its pay-off isn't that we're applauded and exalted. The pay-off is the joy of being useful to our Master and serving others. The pay-off, the reward, is that our eyes are taken off ourselves and we experience the joy and fulfillment of being used by God to help and serve others.

This path frees us from the bondage of our inward focus of sin whether our tendency is to think we are God's gift to the world or to think that we have nothing to offer so why bother? This path frees us from prideful self-promotion and prideful self-pity to play the song God created us to play. And that, I think, is God's definition of a great life - doing what He has called us and shaped us to do. Serving others is God's path to a great life.

3. The third Biblical principle is that God does amazing things in the church when every part does its part.

When we combine our songs, our melodies, with others in the church, a symphony of grace is produced. Health and growth, truth-speaking in love, maturing, Christ is formed in us. Not from any one or two people, but by the symphony of a church playing together as each part is playing its part. That's the beauty of God's plan.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 3, it says that God causes the growth in the church, but here in verse 16 it says that it's every part doing its part that causes the growth. God causes the growth but He uses us to do it. Growth that can't be measured by the size of a building or budget - not that there's anything wrong with large buildings or large budgets. But that's not the growth that God emphasizes. That growth is measured by people touched and transformed by the power of God's grace. Saved by the power of Christ's blood shed for them. Lives and marriages and children who are growing in the knowledge and the grace of the Lord Jesus. Lonely people who find love, hurting people who find healing, hardened hearts that are melted by grace, and broken lives that are put back together by mercy. A church body that, rather than tearing itself down in division, is building itself up in love. What a glorious vision God's word gives us for the church!

So, a part of our vision as a church is to help people move from attenders to contributors, from served to serving. Again, not out of desperate need for volunteers but because it's a necessary part of all of us maturing. So... let's look at three quick practical thoughts about how we do that.

- **First, ask God to give you His heart to serve.**

We need Jesus to give us His heart to serve. We all suffer from an inward focus, and we need the power of the Spirit to break that inward curve and bend us outward in a life of serving others. To be "*good and faithful servants*" we need God's help and power. So, ask God to give you His heart to serve.

- **Second, figure out what you love and are good at.**

God made you in a particular way to serve Him in a particular way and probably it's not going to be doing something you hate and are bad at. Now, there's a time and place to serve in the church in whatever way is needed. But when someone plugs into what they love and are good at, they're going to serve so much more effectively in that area. And they will be far less likely to burn out.

- **Third, get involved!**

There is a tremendous barrier that we break when we just get involved, so we want to make it as easy as possible for people to get involved in our ministry. I encourage everyone with a desire to serve to contact me or any people on our staff on ways that you can get involved. We want to make it as easy and pressure free for you to figure out how and where God might be leading you to serve within the church.

Maybe the Lord has put something on your heart that isn't currently going on in the church. And all ministry doesn't need to be - and shouldn't be - centered on the local church either. There is a whole world in need of ministering to! Many initiatives in churches start when God places a need in a person's heart for a ministry and that person starts the ministry. These things wouldn't have happened if these people hadn't stepped forward with a burden on their hearts. But as we seek to serve the Lord and others, ministry should and will flow.

In closing, it is my prayer that we don't need a brick thrown at us or our car to encourage us to live lives of service. Just as Jesus came not to be served but to serve, so are we to be serving people.

Let's pray. Thank You, Lord, for Your grace that makes our service possible. Help us to see the opportunities for service that You continue to show us and then help us to serve. Amen.

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

Week Three:

“Generous and Ready
to Share”

(1 Timothy 6:18).



Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

The focus for the third week of our stewardship emphasis is “Generous and Ready to Share.” Love is what motivated God to give, and, because of His love, He didn’t give leftovers; He gave His best. He gave us what we needed — His own Son. *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). Through faith, we begin to understand God’s tremendous love for us, and we are compelled to share with others the love of God that fills our hearts. The more fully we understand how richly God has blessed us, the deeper will be our love and gratitude to Him and the greater will be our desire to respond in generous giving of all that we have to offer — not just our monetary gifts but our time, efforts, and abilities as well.

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

Giving Is the Language of Love

“Giving is the language of love; it is godly language, for God is love. Filled with the fullness of a giving God, we become givers ourselves. We give love, give thanks, give praise, give heed, give attention, give care, give time, give attention, give care, give time, give effort, give talents, give treasures, and even give forgiveness to others as He has given forgiveness to all. Thus, we give proof that God has taken up His residence within us.” (Carl Berner, *The Power of Pure Stewardship*)

GIVING IS A LIFESTYLE, NOT AN ACTIVITY, AND IT EMANATES FROM THE VERY CHARACTER OF GOD, THE PERFECT AND ETERNAL GIVER.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).



MAY WE BE WISE AND GENEROUS WITH WHATEVER THE AMOUNT OF MONEY GOD ENTRUSTS TO US.

“Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense. (Proverbs 12:11).



The Joy of Unselfish Giving

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

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over... (Luke 6:38).

(Helen Steiner Rice)



Worship Helps (week 3)

Hymns:

Opening hymn: "We Praise You, O God" 785
Sermon hymn: "The Temple Rang with Golden Coins" 787
Closing hymn: "What Is the World to Me" 730

Readings:

Old Testament: Malachi 3:6-15
Epistle: 2 Corinthians 9:1-7
Gospel: Luke 19:1-10

Stewardship Litany:

Leader: Heavenly Father, in the beginning You created heaven and earth, and You saw that it was good.

People: Lord, thank You for the privilege of being stewards of all Your creation. Help us to act as managers and not owners. Open our eyes and minds to see that You own all things, control all things, and sustain all things.

Leader: Dear God, by Your grace, You transform our stewardship from specific acts into a lifestyle of stewardship. With new hearts, we are eager to do good works that please and honor You.

People: Lord, grant us wisdom, strength, and conviction to live each day faithfully as stewards of Your blessings.

Leader: Lord God, in our lifestyle of stewardship, we commit our lives, gifts, and resources to serving You and fulfilling Your will for our lives.

People: Lord, help us to use all that we are and have in ways that give You honor and glory.

Leader: Dear Lord, as Your Holy Spirit works in us through Word and Sacraments, You teach us to become givers rather than takers. You change us into people who understand stewardship to be a joy rather than a duty.

People: Help us to be **Faithful Stewards of God's gifts.**

God Blesses Faithful Givers

This is our third and final week in our stewardship emphasis, **Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts**. Our focus today is: "Generous and Ready to Share." A missionary was sitting in a small corner restaurant reading a letter delivered from home. As she opened the letter, a crisp, new twenty-dollar bill caught her attention. Needless to say, she was pleasantly surprised, but, as she read the letter, her eyes were distracted by the movement of a raggedly dressed man on the sidewalk leaning against a light post in front of the building. She couldn't get his peculiar condition and stature off her mind. Thinking that he might have greater financial need than she, she slipped the bill into an envelope on which she quickly penned "persevere." Leaving the restaurant, she nonchalantly dropped the envelope at the stranger's feet.

Turning slowly, he picked it up, read it, watched the woman walk away, and smiled as he tipped his hat and went his way.

The next day walking down the street, she felt a tap on her shoulder. She found the same shabbily dressed man smiling as he handed her five twenty-dollar bills. When she asked what they were for, he replied: "That's the money you won, lady. Persevere paid five to one."

There is a serious moral to this humorous story: It is impossible to give unselfishly of ourselves without being blessed in return. In Proverbs 3:10, we are told that, when we give God our first and best, *"our barns will be filled with plenty."* Proverbs 22:9 tells us, *"A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor."* Jesus tells us that as we give it will be given back to us (Luke 6:38). God promises us through His Word that He will bless those who give faithfully. The blessings that we can be certain of are spiritual blessings and, for some, financial blessings as well. Giving is a blessing for both the giver and the recipient. The recipients of our gifts are blessed in receiving our gifts, and we are blessed in giving them. May God help us all to be **Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts**.

Children's Message (week 3)

Hello boys and girls

Today we are going to talk about the theme for this week which is "Generous and Ready to Share."

Hold up an offering plate or offering basket with two pennies in it (let them see what is in it). What is it this that I am holding up? What do I have in the offering plate?

You may wonder why I put only two pennies in here. That's not very much money is it? Do you think God cares about only two pennies? Yes, He does. Let me tell you how I know. (Tell the story of the Poor Widow's Mite (Luke 21:1-4). Let me tell you why this is an important story for us

All of you here are still quite young. You may be like the poor widow. Probably you don't have a lot of money to put in the offering plate. How should you give then? Sometimes each of us gives the same amount. Maybe we want to give our teacher a gift, so a dollar is collected from each student for the gift. Sometimes each of us is asked to bring one canned good for the food bank. We give equal amounts.

Sometimes we give what someone expects us to give. Your mom may expect you to pick up your toys, but she may expect your big brother, because he's older and stronger, to sweep out the whole garage.

All of us, though, can give out of love, just like the widow did. The widow didn't give an amount equal to what others gave, because she didn't have as much as others. She didn't give what was expected of her either. No, she gave much more than what was expected! Would God expect her to give her last coin? God doesn't ask us to do what the widow did, but He does ask us to be generous and to give out of love for Him. Money is not the only gift you can give. God is happy to accept your gifts of love when you help someone else, when you're kind to someone, when you make a card for someone who's sick, or whatever you find to do. You have lots to give!

Let's pray together. Dear heavenly Father, thank You for all You've given me, especially Your Son Jesus. Help me to want to give generously and to help others whenever I can. Help me to love others just like You love me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

My 2020 Commitment for the Lord

"Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts"

Peter wrote, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:10). Peter is telling us that God gives each of us different gifts to be used in service to others. Our gifts are not our personal possessions but are meant to be used according to God's will. Filled with the joy of Jesus, we share His gifts to us with others.

My/our giving per week in 2020 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 2020 Commitment for the Lord

"Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts"

My (our) weekly offering will be \$ _____, totaling \$ _____ annually.

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

**Please detach and
keep for your records**



SERMON for Third Week:
“Not as an Exaction”
Text: 2 Corinthians 9:1-7

Grace, mercy, and peace be to all of you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and may His Spirit fill your heart and your mind in the hearing of His Word.

This is our third and final week of our stewardship emphasis **Faithful Stewards of God’s Gifts**. Today we will focus on our joy and responsibility as God’s stewards to give generously to those in need and to extend God’s kingdom.

Judged by contemporary standards, the Apostle Paul employed some strange fund-raising methods. In our text for today, Paul was busy encouraging the folks in Corinth to make an offering, to be diligent in stewardship, to do their best to give to the distressed saints in Jerusalem, but, curiously, he never said anything about the nature of their suffering. Isn’t it strange that, in seeking an offering for suffering people, Paul mentioned so little about actual conditions of poverty in Jerusalem? What sorts of deprivation were they experiencing? Exactly how great was their need? He missed a chance to highlight something that could have increased the response of the people in Corinth, and I wonder why.

This is certainly not the way we go about raising money for charitable causes today. Paul needs some help here. If there is a disaster in the world, we see pictures on the news within hours. We depict suffering as vividly as possible. Everyone has been moved by the pictures on television of the distended bellies and ghastly living conditions of people in third-world countries. Television producers know, and so do we, that if people can see human suffering, they will become more compassionate and generous.

So if we were organizing Paul’s appeal, we would encourage him to do things differently, to describe the suffering more vividly. How else would we change Paul’s approach to make his stewardship campaign more effective? Perhaps we should urge Paul also to appeal to people’s sense of obligation and duty. All others are doing their share, he could say, and so should you. Paul could play on not only personal duty but institutional too: “Your name is on the role of this organization, and you should do your part.”

But when you think about it, this approach might work. This sort of appeal portrays stewardship as dues paying, doing one’s bit, being a loyal member of the local service club, and some may respond to this, but to tell you the truth, not many. I can’t get very enthusiastic myself about stewardship that presses obligation or duty, so I’d have a hard time trying to convince Paul to use this method.

If appeals to obligation aren’t the way to go, maybe we could encourage Paul to appeal to self-satisfaction. Knowing we have done something good for someone else can give us a warm inner glow. Never mind that such gifts, while commendable, are really a thinly disguised way of giving to ourselves; this is a proven way to raise money. Many people, when motivated by self-satisfaction, by giving to themselves really, become extra generous and the gift to the church might

be larger than we anticipated. But no, on second thought, this approach isn't all that good either—a warm inner glow only goes so far. So, I wouldn't advise Paul to go this way after all.

Maybe, then, I would tell Paul to appeal to people's sense of prestige. Paul could create a stewardship program for those who "care enough to send the very best." I was told about a church that had a large leather book of names of members who have pledged \$2,000 or more to their church. Because the book had many names in it, it seems that this appeal to prestige seems to work. But, upon reflection, this is not the way to go either. Pride in giving can be good, of course, but it can also be dangerous. Prestige gifts advertise the glory of the giver, but most of us do not have the resources to be the most impressive giver anyway.

So maybe Paul had it right all along. Maybe Paul was wise to ignore fund-raising methods altogether. Instead of taking the low road, Paul persevered on the high road with a theological theme he raised at the beginning. The world might make its appeals for funds on the basis of need, obligation, self-satisfaction, prestige, sympathy—in short, on everything people have done—but Paul focused his energy almost entirely on what God has done.

We can see Paul's emphasis on the work of God in the very first verse of our passage. Sometimes this verse is translated to say that Paul is writing to the Corinthians about the "offering for the saints." This makes it sound like Paul is interested in the offering plate, the Sunday collections. But Paul actually used the word *diakonia*, which means "service" or "ministry" (the root of our word "deacon") and a better translation is: "I write to you about the service for ministry for the saints." Paul was not talking about mere fund-raising; he was talking about ministry in the name of God. Paul set the service to the poor within the context of service to God. It is a reality the church must always keep foremost in our prayers and actions, otherwise our congregation could degenerate into little more than another fund-raising organization.

I read about a young girl who was busily engaged in selling some trinkets to raise money for an organization. When she was asked, "What is the purpose of your organization?" She looked blankly at the person for a moment. "Purpose?" Then, looking at the bag of goods she had grasped in her hand, she brightened up and said, "You make money and then spend it."

The church could be in danger of becoming such an organization should the perennial temptations to find better fund-raising techniques ever overtake our calling to be faithful hearers and doers of God's Word. Fund-raising has its place within our community. Money is needed to do good all over our world, and it must be raised or good will not be done. But our purpose is not to raise money and spend it. Our purpose is service, ministry in God's name. At the core of things, we are gathered together as a community of God's people to preach Christ and minister in His name. Paul called the offering a "ministry," for that is the only way in which he ever would have involved himself with it.

Later in the same passage, Paul said he hoped the gift the Corinthians had promised would come "not as exaction but as a willing gift." Recently one of our Bible study groups was studying this passage, and they agreed that the word "exaction" was a good one. It sounds enough like the dentist's term "extraction" to make Paul's point even clearer. Paul wanted no part of an offering that was coerced out of people, an offering that required a good shot of novocaine so that people

wouldn't holler quite as much as it was yanked out of them. His interest was in a willing gift, one given in response to the gifts of God and to the need of others.

So instead of trying to get Paul to adjust his methods of stewardship, perhaps we should pay attention to the ways Paul went about motivating the Corinthians to respond to God's gift of grace with their own ministering gifts.

First, Paul's appeal was tactful. While saying "There is really no need for me to write," he wrote anyway, just as pastors often say, "You'll remember the story about..." and then tell it anyway since it is good to be reminded even of the things that are familiar. Response to God's grace is a constant need of God's people, and we need reminding.

His appeal was also positive. "I know that you are willing to help. I boast about you to the people of Macedonia." Paul was confident in the strength that God could give to the Corinthians, just as I am confident of the strength that God is ready to give us. Our church is engaged in countless acts of wonderful ministry, and I boast to my colleagues in the ministry about this church all the time. It is a foundation upon which we can build, and God is ready to give the energy supplied in our response.

Moreover, Paul's appeal was honest. What Paul said about the Macedonians and the Corinthians was true. Knowing of the strengths of the other, each could be stimulated to renewed strength of purpose. The Macedonians were prepared to give in spite of their poverty. The Corinthians expressed their willingness to take part in the offering before anyone else. These were strengths worth building on. This approach was so typical of Paul. He would not lift up weakness in order to criticize one church to another; he lifted up strengths in order to praise one church to another. It's not a bad idea to try as we look around our own church for the many strengths that can serve as an inspiration to others as well as to ourselves.

Finally, Paul's appeal was direct. Paul spoke to the heart of the matter, to people's basic commitment to Jesus Christ. He wasn't just preaching; he was "meddling," speaking to the core of our values.

In many churches, stewardship programming follows this pattern:

- The committee is organized and meets regularly;
- Assignments are made and carried out;
- Budgets are developed;
- The ministry of the church is interpreted;
- Sermons on stewardship are preached;
- Challenges are extended.

This looks like a complete stewardship program, but one crucial element is missing. In some fashion, we must be confronted with an inescapable decision about personal commitment. As someone notes, "to inform and nurture the people of God without confronting them with the cost of discipleship is to show ourselves as poor stewards." This is no less the case in stewardship than it is in our decision to follow Jesus. At some point, someone has said to us, "Who is your Lord and Savior?"

Paul's appeal called for faithful gifts, heartfelt gifts, not guilt-driven gifts. God accepts our gifts not as an exaction—or an extraction! —on the basis of what we have to give, not on what we don't have. That is how it must be with our pledge commitment. The only really driving force comes from within, inasmuch as the love of Christ claims and directs us.

This day, and in the days to come, we are a called people, called to respond to the gracious love of Christ with hearts, minds, hands, and yes, even checkbooks open to the leading of His Lordship. Let us give thanks and praise to God for His inexpressible gift.

“Not as an Exaction” reproduced by permission from *Speaking of Stewardship: Model Sermons on Money and Possessions*, edited by William G. Carter. To purchase from the PC(USA) store, visit www.pcusastore.com at call (800) 533-4371.

Bible Study 1:

“Good Stewards of God’s Varied Grace” (1 Peter 4:10).

Prayer

Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, we thank You for choosing us as Your stewards. Enable us to be faithful in our calling as stewards. Teach us to follow Your guidance and direction. Help us to acknowledge that You are the source and owner of all things. Forgive us when we fail to use and manage our gifts and blessings responsibly. Bless this study that we are about to begin. In Jesus’ name. Amen.



What Is a Steward?

Christian stewards are first of all children of God. We become stewards at birth and Christian stewards in Holy Baptism. Through faith, we understand that all we are and have are gifts of God’s grace without any merit or worthiness in ourselves. As redeemed children of God, we as Christian stewards realize our role in life as partners, trustees, managers, caretakers or temporary custodians of gifts that belong to God. Good and faithful stewards manage the assets of the owner according to the owner’s will and purpose. The understanding that all things belong to God is the cornerstone of our lives as stewards. God has given us authority over all He created (Genesis 1:28; 2:15). As God’s stewards, we joyfully receive what God has created, and we faithfully and responsibly manage His marvelous creation. To be God’s stewards is both a privilege and a responsibility as we seek to manage all that God entrusts to us for His glory. Christian stewards want to worship and serve God with all the talents, abilities, and gifts that God entrusts to them.



God's Creation

As God’s stewards, we must never think that the possessions that we manage for Him are our own. We cannot allow ourselves to consider that we are somehow deserving of all that we oversee or make ourselves the rightful owners. Only when we are completely detached from all that we manage for God can we determine how we can be most productive with what He has entrusted to us.

1. What does it mean to be a steward? God’s steward?
2. What do the following verses have to say about God’s ownership?
 - Genesis 1:27-31
 - Deuteronomy 8:11-18
 - Psalm 24:1-3
3. Read Mark 10:17-22. What kind of steward was the Rich Young Man?

Transformed to Be God's Stewards

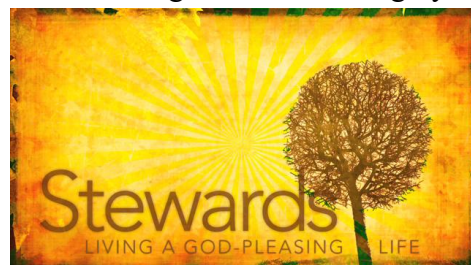
Do we really want to be stewards? No! By nature, we are independent, self-centered people. Our first impulse is that we want to be the owners. We want to have possession of things. We want to be important, to be respected, and even to be envied. We want to be in charge! We are not born stewards. However, by His grace, God transforms us into stewards who seek to follow His ways rather than our own. With changed hearts, we embrace His love and plan for our lives. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, we surrender our desires and plans to follow and serve Him. God empowers us to put aside our need to be owners who are in control as we become His faithful stewards who seek to do His will. The love of Christ controls us. Transformed, we worship the Lord and live lives of faith, love, and obedience rather than living for ourselves.

As the Holy Spirit works in us through Word and Sacrament, transforming us into the image of Christ, we, in turn, will express more of His character. When we believe that God is present in our lives and trust in His grace, we will, through faith, apply God's teachings to our lives. Faith gives us access to God's endless source of power, and faith produces the works of love that we do in Christ's name.

Being a faithful steward is faith and love in action. As Dr. Stephen F. Olford, founder of Union University, said,

Christ alone owns our eyes to view His world. He alone owns our hands to serve His will. He alone owns our feet to walk His way. He alone owns our minds to think His thoughts. He alone owns our hearts to love Him fervently. He alone owns our personalities to radiate His charm and glory. Failure to recognize this is a refusal to recognize His sovereignty.

4. How does God change you into a faithful steward whose purpose is to do God's will? (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:17-19).
5. With all the advertising and self-promotional literature in our society, how can you remind yourself that you are God's steward?



Our Identity as God's Stewards

Do you see yourself as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Unfortunately, many first identify themselves by their vocations, by their positions in their families and communities, even by their ethnicity. Too often, being a Christian is far down the list. As we read and study God's Word, His Spirit enlightens our minds so that we can begin to understand and embrace our identity and role as His children and thus, His stewards. From the beginning, God placed us over His creation (Genesis 1:28). Being stewards with dominion over what He created gives us our identity. We become God's stewards. What we do as stewards flows from who we are. We understand our purpose, and we accept our limitations. Realizing our position and purpose in life gives us balance and perspective. We live as grateful people who have a deep sense that all of life is a gift. As renewed and redeemed people, we turn the management of our lives over to Jesus. As stewards, we willingly ask the question: "What is God's way?"

God's people acknowledge and accept God's absolute authority. "*You shall have no other gods before Me*" (Exodus 20:3). Professor Robert Kolb writes in his book, *The Christian Faith*,

What we do as Christians is always secondary to, and a result of, who we are as children of God. Our actions flow from our attitude, an attitude of trust in Jesus Christ. To try to establish our ultimate identity upon what we do, rather than what God has done for us, always ends up in idolatry.

Our lives as stewards do not start or stop at certain times of the day or days of the week or month. We are not stewards merely on Sundays or other special days. As stewards for Christ, we are to be devoted to a full-time effort and commitment to serve the Lord with our lives and possessions. It involves our entire beings, our entire time, and our entire resources. It includes both attitudes and actions.

As faithful stewards, we acknowledge that:

- . . . God owns everything (Psalm 24:1).
- . . . we are to follow His will, not our own (Psalm 143:10).
- . . . we are His tools to teach and witness (Matthew 28:16-20).
- . . . we are to be obedient (John 14:15).
- . . . we are to love, serve, and give to Him and those in need (Romans 12:13).
- . . . we are accountable to God (Romans 14:12).
- . . . we are to give regularly and proportionately (1 Corinthians 16:2).
- . . . we are to give freely and cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:8).
- . . . we are to praise and glorify God (Ephesians 1:12).
- . . . He is our strength and source (Philippians 4:13).
- . . . every good and perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17).
- . . . we are to live humbly in submission to Christ (James 4:7).

6. What does 1 Peter 4:10 tell you about your responsibility as a steward?
7. How important is it for you to understand your identity in Christ in order for you to live as **Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts**?
8. Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-20. How is being a faithful steward an act of worship and devotion?
9. What is something new that you learned from this study?

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, help us to remember that all we have comes from You. Thank You for our families, friends, church, health, talents, and possessions. Thank You for Your grace that gives us the privilege of being Your stewards. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen.

Bible Study 2:

“As We Have Opportunity, Let Us Do Good to Everyone” (Galatians 6:10)

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the wonderful privilege of being Your stewards. Help us to seek to do Your will and rely on Your wisdom and strength in all that we do. Bless our study as we focus on ways that we can serve You by helping and serving others. In Jesus’ holy and precious name we pray. Amen.

Called to *Serve*

Do Not Grow Weary in Doing Good

Do you wake up in the morning thinking about whom you can help and serve each day? Who needs some special time and attention? The answer for most of is no. By ourselves, we aren’t capable of changing our focus from ourselves to others. In fact, the whole idea of service runs counter to a culture that encourages us to be served. Our society encourages us to promote ourselves and put our own needs first. We are taught that we better look out for ourselves, because no one else will. As God’s children, who live in God’s counter-cultural kingdom, we know that we are called to give our time, energy, and effort to serve others. While on earth, Jesus gave us the perfect example of a giving life full of service and compassion. Jesus spent time with the blind, lame, hungry, and spiritually destitute people. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can we be changed into people who are eager and willing to serve. God is calling us to be His hands, feet, and mouth to help those who are in need. God will lead us where He wants us to serve, and opportunities for service abound. Because of God’s calling and our devotion to Him, service becomes our way of life. Service is what emanates from a life filled with love and devotion to Christ.



The Apostle Paul wrote the following to the believers in Ephesus: *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”* (Ephesians 2:10 NIV). The instruction is clear that we are to render help and service and not sit in idleness. Our motivation to help people stems from the fact that God loved us first, and we are so overwhelmed by His love that we want share that love with others. Our actions flow from changed hearts.

A lawyer asked Jesus, *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”* Jesus replied: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This the great and first commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself”* (Matthew 22:36-39). Jesus came to earth not just to die and rise again for us, but to live the perfect life in our place, because it is impossible for us to keep these commandments. Still, by His grace, God works in us and through us to carry out His purposes on earth. The key to our reaching out to others is to rely on Him, living with an attitude that is God-centered. With God as our focus, we will want to love and serve Him by serving others. We follow Jesus and His commandments because of God’s love for us, a love we want others to receive, too. When we love one another,

others can actually see God in and through us. Jesus said: *“By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:35).

1. Read Matthew 25:31-46. How does Jesus describe being a servant?
2. Read Hebrews 11:6. What is needed for your serving to be pleasing to God?
3. Read John 3:22-30. Why is John the Baptist such a good example of a servant?
4. In what specific ways do you serve others?

Jesus Came to Serve

Matthew 20:28 reads, *“...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life for many.”* Jesus came into the world to serve and to give His life for us. He gave



Himself fully and freely on Calvary's cross. He continues to serve us in His Word and the Sacraments as He gives us life and salvation. Jesus illustrated servanthood in when He took a towel and washed His disciples' feet. Jesus speaks to all of His disciples when He said, *“Do you understand what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just I have done to you.*

Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (John 13:3-17).

The very nature of Jesus, as revealed in Scripture, is the example that should be our encouragement to serve others. Jesus didn't just talk about serving others, He did it. Acknowledging Christ for Who He is and what He has done to redeem us as sinners, we begin to understand His nature and purpose for us. As forgiven people, we have the redemptive purpose of living lives of faithful service to others in Jesus' name. Christ's love for us and our love for Him make our lives of servanthood possible. Through a loving relationship with Him, we are able to serve as Christ served.

5. Read Philippians 2:5-8. How did Jesus show His servant humility?
6. Read John 13:12-17 again. What did Jesus ask/command His disciples and all people to do? What happens to those who follow His instructions?
7. Read the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). How did the Good Samaritan use his time, talents, and money in assisting the injured person?



A Life of Service

It is easy to serve the loveable and those who can repay us. It is easy to serve others when there is some tangible reward. It is not so easy sometimes when there is no way to be repaid or when

others don't even seem grateful. But we are called to serve all people regardless. Jerry White, in his book, *Honesty, Morality, and Conscience*, writes, "Christians are to be servants of both God and people, but most of us approach business, work, and life in general with the attitude of what I can get rather than what I can give. Serving God receives a favorable response but serving people, especially those who cannot repay has no visible benefit or glory from anyone except God." Let God be the One to reward us for serving Him—for serving His people—for serving the unlikable and unlovable—the most difficult to work with. Let God be our reward.

God has made us for the purpose of doing good and serving others. In writing to the church in Galatia Paul exhorted, "*Let us not grow weary of doing good*" (Galatians 6:9). Whether we are working in the church, volunteering in our communities, or helping others, when we toil in the strength of the Lord, we are not to grow weary. "*[God] gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might He increases strength...they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they will run and not be faint...*" (Isaiah 40:29, 31).

God gives us both strength to do good and joy in our service. Solomon tells us, "*Whoever brings blessing 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." In his book *Give to Live* Dr. Douglas M. Lawson writes, "But there is one kind of experience that delivers emotional and psychic satisfaction time after time, day after day: helping other people. Volunteer efforts, charitable acts, generosity of spirit, and gestures of compassion all enrich and sustain our lives."



8. Read John 15:1-17. What is necessary in order for you to help and serve others?
9. Read James 2:14-17. What is the relationship between faith and good works?
10. According to 2 Corinthians 9:11, what is the ultimate result of your service?
11. What does 1 Peter 4:10 say about the use of your talents?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, grant us Your forgiveness when we fail to use our gifts in service for the people You put in our midst. Help us to use the gifts that You entrust to us for Your purposes. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Bible Study 3:

“Generous and Ready to Share” (1 Timothy 6:18)

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You have called us to be stewards by Your grace. You have entrusted to us so many gifts. Help us use Your gifts in accordance with Your will. Bless the study that we are about to begin. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.



More Blessed to Give

It has been said we have been given two hands so we can receive with one and give with the other. It is nice to be on the receiving end, but it is even more meaningful to be the giver. Jesus said, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (Acts 20:35). Jesus knew that our acts of giving return to us more than what we give. God wants only the best for us when He asks us to give. We should view our giving as an opportunity rather than an onerous obligation. Through our giving, God is able to make an impact in our world. He uses our generosity to help those in need, build His Kingdom, and to strengthen and enrich us as givers.

Giving is something that does not often come naturally, but God’s grace virtually compels a response to His love (2 Corinthians 5:14). The depth of God’s love within us makes us cheerful, faithful givers who desire to emulate our Savior Who gave His all. God’s grace empowers us to be fruitful with our lives and resources.



The basic urge of our secular society is to “get.” This self-centered and self-seeking attitude contrasts with the exhortation to Christians to give. The Christian’s focus is centered on God and others. The Holy Spirit changes us from self-regarding to regarding others, from getting to giving, from selfish ends to altruistic ends.

1. Read Genesis 4:1-16; Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:12. What was the difference between Cain’s and Abel’s offerings?
2. Are your offerings more like Cain’s or Abel’s? Why?
3. Read 2 Samuel 24:18-25. What did David insist on doing? For what reason?
4. God loves us and wants the best for us. Why is giving an important part of our relationship with Jesus?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-7. What part did God’s grace have in the ability of the Macedonians to give so generously? How about your giving?
6. God commanded His people in the Old Testament to tithe or give one-tenth of their incomes (produce or harvest) to the work of the Lord. Should you give more or less under grace than under the Law?

Your Attitude toward Giving

Giving with the proper attitude is crucial. The Apostle Paul wrote to the people in Corinth: *“If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.”* (1 Corinthians 13:3). Giving to the poor is very commendable, but, if it is done with the wrong attitude, without love, there is no benefit to us as givers.

When we have the attitude that our gifts to people in need, to our church, and other Christian causes are actually to the Lord, our giving becomes an act of worship. Because Jesus Christ is our Creator, our Savior, and our faithful Provider, we can express our gratitude and love by giving our gifts to Him. When we place our offerings in the offering plate during worship, we should consciously remind ourselves that we are giving our gifts to the Lord Himself.

God’s Word tells us that when our gifts are given with the proper attitude, the giver benefits as much or even more than the recipients of the gifts. As we respond to God’s love for us by giving back to Him part of what He’s given to us, He reacts by giving us even more. *“Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you”* (Luke 6:38). God loves and gives to all people, but, through our faithful and generous giving, we are blessed even more.

When we give to others, we experience one of the true joys of being Christians.



7. In the story of the Poor Widow (Luke 21:1-4), why did Jesus commend the widow who gave little and not the rich who gave much?

8. What did Jesus mean when He said, *“For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you”*? (Luke 6:38).

Changing Selfishness into Generosity

By God’s grace, appropriated to us through Word and Sacrament, we are transformed in our thinking. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). As new people in Christ, we seek ways and opportunities to share not just our money, but all of God’s gifts with others. Our selfish hearts are transformed into hearts filled with a desire to share God’s blessings to us with others. We share the experience of Zacchaeus, who had lived a selfish life as a tax collector, but, after meeting Jesus, became a new creation, one filled with a generous spirit (Luke 19:1-10).

Through faith, God’s people are moved to give even when they do not have as much as Zacchaeus. In Genesis 8 and 9, we read of Noah’s sacrifice. Descending from the ark, Noah did not have much. Yet, as a first act of worship for the protection he and his family received, Noah built an altar and sacrificed some of the clean animals as burnt offerings. Noah made the sacrifice because he trusted that God would continue to provide for him. That same faith and trust that empowered Zacchaeus and Noah to give enabled the Widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:7-24) to give the last of her food. The widow in Luke 21:1-4 was also able to give all of her money to God because she put her complete trust in Him.

Because of God's grace given freely to us, we do not have to continue living as selfish people. We can become detached from our money, seeing it as a tool to be used for God's purposes. When we surrender our wills to God, He will enable us to become less interested in our money and demonstrate the fruit of generosity.

The Importance of Giving

Jesus told us: *"Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation"* (Mark 16:15). It is our duty and joy as believers in Christ to spread the holy Word of salvation so that others can enjoy eternity with us. To obey this command requires money. Our churches and those who serve in the church need funds for ministry. Missionaries must be trained and sent into the field. Television and radio programs require money so the gospel can reach those who otherwise would not receive it. Food and clothing must be provided to the poor so that they will be able to be receptive to the good news of the Gospel. How are they to receive this money? The Apostle Paul wrote, *"On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper..."* (1 Corinthians 16:2).

Give Generously



Experience the Joy

9. Read Malachi 3:10. What challenge does God issue?

10. Read 2 Corinthians 8:7. How can we excel in the grace of giving?

Prayer: Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, thank You for this study on giving. Give us the courage and generosity to share what You entrust to us with those in need and to extend Your kingdom. Help us to be serving and giving people. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

Answer Guide

Bible Study 1

1. God calls us to be His stewards (Genesis 1:28; 2:15). God is the owner; we are stewards. As God's stewards, we manage or take care of God's property. We are to manage what God entrusts to us according to His will.
2. Genesis 1:27-31. God created man in His image. God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. God gave man dominion over His creation.
Deuteronomy 8:11-18. We are to remember that God gives us the ability to earn an income. We are not to be prideful and believe that what we have belongs to us or even come into being solely by our own efforts.
Psalm 24:1-3. God owns us and all things.
3. Mark 10:17-22. God knew that the Rich Man loved money. God told him to give his money to the poor, but his greed prevented him from obeying God. He was not a faithful steward.
4. Romans 12:1-2. Through God's Word and the Holy Spirit, God renews or changes our minds and hearts so we can present our bodies as living sacrifices.
2 Corinthians 5:17-19. We are new creations.
5. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we will fix our eyes on Jesus and follow God's ways rather than the world's. Spending time reading and studying God's Word fills us with the Holy Spirit so He can help us resist the pull of the world.
6. 1 Peter 4:10. Each of us has been given gifts from God, and our gifts are to be used in service for others.
7. Through faith, we understand who we are and the purposes that God has given us. When our identity is in Christ, our actions will reflect who we are. As God's children, we become God's stewards.
8. 1 Chronicles 29:10-20. Giving acknowledges God's ownership. In David's prayer, he refers to God's greatness and generosity to him and his people. His giving and the gifts of his people reflect an attitude of gratitude and that he was merely returning to God what He had already entrusted to them.
9. Personal response.

Bible Study 2:

1. Matthew 25:31-46. When we feed the hungry, provide drink for the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and minister to those in prison, we are serving Jesus.

2. Hebrews 11:6. If our acts of service are not done through faith, they are not pleasing to God.
3. John 3:22-30. In order to serve, a servant needs to be humble. John the Baptist knew he had to decrease, and Jesus had to increase. John the Baptist knew that his purpose was to serve in the role God had given him before he had been born. He used what God had entrusted to him to serve God by serving others.
4. Personal response
5. Philippians 2:5-8. Jesus *“made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant.”* He *“humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”*
6. John 13:12-17. Jesus didn’t just ask His followers to serve, He served. Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. The task of washing feet was normally done by the lowest of servants. Just as Jesus served, we are to serve. Those who follow Him will be blessed.
7. Luke 10:25-37. The Good Samaritan gave his time and showed compassion when he stopped to provide care for the person who was robbed and beaten. He extended his service when he took the injured person to an inn and paid for his care and lodging.
8. John 15:1-17. Jesus is the Vine, and we are the branches. In order for us to love and serve others, we need to stay connected to the Jesus the Vine. When we abide in Jesus, we will desire to serve others.
9. James 2:14-17. We don’t do good works to justify ourselves or secure God’s love. Good works come from abiding in Jesus. Abiding in Jesus creates a relationship with Jesus and from that relationship we want to please Him by serving others. Our good works are the result of our relationship with Jesus.
10. 2 Corinthians 9:11. When we do acts of service in Christ’s name, God is glorified.
11. 1 Peter 4:10. All of our gifts, including our talents, are to be used in service to the Lord. God is pleased when we seek to do His will. We serve God by serving others with the gifts that God gives us.

Bible Study 3:

1. Genesis 4:1-16. Cain brought some of his harvest of grain, whereas Abel brought the firstborn of his flock. The Lord had regard for Abel’s gift.
Hebrews 11:4. Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice because he brought it in faith.
1 John 3:12. Cain’s deeds were evil.
2. Personal response.

3. 2 Samuel 24:18-25. King David would not offer burnt offerings to the Lord that cost him nothing. He paid Araunah for the “*threshing floor and the oxen*” which were used for his burnt and peace offerings.
4. As God’s children and as His stewards, we are blessed and in His debt. We show our gratitude in many ways. One way that we show gratitude for Who God is and what He has done and continues to do for us is through our giving. Our giving expresses our gratitude and acknowledges God’s ownership.
5. 2 Corinthians 8:1-7. In chapters 8 and 9, the whole focus is on God’s grace. By grace, the Macedonians were able to give beyond their means. That same grace enables us to give freely and generously as well.
6. As New Testament Christians, we are no longer commanded to tithe (give one-tenth of our income). God wants us to give cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7) and proportionately of our incomes (2 Corinthians 8:12). We are directed to give each week on a regular basis (1 Corinthians 16:2). Throughout the New Testament, God’s people gave beyond the tithe. God grace makes it possible for us to hold onto things loosely and give generously. With God’s help, our goal should be to give beyond the tithe.
7. Luke 21:1-4. The Poor Widow gave all that she had. She trusted that God would provide for her needs. The rich gave out of their abundance and for show. Their giving didn’t affect their lifestyle.
8. Luke 6:38. Scripture gives us the principle of sowing and reaping (2 Corinthians 9:6). When we sow generously, we will reap generously. When we give faithfully and generously, God promises to bless us. We can be certain of spiritual blessings and possibly even material blessings.
9. Malachi 3:10. God wants us to test Him through our giving. During the time of Malachi, people were robbing God by not giving their first and best. If God’s people would give faithfully and generously, He promised that He would “*pour down for [them] a blessing until there is no more room.*”
10. 2 Corinthians 8:7. When we give our first and best from faithful, loving, and grateful hearts, we excel in the grace of giving. From loving and grateful hearts, we excel in the grace of giving.



Daily Devotions *for the whole family!*

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

Week 1: “Stewards of God’s Varied Grace” (1 Peter 4:10)

Daily Devotions:

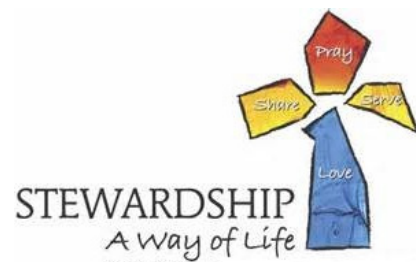
- Sunday: “Being a Faithful Steward”
- Monday: “Following God’s Direction”
- Tuesday: “Strengthened by Grace”
- Wednesday: “Jesus Is Most Important”
- Thursday: “Being People of God”
- Friday: “Serving God as Stewards”
- Saturday: “God’s Grace Shapes His Stewards”

Week 1 – Sunday – “Being a Faithful Steward”

Scripture: “Moreover, it is required by stewards that they be found trustworthy” (1 Corinthians 4:2).

“It’s my life. I can do with it what I want.” We worked hard for what we have, and no one is going to tell us what to do with it. At least that is what our old self would have us believe.

The truth is very different. God is the one Who entrusted us with everything we have. He is the rightful owner, and we are merely stewards of it.



Stewardship is a relationship, not just activities and responsibilities. It recognizes God as the owner of all things—including our very lives. That means all choices concerning our money, possessions, time, family, relationships, and tasks are really spiritual decisions lived in response to our relationship to God. The more we get to know God, Who owns all things, the better we can manage life according to His will. That knowledge of Him and that relationship with Him develop by reading and studying His Word and receiving His Sacraments. Working through that Word and God’s Holy Sacraments, the Holy Spirit does His work of sanctification, changing us into the

likeness of our Savior (2 Corinthians 3:12). We follow His ways rather than the world's. We look at life differently and no longer live for ourselves but for Jesus, Who took our sins upon Himself so we can live as forgiven people and be His faithful stewards.

A faithful steward will learn to distinguish between needs and wants in order to live faithfully within the financial means entrusted to him. Frequently ask yourself, "Is this what God, Who has entrusted me with my resources, would want me to do with these resources so that my life might fulfill His will? In the end, we long to hear Him say, *"Well done, good and faithful [steward]. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master"* (Matthew 25:23).

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for calling me to be Your steward. Grant me faith so I can be a trustworthy steward. In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen.

Week 1 – Monday – "Following God's Direction"

Scripture: *"But by the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me"* (1 Corinthians 15:10).

While traveling on a train, the Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes misplaced his ticket. Watching him fumble through his belongings and pockets in frustration, the conductor tried to ease his mind. "Don't worry about it, Mr. Holmes. I'm sure you have your ticket somewhere. If you don't find it during the trip, just mail it in to the railroad when you reach your destination."

Appreciative of the of the conductor's empathy, yet dismayed by his predicament, he looked the conductor in the eye and responded: "Young man, my problem is not finding my ticket. It's to find out where in the world I'm going."

As Christians, the question becomes, "Where does God want us to go?" Or better yet, "Where does God want us to go where He can best use us and where He can be praised?" God has a plan and purpose for each one of us. Our answers come from reading His Word and then through our prayers. Through faith and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we understand that we need to allow God to lead us and to depend on His strength. As the Apostle Paul wrote, *"Now to Him Who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."* (Ephesians 3:20).

When we follow God's lead and depend on us His power, we will, unlike Oliver Wendell Holmes, not be lost. As we place our faith and trust in Jesus, He can take control and lead us where He wants us to be.



Prayer: Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, grant me the wisdom that I need to determine Your will and purpose for my life and then help me to follow where You lead me. I ask this in the name of Jesus, Your Son, my Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, world without end forever and ever. Amen.

Week 1 – Tuesday – “Strengthened by Grace”

Scripture: *“But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace”* (Romans 11:6).

If you’ve done some carpentry, you’ve probably tried pulling out some very stubborn nails. The strength of a hammer may not be sufficient so you’ve had to bring in a pinch bar, that two- or three-foot metal rod with claws on the end. With the power from the pinch bar, you could wrench the nails out.



As helpless as we can be with just a hammer, we are even more helpless without God. As the pinch bar helps us with nails, God helps us in life. God enables us to understand that all we are, have, and do are the result of God’s grace in Christ. God’s grace not only brings us salvation: it trains *“us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and Godly lives in the present age”* (Titus 2:11-12). Knowing our lives are gifts from God’s grace, we live our lives in gratitude for Who God is and what He has done for us. God’s purpose becomes our purpose. Strengthened by grace, we seek to do God’s will leading to productive and abundant lives.

Even though we are sinful and undeserving, God loves us and wants only the best for us. He wants us to call upon the *“strength of His might”* (Ephesians 6:10). Being in a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus, our lives have purpose, and we are changed from being self-centered, selfish people to people who serve God by loving and serving others.

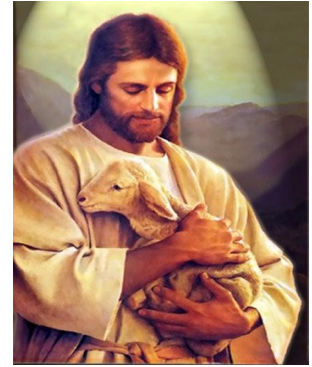
With God’s help, we are equipped and energized to do our best. The Apostle Paul tells us to *“put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator”* (Colossians 3:10). Being renewed by God grace, we live the Godly lives He calls us to live. We live new lives marked by the mysterious union with Jesus described by Paul in these words: *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me”* (Galatians 2:20). God directs us to areas and activities He wants us to pursue. God takes ordinary people like us and does some extraordinary things through us. We become his hands, feet, and mouth. We just need to desire to be tools in God’s hands.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for Your grace through Jesus. By Your grace, I know that I can be obedient and seek to please You. Give me the desire to live in such a way that Your purposes are my purposes. In the name of Jesus my Savior. Amen.

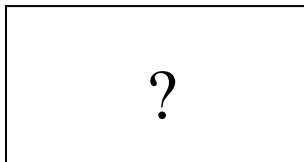
Week 1 – Wednesday – “Jesus Is Most Important”

Scripture: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).

In his book, *The Best Is Yet to Come*, John Kieschnick tells the story of Bob Buford. He writes, “Bob Buford owned a cable television company, and God richly blessed his business. Wealth and power, however, didn’t fill the hole in Bob’s life. He had a nagging sense of emptiness, so he went to a psychiatrist. Bob shared his dilemma, and the psychiatrist told him, ‘Bob, I want you to go home and take out a piece of paper and a pen. Draw a box, and in that box write the words that describe the most important thing in your life.’”



What do you suppose Bob wrote in His box? What would you write in your box? What is your highest priority in life?



Before we put our answers in the box, let’s reflect on our thoughts in relation to Bob’s emptiness. As Christians, we understand that wealth and power do not fill our emptiness nor give us the security and happiness that Bob was seeking. As our faith grows, we learn that true riches have nothing to do with money. We can have very little money and be very rich or be very wealthy and be impoverished. True riches have to do with a right relationship with Jesus Who, through His death and resurrection, brings us happiness, contentment, joy, love, peace, and life everlasting. Material possessions do not constitute real riches.

God had blessed Bob materially, but he was still feeling empty with no purpose. Through faith, we understand that what we need most is a relationship with Jesus Who is the only Person Whose love and forgiveness can give us all that we need. So, in response to the psychiatrist’s question as to what is the most important thing in our life, our answer in the box is “Jesus!”

Prayer: Dear Lord, You have called us to be stewards by Your grace. You have entrusted us with the gifts of life and all of life’s resources to use in accordance with Your will. May all that I do give You honor and glory. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Week 1 – Thursday – “Being the People of God”

Scripture: “By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

The famous German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, warned the church that it had lost its mission of being disciples for Jesus. He referred to the problem as “cheap grace.” He described “cheap grace” as follows:

**Have
Faith
in
GOD**

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap Grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the Cross, grace without Christ, living and incarnate.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor, believed that God's people living in Germany in the late 1930s, did not understand what it meant to be disciples for Jesus. The people had forgotten who they were and who they were called to be. They stopped being salt and light to the world. Instead of following Jesus, they followed the ways of the world.

If Pastor Bonhoeffer lived today, we can only guess what he would think and say. Hopefully, he would see a resurgence in God's people who are living out their calling to be disciples. Through faith, we understand the wonderful gift of grace that God has given to us through His Son, Jesus. While this grace is free, it is not cheap, because it cost Jesus His life. Because of His ultimate sacrifice, we have received grace that empowers us to live as disciples today and saving grace that assures us a life forever with Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I know that I am sinful and have not managed Your gifts wisely. Forgive me, Lord, and help me to be a faithful steward. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Week 1 – Friday – “Serving God as Stewards”

Scripture: *“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace”* (1 Peter 4:10).

Do we really want to be stewards? No! By nature, we are independent, self-centered people. Our first impulse is that we want to be the owners. We want to have possession of things. We want to be in control, to be respected, and even to be envied. We are not born stewards. However, by His grace, God transforms us into stewards who seek to follow His ways rather than our own. With changed hearts, we embrace His love and plan for our lives. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, we surrender our desires and plans to serve Him. God empowers us to put aside our need to be owners who are in control as we become His faithful stewards who seek to do His will. The love of Christ controls us. Transformed, we worship the Lord and live lives of faith, love, and obedience rather than living for ourselves.

As the Holy Spirit works in us through Word and Sacrament, transforming us into the image of Christ, we, in turn, will express more of His character. When we believe that God is present in our lives and trust in His power, we will, through faith, apply God's teachings to our lives.

As God's people, we can live unselfishly because of God's giving. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son...”* (John 3:16). The love of God empowers us to respond faithfully to His love and grace. We learn to love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). We learn to give because God first gave to us. Being a faithful steward is love in action. As Dr. Stephen F. Olford,



a 20th Century Christian leader, said,

Christ alone owns our eyes to view His world. He alone owns our hands to serve His will. He alone owns our feet to walk His way. He alone owns our minds to think His thoughts. He alone owns our hearts to love Him fervently. He alone owns our personalities to radiate His charm and glory. Failure to recognize this is a refusal to recognize His sovereignty.

Prayer: O Lord, I praise Your Name for creating the world and everything in it. I give You thanks for Your grace, love, and mercy. To You be the glory now and forever. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Week 1 – Saturday – “God’s Grace Shapes His Stewards”

Scripture: *“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned”* (Romans 12:3).

The Apostle Paul tells us that God’s divine nature has *“been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God...”* (Romans 1:20-21). We may know some things about God from creation, but it is impossible to know God truly in and of ourselves. To know God is a great gift of the grace of God. *“Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit Who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God”* (1 Corinthians 2:12).



Because of God’s grace, we are enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament to know God as our Heavenly Father, Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and the Spirit as our Comforter. By grace, we know that we are redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus and that God seeks a relationship with us. By grace, we know that God has adopted us as His children and called us to be His stewards of all that He entrusts to us.

Because we know that we have a God Who loves us, has adopted us as His children, and wants the best for us, we are energized to be about His work. Out of gratitude for who God is and what He has done and continues to do for us, we respond by using our lives and blessings in ways that give honor and praise to our Lord. Acknowledging God as our creator and sustainer of all things, we understand our role as God’s stewards. As God’s stewards, we seek to manage our time, talents, and money faithfully and according to His will, which we discover in His Word. We become God’s instruments through which He works to further His kingdom and help those in need. What a blessing and great honor it is that God has chosen us to be His stewards! May God continue to encourage and equip us to be His faithful stewards who have been shaped by His grace.

Prayer: Gracious and loving Father, You call me to be the caretaker of all that You entrust to me. Direct me to use my gifts faithfully and responsibly. May my faithful stewardship bear witness to the grace and love that You give me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Week 1 - Saturday

“God’s Grace Shapes His Stewards”

Scripture: *“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned” (Romans 12:3).*



The Apostle Paul tells us that God’s divine nature has *“been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God...”* (Romans 1:20-21). We may know some things about God from creation, but it is impossible to know God truly in and of ourselves. To know God is a great gift of the grace of God. *“Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit Who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God”* (1 Corinthians 2:12).

Because of God’s grace, we are enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament to know God as our Heavenly Father, Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and the Spirit as our Comforter. By grace, we know that we are redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus and that God seeks a relationship with us. By grace, we know that God has adopted us as His children and called us to be His stewards of all that He entrusts to us.

Because we know that we have a God Who loves us, has adopted us as His children, and wants the best for us, we are energized to be about His work. Out of gratitude for who God is and what He has done and continues to do for us, we respond by using our lives and blessings in ways that give honor and praise to our Lord. Acknowledging God as our creator and sustainer of all things, we understand our role as God’s stewards. As God’s stewards, we seek to manage our time, talents, and money faithfully and according to His will, which we discover in His Word. We become God’s instruments through which He works to further His kingdom and help those in need. What a blessing and great honor it is that God has chosen us to be His stewards! May God continue to encourage and equip us to be His faithful stewards who have been shaped by His grace.

Prayer: Gracious and loving Father, You call me to be the caretaker of all that You entrust to me. Direct me to use my gifts faithfully and responsibly. May my faithful stewardship bear witness to the grace and love that You give me. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Stewardship



Daily Devotions

for the whole family!

Faithful Stewards of God’s Gifts

WEEK 1

Stewards of God’s Varied Grace
1 Peter 4:10

Sunday:..... “Being a Faithful Steward”
Monday:..... “Following God’s Direction”
Tuesday: “Strengthened by Grace”
Wednesday: “Jesus Is Most Important”
Thursday: “Being People of God”
Friday: “Serving God as Stewards”
Saturday: “God’s Grace Shapes His Stewards”

Week 1 - Sunday

“Being a Faithful Steward”

Scripture: “Moreover, it is required by stewards that they be found trustworthy” (1 Corinthians 4:2).

“It’s my life. I can do with it what I want.” We worked hard for what we have, and no one is going to tell us what to do with it. At least that is what our old self would have us believe. The truth is very different. God is the one Who entrusted us with everything we have. He is the rightful owner, we are merely stewards of it.

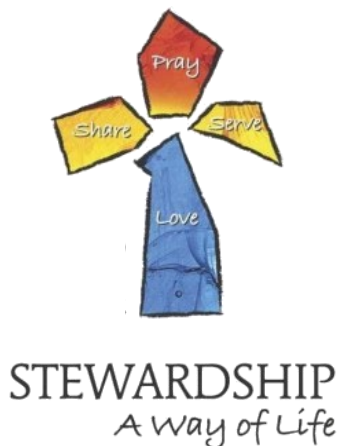
Stewardship is a relationship, not just activities and responsibilities. It recognizes God as the owner of all things - including our very lives. That means all choices concerning our money, possessions, time, family, relationships, and tasks are really spiritual decisions lived in response to our relationship to God. The more we get to know God, Who owns all things, the better we can manage life according to His will. That knowledge of Him and that relationship with Him develop by reading and studying His Word and receiving His Sacraments. Working through that Word and God’s Holy Sacraments, the Holy Spirit does His work of sanctification, changing us into the likeness of our Savior (2 Cor 3:12). We follow His ways rather than the world’s. We look at life differently and no longer live for ourselves but for Jesus, Who took our sins upon Himself so we can live as forgiven people and be His faithful stewards.

A faithful steward will learn to distinguish between needs and wants in order to live faithfully within the financial means entrusted to him. Frequently ask yourself, “Is this what God, Who has entrusted me with my resources, would want me to do with these resources so that my life might fulfill His will? In the end, we long to hear Him say, “*Well done, good and faithful [steward]. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master*” (Matthew 25:23).

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for calling me to be Your steward. Grant me faith so I can be a trustworthy steward. In Jesus’ precious name I pray. Amen.

Week 1 - Monday

“Following God’s Direction”



Do we really want to be stewards? No! By nature, we are independent, self-centered people. Our first impulse is that we want to be the owners. We want to have possession of things. We want to be in control, to be respected, and even to be envied. We are not born stewards. However, by His grace, God transforms us into stewards who seek to follow His ways rather than our own. With changed hearts, we embrace His love and plan for our lives. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, we surrender our desires and plans to serve Him.

God empowers us to put aside our need to be owners who are in control as we become His faithful stewards who seek to do His will. The love of Christ controls us. Transformed, we worship the Lord and live lives of faith, love, and obedience rather than living for ourselves.

As the Holy Spirit works in us through Word and Sacrament, transforming us into the image of Christ, we, in turn, will express more of His character. When we believe that God is present in our lives and trust in His power, we will, through faith, apply God’s teachings to our lives.

As God’s people, we can live unselfishly because of God’s giving. “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son...*” (John 3:16). The love of God empowers us to respond faithfully to His love and grace. We learn to love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). We learn to give because God first gave to us. Being a faithful steward is love in action. As Dr. Stephen F. Olford, a 20th Century Christian leader, said,

Christ alone owns our eyes to view His world. He alone owns our hands to serve His will. He alone owns our feet to walk His way. He alone owns our minds to think His thoughts. He alone owns our hearts to love Him fervently. He alone owns our personalities to radiate His charm and glory. Failure to recognize this is a refusal to recognize His sovereignty.

Prayer: O Lord, I praise Your Name for creating the world and everything in it. I give You thanks for Your grace, love, and mercy. To You be the glory now and forever. In Jesus’ name. Amen.



Week 1 - Thursday

“Being the People of God”

Scripture: “By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

The famous German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, warned the church that it had lost its mission of being disciples for Jesus. He referred to the problem as “cheap grace.” He described “cheap grace” as follows:

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Christ, living and incarnate.

Have
Faith
in
GOD

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor, believed that God’s people living in Germany in the late 1930s, did not understand what it meant to be disciples for Jesus. The people had forgotten who they were and who they were called to be. They stopped being salt and light to the world. Instead of following Jesus, they followed the ways of the world.

If Pastor Bonhoeffer lived today, we can only guess what he would think and say. Hopefully, he would see a resurgence in God’s people who are living out their calling to be disciples. Through faith, we understand the wonderful gift of grace that God has given to us through His Son, Jesus. While this grace is free, it is not cheap, because it cost Jesus His life. Because of His ultimate sacrifice, we have received grace that empowers us to live as disciples today and saving grace that assures us a life forever with Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I know that I am sinful and have not managed Your gifts wisely. Forgive me, Lord, and help me to be a faithful steward. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Week 1 - Friday

“Serving God as Stewards”

Scripture: “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Peter 4:10).

Scripture: “But by the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10).

While traveling on a train, Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes misplaced his ticket. Watching him fumble through his belongings and pockets in frustration, the conductor tried to ease his mind. “Don’t worry about it, Mr. Holmes. I’m sure you have your ticket somewhere. If you don’t find it during the trip, just mail it in to the railroad when you reach your destination.” Appreciative of the conductor’s empathy, yet dismayed by his predicament, he looked the conductor in the eye and responded: “Young man, my problem is not finding my ticket. It’s to find out where in the world I’m going.”

As Christians, the question becomes, “Where does God want us to go?” Or better yet, “Where does God want us to go where He can best use us and where He can be praised?” God has a plan and purpose for each one of us. Our answers come from reading His Word and then through our prayers. Through faith and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we understand that we need to allow God to lead us and to depend on His strength. As the Apostle Paul wrote, “Now to Him Who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20).

When we follow God’s lead and depend on His power, we will, unlike Oliver Wendell Holmes, not be lost. As we place our faith and trust in Jesus, He can take control and lead us where He wants us to be.

Prayer: Dear gracious Heavenly Father, grant me the wisdom I need to determine Your will and purpose for my life and help me to follow where You lead me. I ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.



Week 1 - Tuesday

“Strengthened by Grace”

Scripture: “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace” (Romans 11:6).

If you've done some carpentry, you've probably tried pulling out some very stubborn nails. The strength of a hammer may not be sufficient so you've had to bring in a pinch bar, that two- or three-foot metal rod with claws on the end. With the power from the pinch bar, you could wrench the nails out.



As helpless as we can be with just a hammer, we are even more helpless without God. As the pinch bar helps us with nails, God helps us in life. God enables us to understand that all we are, have, and do are the result of God's grace in Christ. God's grace not only brings us salvation: it trains "*us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and Godly lives in the present age*" (Titus 2:11-12). Knowing our lives are gifts from God's grace, we live our lives in gratitude for Who God is and what He has done for us. God's purpose becomes our purpose. Strengthened by grace, we seek to do God's will leading to productive and abundant lives.

Even though we are sinful and undeserving, God loves us and wants only the best for us. He wants us to call upon the "*strength of His might*" (Ephesians 6:10). Being in a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus, our lives have purpose, and we are changed from being self-centered, selfish people to people who serve God by loving and serving others.

With God's help, we are equipped and energized to do our best. The Apostle Paul tells us to "*put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator*" (Colossians 3:10). Being renewed by God grace, we live the Godly lives He calls us to live. We live new lives marked by the mysterious union with Jesus described by Paul in these words: "*It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me*" (Galatians 2:20). God directs us to areas and activities He wants us to pursue. God takes ordinary people like us and does some extraordinary things through us. We become His hands, feet, and mouth. We just need to desire to be tools in God's hands.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for Your grace through Jesus. By Your grace, I know that I can be obedient and seek to please You. Give me the desire to live in such a way that Your purposes are my purposes. In the name of Jesus my Savior. Amen.

Week 1 - Wednesday "Jesus is Most Important"

Scripture: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*" (Matthew 22:37).



In his book, *The Best Is Yet to Come*, John Kieschnick tells the story of Bob Buford. He writes, "Bob Buford owned a cable television company, and God richly blessed his business. Wealth and power, however, didn't fill the hole in Bob's life. He had a nagging sense of emptiness, so he went to a psychiatrist. Bob shared his dilemma, and the psychiatrist told him, 'Bob, I want you to go home and take out a piece of paper and a pen. Draw a box, and in that box write the words that describe the most important thing in your life.'

What do you suppose Bob wrote in His box? What would you write in your box? What is your highest priority in life?

?

Before we put our answers in the box, let's reflect on our thoughts in relation to Bob's emptiness. As Christians, we understand that wealth and power do not fill our emptiness nor give us the security and happiness that Bob was seeking. As our faith grows, we learn that true riches have nothing to do with money. We can have very little money and be very rich or be very wealthy and be impoverished. True riches have to do with a right relationship with Jesus Who, through His death and resurrection, brings us happiness, contentment, joy, love, peace, and life everlasting. Material possessions do not constitute real riches.

God had blessed Bob materially, but he was still feeling empty with no purpose. Through faith, we understand that what we need most is a relationship with Jesus Who is the only Person Whose love and forgiveness can give us all that we need. So, in response to the psychiatrist's question as to what is the most important thing in our life, our answer in the box is "Jesus!"

Prayer: Dear Lord, You have called us to be stewards by Your grace. You have entrusted us with the gifts of life and all of life's resources to use in accordance with Your will. May all that I do give You honor and glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Jesus Taught us how to Serve Others

Daily Devotions *for the whole family!*

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

Week 2: “As We Have Opportunity, Let Us Do Good to Everyone”
(Galatians 6:10)

Daily Devotions:

Sunday: “Love Filled the Need”
Monday: “God Working through You”
Tuesday: “Changing Me to We”
Wednesday: “Blessed to Be a Blessing”
Thursday: “Serving Others”
Friday: “Loving People”
Saturday: “Love Makes Us Do It”

Week 2 – Sunday – “Love Filled the Need”

Scripture: “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11).

The word “love” is used in many different ways: “I just love pecan pie!” “I love my child.” “I love to play basketball.” The word is thrown around so carelessly that its meaning has deteriorated.

If we want to know what love truly means, we can go to God’s Word. There we find that “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8). We understand what that means only as we continue to delve into Scripture. We find that, since God is love, He acts in love. Everything He does, He does out of love for us, His creation. He doesn’t give us everything we want; He does give us everything we need.

What do we need? We need a Savior, for we are sinners, condemned to die eternally for our sins. “*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*” (1 John 1:10), the Apostle John states positively, but his following words demonstrate what God’s love does: “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:8-9).



That's love. Because of love, Jesus did not remain in Heaven but came to Earth to become one of us, to suffer and die for us, and then rise again, a resurrection that we celebrate every Sunday as we gather together to rejoice in this great love that makes us His own.

He gave us Himself, and He wants us to give ourselves to Him in return. Having given ourselves to Him, it becomes a joy and a privilege to share our resources, our time, our abilities with Him by sharing them with others, just as Christ, out of love for His own, shared His very self with us.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for loving me so much that You would send Your Son to live among us and to have Him take our sins upon Himself on the Cross. Help me to show my gratitude to You by reaching out and serving others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Week 2 – Monday – “God Working through You”

Scripture: *“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).



Most of us have done some landscaping and gardening projects. Perhaps you have run across a handy device called a tree pruner. It is used to reach up high into a tree to lop off unwanted branches. Working kind of like an arm extension, it's much more convenient than getting on a ladder, which may not reach the branch you want to remove.

In a way, that tree pruner is a picture of what serving is like. Just as it reaches beyond your own arm's length, so do your arms and hands reach out to help others as extensions of Christ's love. Jesus walked this earth for approximately 30 years, and, during that time, His hands were always busy touching, healing, lifting, and comforting. With His ascension into Heaven, that job has been left to all of God's people, including you.

How can you carry out that task? Whom can you touch, lift up, or comfort? You are the most likely person to answer that question. Just by looking around, you can find someone who would benefit from your service. What about the shy person where you work? Could you encourage him or her? What about the lonely person in your church who just seems to want to talk? Could you be a patient listener? What about your neighbors? Maybe there is someone near where you live who would appreciate some help around the house and yard, or just a little time with you!

Jesus was never too rushed to stop and talk to someone in need. Although He had much to accomplish, He never raced from one task to another. Sometimes their needs surfaced at inconvenient times (See Matthew 9:18-26.) Sometimes, in order to reach someone, He had to risk offending them (See John 4:1-26.) He always spoke to them in love, carrying out the reason for His coming into this world: *“...the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many”* (Matthew 20:28). God, Who gives you all you need to do whatever He asks you to do (Philippians 4:13), will give you the opportunity and ability.

Prayer: Dear Lord God, You alone are the source of every good gift. I thank You for Your faithful love. Grant me a loving heart for those who You place in my midst. Use me as Your hands, feet, and mouth to help others. In Jesus' holy and precious name, I pray. Amen.

Week 2 – Tuesday – “Changing Me to We”

Scripture: *“But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as ransom for many”* (Matthew 20:26-28).



By nature, we are self-serving, proud people. The world and our flesh promote the thought of “looking out for number one” at any cost. We want what is best for ourselves, often at the expense of others. We want to be in control, and we live as if we are invincible. To illustrate this idea, there is a story about Muhammad Ali who was the boxing champion of the world. He was on an airplane and was told by the stewardess to buckle his seat belt. Ali said, “I don’t need to buckle my seat belt, because I am superman and superman doesn’t need a seat belt.” In response the stewardess said, “You may call yourself superman, but superman doesn’t need an airplane.”

We are probably not as obnoxious as Ali was reported to be on that airplane; however, don’t we struggle with the same problem of our own self-importance? In our humanity, we place ourselves on a pedestal. Without God’s presence in our lives, this attitude of self-importance will not change. By our own reason or strength, we can’t change. Only through God’s love and grace can we truly live with love toward others and with servant hearts. In Matthew 20:26 Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.”* Jesus lived for His heavenly Father and others. Through God’s Word and Sacraments, He changes us from being interested only in ourselves to seeing others as brothers and sisters in Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, God opens our eyes so we see the opportunities to reach out and serve others with His love. In Jesus’ life, we see the life that He wants us to emulate. Jesus told His disciples, *“The Son of Man did not come 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 love and service, but the one act of serving that is most often referred to is His washing of His disciples’ feet during the evening of the Passover Feast before His crucifixion. After washing their feet, Jesus said, *“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set an example that you should do as I have done for you”* (John 13:16-17). As Jesus came to serve, so must all of us joyfully accept a life of service to others. As we change from “me” people to “we” people, we begin to share God’s love with others.

Prayer: Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, thank You for Your love, grace, and mercy that are with us each and every day. Help me to commit my time, talents, and money in service to others. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Week 2 – Wednesday – “Blessed to Be a Blessing”

Scripture: *“But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him”* (1 John 3:17).

Ben Franklin, one of our country’s founding fathers, developed a challenging habit. Every day of his adult life, he set aside time to examine two questions. In the morning, he asked himself, “What good shall I do today?” As the day drew to a close, his question was: “What good have I done today?” As Christians, it is easy to relate to Ben Franklin’s attitude because a common theme throughout God’s Word is that we are to do good to others as we help, love, and serve them. We are called to love others as we love ourselves. In his letter to the church in Galatia, the Apostle Paul wrote, *“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith”* (Galatians 6:10).



God has created, forgiven, and redeemed us, and we become His instruments of love and compassion in the world. God blesses us so we can serve Him by serving others. He honors us with the privilege of being the channels through which He works. We are blessed to be a blessing. God wants us to be His channels who live in total devotion to Him and are His faithful stewards. He empowers us to do the *“good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:10). The same strength that was available to Paul is available to us. As the Apostle Paul wrote the people in Philippi, *“I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me”* (Philippians 4:13). God is our source of strength. Through our weakness, God is able to display His divine power. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can make the serving of others a priority in our lives.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I give You praise and thanks because You are the King of kings, the Lord of Lord, the beginning and the end. Be with me each day, I pray, and by your Holy Spirit, let me seek to glorify You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Week 2 – Thursday – “Serving Others”

Scripture: *“So Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets”* (Matthew 7:12).

Jesus said, *“The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve”* (Matthew 20:28). Though He was/is a king, Jesus put aside the rights of a king to become like common man, to become a servant. He asks no less of us than we serve others as He has served us. The writer of Hebrews tells us that we are called and enabled to *“serve the living God”* (Hebrews 9:14). We serve God by serving others. When Jesus was asked, *“When did we see a stranger and welcome You, or naked and clothe You?”* Jesus replied, *Truly, I say to you, as you did to one of the least of these My brothers, you did for Me”* (Matthew 25:40).



Mother Teresa would offer a resounding “amen” to these thoughts. “Unless life is lived for others,” she said, “it is not worthwhile.” As a young nun she developed a burning desire to work with the

homeless and hopeless. Although she was convinced of this calling, her superiors suggested her youth and inexperience would cause her to fail in such an endeavor. Mother Teresa was, therefore, assigned to teach at a convent in India.

Mother Teresa's mission to serve others unable to meet their own needs burned deep in her heart. Finally, at age 39, she was allowed to pursue her passion in poverty-stricken Calcutta. On her first day, she encountered a man lying in the gutter, so covered with disease and insects that everyone avoided him. Mother Teresa knelt down next to him and began cleaning his infected body. He was so astounded by her caring, he asked her, "Why are you helping me?" Mother Teresa smiled and replied, "Because I love you."

When service opportunities present themselves to us, may we be ready and available to love and serve others in Jesus' name.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I give You praise and thanks for Who You are and what You've done and continue to do for me. Use me as Your instrument to provide comfort and help to others. Grant me courage to share the good news of the Gospel with others. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Week 2 – Friday – “Loving People”

Scripture: *“We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him: whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:19-21).*

Charlie Brown's young friend Linus made the mistake of confessing to his big sister Lucy that he wanted to be a doctor when he grew up. Lucy was astounded at her brother's declaration. “You, a doctor!” That's a laugh! You could never be a doctor! You know why? Because you don't love humankind!”



Young Linus immediately responded, “I do love humankind! It's people I can't stand!”

Linus' comment may give us a chuckle. We find humor in it because we identify with Linus. Apart from the power of God's Spirit working in us, our love for others is weak and shallow at best. But God calls us to love all people and enables us to do so. Whether we are doctors, carpenters, policemen, teachers, secretaries, or plumbers, we are to love those with whom we work with as well as all people. God places us in different vocations where we can share God's love. We are His instruments through which He works.

In his letter to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul wrote, *“Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to Him, and to which God has called him” (1 Corinthians 7:17).* God has a purpose, a plan, in mind for each of us. Like Linus, one might consider being a doctor, but God may have a much different vocation in mind. No vocation is to be viewed higher or lower

than another, and we are called, regardless of where we are placed by God, to let His love within us overflow to others.

Prayer: Lord, in love You created me and in love You recreated me in Baptism. May Your love within me overflow through me to others. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Week 2 – Saturday – “Love Makes Us Do It”

Scripture: *“If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing”* (1 Corinthians 13:3).

A young girl was dying. Her only hope lay in a complete blood transfusion, but she had a very rare blood type. Only her bother, even younger than she, had the same type blood. His parents and doctors explained the situation to him, giving him time to ask questions. He agreed and, without delay, he was laid on a bed, the needle was pushed into his tiny vein, and slowly his blood seeped from his small body into the bag hanging from his bed. He lay quietly as the nurse stood next to him, ready to attend to any need he might have. “How do you feel?” she asked. “Ok,” he answered, “but, Nurse, when do I die?”



What love this little boy had for his sister. What must he have thought when his own parents seemingly agreed, even asked him to sacrifice his life to save his sister's?

Another parent did, in fact, ask His Son to give His blood to save His children. He sent that Child from the glories of Heaven to earth, to be born in poverty and obscurity, in order to become our Brother and earn our right to join Him in Heaven with our Father. This Brother, too, willingly made the sacrifice to save us. *“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down His life for His friends”* (John 15:13). He demonstrated His tremendous love not because of our worthiness, but because He is a God of tremendous love. Jesus' love for His heavenly Father and for us changed the world. Through His birth, life, death, and resurrection from that death, we through faith have received the forgiveness of our sins and life eternal. God's love to us in Christ is that power that enables us to love Him. *“We love because He first loved us”* (1 John 4:19).

The love of Jesus empowers us to be His stewards. Because of Jesus' love, we become people responding out of love to serve those He places in our lives. When needs arise, Jesus opens our eyes and hearts so we can respond to those needs. Because Jesus' love for us motivates us, we find joy in our serving and giving. Love changes our giving from an obligation to a privilege.

We, as God's people always have, live in difficult and changing times. How wonderful it is that, as Christians, we know that there is the certainty that Jesus always reaches out to us and loves us. May our lives and our giving genuinely reflect His love for us.

Prayer: Dear Father, help me to respond to Your love and to serve You where you call me to serve. Show me opportunities to help those in need. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Scripture: *"If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3).*

A young girl was dying. Her only hope lay in a complete blood transfusion, but she had a very rare blood type. Only her brother, even younger than she, had the same type blood. His parents and doctors explained the situation, giving him time to ask questions. He agreed and, without delay, he was laid on a bed, the needle was pushed into his tiny vein, and slowly his blood seeped from his small body into the bag hanging from his bed. He lay quietly as the nurse stood next to him, ready to attend to any need he might have. "How do you feel?" she asked. "Ok," he answered, "but, nurse, when do I die?"

What love this little boy had for his sister. What must he have thought when his own parents seemingly agreed, even asked him to sacrifice his life to save his sister's?

Another parent did, in fact, ask His Son to give His blood to save His children. He sent that Child from the glories of Heaven to earth, to be born in poverty and obscurity, in order to become our Brother and earn our right to join Him in Heaven with our Father. This Brother, too, willingly made the sacrifice to save us. *"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down His life for His friends"* (John 15:13). He demonstrated His tremendous love not because of our worthiness, but because He is a God of tremendous love. Jesus' love for His heavenly Father and for us changed the world. Through His birth, life, death, and resurrection from that death, we through faith have received the forgiveness of our sins and life eternal. God's love to us in Christ is that power that enables us to love Him. *"We love because He first loved us"* (1 John 4:19).

The love of Jesus empowers us to be His stewards. Because of Jesus' love, we become people responding out of love to serve those He places in our lives. When needs arise, Jesus opens our eyes and hearts so we can respond. Because Jesus' love for us motivates us, we find joy in our serving and giving. Love changes our giving from an obligation to a privilege.

We, as God's people always have, live in difficult and changing times. How wonderful it is that, as Christians, we know there is the certainty that Jesus always reaches out to us and loves us. May our lives and our giving genuinely reflect His love for us.

Prayer: Dear Father, help me to respond to Your love and to serve You where you call me to serve. Show me opportunities to help those in need. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



Jesus Taught us how to Serve Others

Daily Devotions *for the whole family!* *Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts*

WEEK 2 *As We Have Opportunity, Let Us Do Good to Everyone - Galatians 6:10*

Sunday:..... "Love Filled the Need"

Monday:..... "God Working through You"

Tuesday: "Changing Me to We"

Wednesday: "Blessed to Be a Blessing"

Thursday: "Serving Others"

Friday: "Loving People"

Saturday: "Love Makes Us Do It"

Week 2 - Sunday

“Love Filled the Need”

Scripture: *“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11).*

The word “love” is used in many different ways: “I just love pecan pie!” “I love my child.” “I love to play basketball.” The word is thrown around so carelessly that its meaning has deteriorated.

If we want to know what love truly means, we can go to God’s Word. There we find that *“God is love”* (1 John 4:8). We understand what that means only as we continue to delve into Scripture. We find that, since God is love, He acts in love. Everything He does, He does out of love for us, His creation. He doesn’t give us everything we want; He does give us everything we need.

What do we need? We need a Savior, for we are sinners, condemned to die eternally for our sins. *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”* (1 John 1:10), the Apostle John states positively, but his following words demonstrate what God’s love does: *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:8-9).

That’s love. Because of love, Jesus did not remain in Heaven but came to Earth to become one of us, to suffer and die for us, and then rise again, a resurrection that we celebrate every Sunday as we gather together to rejoice in this great love that makes us His own.

He gave us Himself, and He wants us to give ourselves to Him in return. Having given ourselves to Him, it becomes a joy and a privilege to share our resources, our time, our abilities with Him by sharing them with others, just as Christ, out of love for His own, shared His very self with us.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for loving me so much that You would send Your Son to live among us and to have Him take our sins upon Himself on the Cross. Help me to show my gratitude to You by reaching out and serving others. In Jesus’ name. Amen.



Week 2 - Friday

“Loving People”

Scripture: *“We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him: whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:19-21).*

Charlie Brown’s young friend Linus made the mistake of confessing to his big sister Lucy that he wanted to be a doctor when he grew up. Lucy was astounded at her brother’s declaration. “You, a doctor!” That’s a laugh! You could never be a doctor! You know why? Because you don’t love humankind!” Young Linus immediately responded, “I do love humankind! It’s people I can’t stand!”

Linus’ comment may give us a chuckle. We find humor in it because we identify with Linus. Apart from the power of God’s Spirit working in us, our love for others is weak and shallow at best. But God calls us to love all people and enables us to do so. Whether we are doctors, carpenters, policemen, teachers, secretaries, or plumbers, we are to love those with whom we work with as well as all people. God places us in different vocations where we can share God’s love. We are His instruments through which He works.

In his letter to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul wrote, “Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to Him, and to which God has called him” (1 Corinthians 7:17). God has a purpose, a plan, in mind for each of us. Like Linus, one might consider being a doctor, but God may have a much different vocation in mind. No vocation is to be viewed higher or lower than another, and we are called, regardless of where we are placed by God, to let His love within us overflow to others.

Prayer: Lord, in love You created me and others. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



GOD IS LOVE

Week 2 - Saturday

“God’s Grace Shapes His Stewards”

Week 2 - Thursday

“Serving Others”

Scripture: *“So Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets”* (Matthew 7:12).



Jesus said, *“The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve”* (Matthew 20:28). Though He was/is a king, Jesus put aside the rights of a king to become like common man, to become a servant. He asks no less of us than we serve others as He has served us. The writer of Hebrews tells us that we are called and enabled to *“serve the living God”* (Hebrews 9:14). We serve God by serving others. When Jesus was asked, *“When did we see a stranger and welcome You, or naked and clothe You?”* Jesus replied, *Truly, I say to you, as you did to one of the least of these My brothers, you did for Me”* (Matthew 25:40).

Mother Teresa would offer a resounding “amen” to these thoughts. “Unless life is lived for others,” she said, “it is not worthwhile.” As a young nun she developed a burning desire to work with the homeless and hopeless. Although she was convinced of this calling, her superiors suggested her youth and inexperience would cause her to fail in such an endeavor. Mother Teresa was, therefore, assigned to teach at a convent in India.

Mother Teresa’s mission to serve others unable to meet their own needs burned deep in her heart. Finally, at age 39, she was allowed to pursue her passion in poverty-stricken Calcutta. On her first day, she encountered a man lying in the gutter, so covered with disease and insects that everyone avoided him. Mother Teresa knelt down next to him and began cleaning his infected body. He was so astounded by her caring, he asked her, “Why are you helping me?” Mother Teresa smiled and replied, “Because I love you.”

When service opportunities present themselves to us, may we be ready and available to love and serve others in Jesus’ name.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I give You praise and thanks for Who You are and what You’ve done and continue to do for me. Use me as Your instrument to provide comfort and help to others. Grant me courage to share the good news of the Gospel with others. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Week 2 - Monday

“God Working through You”

Scripture: *“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).

Most of us have done some landscaping and gardening projects. Perhaps you have run across a handy device called a tree pruner. It is used to reach up high into a tree to lop off unwanted branches. Working kind of like an arm extension, it’s much more convenient than getting on a ladder, which may not reach the branch you want to remove.

In a way, that tree pruner is a picture of what serving is like. Just as it reaches beyond your own arm's length, so do your arms and hands reach out to help others as extensions of Christ's love. Jesus walked this earth for approximately 30 years, and, during that time, His hands were always busy touching, healing, lifting, and comforting. With His ascension into Heaven, that job has been left to all of God’s people, including you.



How can you carry out that task? Whom can you touch, lift up, or comfort? You are the most likely person to answer that question. Just by looking around, you can find someone who would benefit from your service. What about the shy person where you work? Could you encourage him or her? What about the lonely person in your church who just seems to want to talk? Could you be a patient listener? What about your neighbors? Maybe there is someone near where you live who would appreciate some help around the house and yard, or just a little time with you!

Jesus was never too rushed to stop and talk to someone in need. Although He had much to accomplish, He never raced from one task to another. Sometimes their needs surfaced at inconvenient times (See Matthew 9:18-26.) Sometimes, in order to reach someone, He had to risk offending them (See John 4:1-26.) He always spoke to them in love, carrying out the reason for His coming into this world: *“...the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many”* (Matthew 20:28). God, Who gives you all you need to do whatever He asks you to do (Philippians 4:13), will give you the opportunity and ability.

Prayer: Dear Lord God, You alone are the source of every good gift. I thank You for Your faithful love. Grant me a loving heart for those who You place in my midst. Use me as Your hands, feet, and mouth to help others. In Jesus’ holy and precious name, I pray. Amen.

Week 2 - Tuesday “Changing Me to We”

Scripture: *“But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and who-ever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28).*



By nature, we are self-serving, proud people. The world and our flesh promote the thought of “looking out for number one” at any cost. We want what is best for ourselves, often at the expense of others. We want to be in control, and we live as if we are invincible. To illustrate this idea, there is a story about Muhammad Ali who was the boxing champion of the world. He was on an airplane and was told by the stewardess to buckle his seat belt. Ali said, “I don’t need to buckle my seat belt, because I am superman and superman doesn’t need a seat belt.” In response the stewardess said, “You may call yourself superman, but superman doesn’t need an airplane.”

We are probably not as obnoxious as Ali was reported to be on that airplane; however, don’t we struggle with the same problem of our own self-importance? In our humanity, we place ourselves on a pedestal. Without God’s presence in our lives, this attitude of self-importance will not change. By our own reason or strength, we can’t change. Only through God’s love and grace can we truly live with love toward others and with servant hearts. In Matthew 20:26 Jesus said, “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.” Jesus lived for His heavenly Father and others. Through God’s Word and Sacraments, He changes us from being interested only in ourselves to seeing others as brothers and sisters in Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, God opens our eyes so we see the opportunities to reach out and serve others with His love. In Jesus’ life, we see the life that He wants us to emulate. Jesus told His disciples, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28).

The entire life of Jesus was one of love and service, but the one act of serving most often referred to is His washing of His disciples’ feet during the Passover Feast before His crucifixion. After washing their feet, Jesus said, “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:16-17). As Jesus came to serve, so must all of us joyfully accept a life of service to others. As we change from “me” people to “we” people, we begin to share God’s love with others.

Prayer: Dear gracious Heavenly Father, thank You for Your love, grace, and mercy that are with us each and every day. Help me to commit my time, talents, and money in service to others. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Week 2 - Wednesday “Born to Be a Blessing”

Scripture: *“But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him” (1 John 3:17).*

Benjamin Franklin, one of our country’s founding fathers, developed a challenging habit. Every day of his adult life, he set aside time to examine two questions. In the morning, he asked himself, “What good shall I do today?” As the day drew to a close, his question was: “What good have I done today?” As Christians, it is easy to relate to Franklin’s attitude because a common theme throughout God’s Word is that we are to do good to others as we help, love, and serve them. We are called to love others as we love ourselves. In his letter to the church in Galatia, the Apostle Paul wrote, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

God has created, forgiven, and redeemed us, and we become His instruments of love and compassion in the world. God blesses us so we can serve Him by serving others. He honors us with the privilege of being the channels through which He works. We are blessed to be a blessing. God wants us to be His channels who live in total devotion to Him and are His faithful stewards. He empowers us to do the “good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). The same strength that was available to Paul is available to us. As the Apostle Paul wrote the people in Philippi, “I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

God is our source of strength. Through our weakness, God is able to display His divine power. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can make the serving of others a priority in our lives.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I give You praise and thanks because You are the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the beginning and the end. Be with me each day, I pray, and by your Holy Spirit, let me seek to glorify You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.





Daily Devotions *for the whole family!*

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

Week 3: “Generous and Ready to Share” (1 Timothy 6:18)

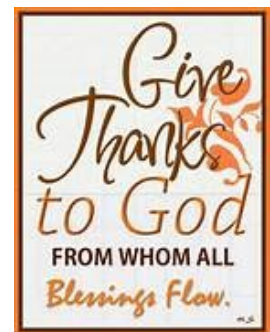
Daily Devotions:

- Sunday: “Giving Expresses our Gratitude”
- Monday: “Giving Cheerfully”
- Tuesday: “The Pump Needs to Be Primed”
- Wednesday: “Whose Money Is it Anyway?”
- Thursday: “Your Giving Speaks”
- Friday: “Robbing God, Robbing Yourself”
- Saturday: “Are You a Giver or a Taker?”

Week 3 – Sunday – “Giving Expresses Our Gratitude”

Scripture: “You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God” (2 Corinthians 9:11-12).

An old legend tells of a man visiting Africa who was amazed to find boys playing marbles with diamonds. The boys, however, found nothing unusual in this; this was the only kind of stones they knew.



There is a danger that the familiar can lose its value. What wonderful truths we hear each Sunday from our pulpit! What gracious gifts we regularly receive through the Sacraments! What a treasure is the Bible which we can own and read whenever we wish! What value do we place on these things of God? How long can God trust us as stewards of His Gospel if we treat it so lightly and neglect the opportunities to spread His Word?

In the New Testament, hardly any facet of Christian life is discussed more often than that of giving. The Bible teaches that it is the obligation of all, the rich and the poor, to give regularly, proportionately, and in the name of and for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that giving is an act of faith, of thanksgiving, and of gratitude for our God and for what He has done for us. Scripture tells us *"God loves a cheerful giver"* (2 Corinthians 9:7) and that He wants us to excel in this grace of giving (2 Corinthians 8:7). Thankfully, God tells us that He will make it possible for us to give when He tells us *"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).

Let us pray, that we would once again comprehend the sacrifice that has won our eternal salvation. Let us tell others of the wonderful hope and love that can be found in Jesus. Let us place our gifts in the offering plates as though they were the nail-scarred hands of Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Father Almighty, please grant me the courage and generosity to share what You entrust to me with those in need and to extend Your kingdom. Help me to develop an attitude of gratitude. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Week 3 – Monday – "Giving Cheerfully"

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

One day a second-grade boy came to school without his lunch. He did not think about it until his classmates started washing their hands and getting out their lunch boxes. He was a shy little kid, and he did not want to say anything because he was embarrassed, but his stomach was really growling. Against his will, his lip started to quiver and his eyes filled with tears. Soon his teacher noticed and then all the students, and he was forced to tell them his problem. No sooner were the words out of his mouth than his classmates were looking into their lunches. One student had two sandwiches and gave the hungry boy one. Another child had an apple and an orange and gave his friend his choice of fruit. Another had too many cookies (Could that ever be?!) and shared them. In short, the hungry boy had a feast, all because of the generosity of others who had more than they needed.

This kind of thing happens often. One person is in need and others give so that the need is met. This is just as God has planned it. The Bible says that *"your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness"* (2 Corinthians 8:14). Sometimes we need to get, and, at other times, we need to give. God gives us the sun and the rain, homes to keep us warm and dry, food to nourish our bodies, clothes to wear, and many other things we could name. In other words, most of us have "plenty." God uses those who have plenty to help others. Yet all of us should prayerfully consider giving part of the income we receive from work or other sources of income away. Our first gift should go to our church in the weekly offering. Certainly, we can think of many ways we would like to spend that money and maybe we're not such cheerful givers. God can handle that problem, too. As we ask Him to



help us give and to make us happy about giving, God will answer our prayers and change our attitudes. Everything God asks us to do, including giving, He helps us to do and gives us the right attitude about doing it.

Prayer: Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, thank You for Your generosity toward me. Help me to be generous with what You entrust to me. Grant me a giving and loving heart. I ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

Week 3 – Tuesday – “The Pump Needs to Be Primed”

Scripture: *“Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your [income]; then your [wallets] will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine”* (Proverbs 3:9-10).



If you’ve ever been on a farm, you may be familiar with old-fashioned water pumps. When pumps have been out of use for a time, they can often be pumped fruitlessly. The problem can be solved by priming the pump with water, which expands the cork, bringing up water, rather than just air.

Life can be compared to that pump. In order to receive, one may need to give first. We have to put something into life to get something out of it. Paul stated this principle in Galatians 6:7: *“Whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”* Rewards and successes in life are earned; they result from hard work and time.

This principle of priming the pump, of sowing and reaping, applies to our giving as well. It is true that God provides for all. Jesus Himself said, *“For He [God] makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and unjust”* (Matthew 5:45). However, He also promised a special blessing on those who are generous in their giving: *“Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you”* (Luke 6:38).

As redeemed children of God, our main motivation for giving is our desire to respond with grateful hearts to Him for His marvelous gifts to us, especially the gift of His Son, Jesus, Who brought us forgiveness of sins and life eternal. We will desire to give, not for reward, but to honor Him with our lives and our time, talents and treasures. We will find that we cannot out-give God. Speaking through the prophet Malachi, God promised, *“Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. And thereby put Me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need”* (Malachi 3:10).

Accept God’s challenge: put Him to the test. Prime the pump.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for accepting me as I am and for Your desire to adopt me as one of Your children. Place in me a desire to please You, especially in how I give to You through the giving to my church and my generosity to those in need. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Week 3 – Wednesday – “Whose Money Is it Anyway?”

Scripture: *“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein”* (Psalm 24:1).

Please ponder the following questions: Who owns the money that you have? Who owns the cash in your wallet? Who owns your paycheck or business income? Who owns your bank account? Who owns the equity in your house and car? Who owns the stocks, bonds, mutual funds and other investments in your portfolio? Who owns all this? Whose money is it?



You might say, "That's obvious. It's mine, of course. It's my cash, my paycheck, my bank account, my house, my car, and my portfolio. If it's in my possession or under my name, it's obviously mine." But not so fast. What if someone else actually owns it and you have it only in order to manage it for him?

It makes a huge difference who really owns the money you are handling. If the money belongs to you and you alone, then you can do with it whatever you like. But if the money is really someone else's and you're only managing it, then you have to handle the money the way the real owner wants, and you have to answer to the owner for how you manage his money.

And the truth about money is this: you don't own a single penny. I don't own a penny. Nobody on earth owns a penny. So, whose money is it? It's God's money – every penny of it. Whatever money we have is ours to manage, not to own. We must handle money God's way and answer to Him for the way we deal with His money. May God grant us all the desire and ability to be faithful managers of all that He entrusts to us.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for the faith that You've given me that enables me to understand that You have given me the ability to earn money. Help me to understand that it is Your money and I'm a steward of it. Amen.

Week 3 – Thursday – “Your Giving Speaks”

Scripture: *“But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also”* (2 Corinthians 8:7).

At the appointed time in each church service, time is set aside to worship the Lord with our financial treasures. This time is



sometimes referred to as taking the collection. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians regarding the collection: *“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made”* (1 Corinthians 16:2).

The Greek word for collection means “to say something.” When you put your money into the offering or collection plate, you are saying something. You are making a statement about what you value as a person as well as what your priorities are. Your giving, or lack thereof, says something about your understanding of stewardship, because the proportion of your income that you give tells what kind of steward you are. Your giving, or lack thereof, indicates whether your treasure is here on earth or in heaven.

Only by God’s grace are we enabled to give. We tend to want to hang on to what we think of as ours, out of greed, insecurity, and for other reasons as well. However, we, as redeemed children of God through whom the Holy Spirit is working, can learn to rely on God instead of money for the provision of our needs.

Giving begins by acknowledging God’s ownership as well as trusting that God will provide. When you give generously, you are saying that you believe God to be the owner and provider of all things. May your faithful giving be a response to our faithful Lord Who has first given to you.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I thank You for Your provisions this day. Help me not to be anxious about tomorrow. Grant me the faith I need to share my gifts freely and generously. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Week 3 – Friday – “Robbing God, Robbing Yourself”

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



In the last book of the Old Testament, God uses the prophet Malachi to tell the people that they were robbing God by not giving their tithes and offerings. Malachi asked the people, *“Will man rob God?”* (Malachi 3:8). This was more an accusation than a question. The people’s hearts had turned away from God, and, because of their hard hearts, they gave blemished animals to sacrifice. Giving animals that were sick, lame, and blind was dishonoring God. God commanded the people to bring the whole tithe into God’s house. Then, God promised, He would *“open the windows of heaven for [them] and pour down for [them] a blessing until there is no more need”* (Malachi 3:10). God promised an abundance of blessings for their faithful giving.

Just as it was clear that God’s people were robbing Him then, so it is today that we rob God when we don’t give Him our first and best. Being thankful for Who He is and what He has done and continues to do for us, we show our gratitude by giving generously and cheerfully.

We can make the case that, when we don't give faithfully, we are also robbing ourselves. The people during Malachi's day were not prospering as they withheld from God.

God Who created us and owns all things does not need our gifts. Giving is for our benefit rather than His. God uses our ability and desire to give to help those in need and to extend His kingdom. Thus, the recipients of our gifts are blessed and we, as givers, are also blessed. Giving is God's way to help us grow spiritually and to enrich us. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"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). Jesus said, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35). In the words of Solomon, *"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"* (Proverbs 3:9-10). Throughout Scripture, we find God's special blessings to those who give faithfully and generously. Don't rob God and yourself.

Prayer: Dear Lord, You are the owner of all the animals in the forest and the cattle on a thousand hills. Help me to live my life knowing that all things belong to You. You have created me and recreated me in my Baptism. May all that I do give You honor and glory. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Week 3 – Saturday – “Are You a Giver or a Taker?”

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



It has been said that we are either givers or takers. Very likely, however, most of us fall somewhere between these two ends of the spectrum. In John 12, we read about a very generous giver and an extreme taker. Mary, the sister of Martha and the brother of Lazarus, was the giver. Her giving was the anointing of her friend and Savior. *"Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair"* (verse 3). Mary's action demonstrated much love and devotion. She anointed Jesus with very expensive ointment or perfume. Very likely this was special ointment that she had been saving, and she found the perfect occasion to use it. How she anointed Jesus also showed her love and devotion. It wasn't enough that she used very expensive ointment; she used her hair to wipe Jesus' feet. Her acts of love epitomize giving. Mary gave herself and her best.

In the same story, we find a taker. *"But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples (he who was about to betray Him), said, 'Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it"* (verses 4-6). It is clear that Judas was a taker. It's equally clear that he found no benefit from his greed, but only self-condemnation and despair.

In our prayers, let us ask our Lord to send His Holy Spirit to grant us giving and generous hearts. May we, like Mary, be willing to give ourselves and our best.

Prayer: Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, forgive me when I hoard what You've entrusted to me. Help me to understand that all I am and have are from Your hands. Enable me to see my money as a tool to be used in ways that give You honor and glory. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Week 3 - Saturday

“Are You a Giver or a Taker?”

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



It has been said that we are either givers or takers. Very likely, however, most of us fall somewhere between these two ends of the spectrum. In John 12, we read about a very generous giver and an extreme taker. Mary, the sister of Martha and the brother of Lazarus, was the giver. Her giving was the anointing of her friend and Savior. *“Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair”* (verse 3). Mary’s action demonstrated much love and devotion. She anointed Jesus with very expensive ointment or perfume. Very likely this was special ointment that she had been saving, and she found the perfect occasion to use it. How she anointed Jesus also showed her love and devotion. It wasn’t enough that she used very expensive ointment; she used her hair to wipe Jesus’ feet. Her acts of love epitomize giving. Mary gave herself and her best.

In the same story, we find a taker. *“But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples (he who was about to betray Him), said, ‘Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’ He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it”* (verses 4-6). It is clear that Judas was a taker. It’s equally clear that he found no benefit from his greed, but only self-condemnation and despair.

In our prayers, let us ask our Lord to send His Holy Spirit to grant us giving and generous hearts. May we, like Mary, be willing to give ourselves and our best.

Prayer: Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, forgive me when I hoard what You’ve entrusted to me. Help me to understand that all I am and have are from Your hands. Enable me to see my money as a tool to be used in ways that give You honor and glory. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



Daily Devotions

for the whole family!

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts

WEEK 3

Generous and Ready to Share

1 Timothy 6:18

Sunday:..... “Giving Expresses our Gratitude”
Monday:..... “Giving Cheerfully”
Tuesday: “The Pump Needs to Be Primed”
Wednesday: “Whose Money Is it Anyway?”
Thursday: “Your Giving Speaks”
Friday: “Robbing God, Robbing Yourself”
Saturday: “Are You a Giver or a Taker?”

Week 3 - Sunday

"Giving Expresses Our Gratitude"

Scripture: *"You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God" (2 Corinthians 9:11-12).*



An old legend tells of a man visiting Africa who was amazed to find boys playing marbles with diamonds. The boys, however, found nothing unusual in this; this was the only kind of stones they knew.

There is a danger that the familiar can lose its value. What wonderful truths we hear each Sunday from our pulpit! What gracious gifts we regularly receive through the Sacraments! What a treasure is the Bible which we can own and read whenever we wish! What value do we place on these things of God? How long can God trust us as stewards of His Gospel if we treat it so lightly and neglect the opportunities to spread His Word?

In the New Testament, hardly any facet of Christian life is discussed more often than that of giving. The Bible teaches that it is the obligation of all, the rich and the poor, to give regularly, proportionately, and in the name of and for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that giving is an act of faith, of thanksgiving, and of gratitude for our God and for what He has done for us. Scripture tells us *"God loves a cheerful giver"* (2 Corinthians 9:7) and that He wants us to excel in this grace of giving (2 Corinthians 8:7). Thankfully, God tells us that He will make it possible for us to give when He tells us *"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).

Let us pray that we would once again comprehend the sacrifice that has won our eternal salvation. Let us tell others of the wonderful hope and love that can be found in Jesus. Let us place our gifts in the offering plates as though they were the nail-scarred hands of Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Father Almighty, please grant me the courage and generosity to share what You entrust to me with those in need and to extend Your kingdom. Help me to develop an attitude of gratitude. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Week 3 - Friday

"Robbing God, Robbing Yourself"

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

In the last book of the Old Testament, God uses the prophet Malachi to tell the people they were robbing God by not giving their tithes and offerings. Malachi asked the people, *"Will man rob God?"* (Malachi 3:8). This was more an accusation than a question. The people's hearts had turned away from God, and, because of their hard hearts, they gave blemished animals to sacrifice. Giving animals that were sick, lame, and blind was dishonoring God. God commanded the people to bring the whole tithe into God's house. Then, God promised, He would *"open the windows of heaven for [them] and pour down for [them] a blessing until there is no more need"* (Malachi 3:10). God promised an abundance of blessings for their faithful giving.

Just as it was clear that God's people were robbing Him then, so it is today that we rob God when we don't give Him our first and best. Being thankful for Who He is and what He has done and continues to do for us, we show our gratitude by giving generously and cheerfully. We can make the case that, when we don't give faithfully, we are also robbing ourselves. The people during Malachi's day were not prospering as they withheld from God.

God Who created us and owns all things does not need our gifts. Giving is for our benefit rather than His. God uses our ability and desire to give to help those in need and to extend His kingdom. Thus, the recipients of our gifts are blessed and we, as givers, are also blessed. Giving is God's way to help us grow spiritually and to enrich us. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"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). Jesus said, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35). In the words of Solomon, *"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"* (Proverbs 3:9-10). Throughout Scripture, we find God's special blessings to those who give faithfully and generously. Don't rob God and yourself.

Prayer: Dear Lord, You are the owner of all animals in the forest and the cattle on a thousand hills. Help me to live my life knowing that all things belong to You. You have created me and recreated me in my Baptism. May all that I do give You honor and glory. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



Week 3 - Thursday “Your Giving Speaks”

Scripture: *“But as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you – see that you excel in this act of grace also” (2 Corinthians 8:7).*



At the appointed time in each church service, time is set aside to worship the Lord with our financial treasures. This time is sometimes referred to as taking the collection. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians regarding the collection: *“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made” (1 Corinthians 16:2).*

The Greek word for collection means “to say something.” When you put your money into the offering or collection plate, you are saying something. You are making a statement about what you value as a person as well as what your priorities are. Your giving, or lack thereof, says something about your understanding of stewardship, because the proportion of your income that you give tells what kind of steward you are. Your giving, or lack thereof, indicates whether your treasure is here on earth or in heaven.

Only by God’s grace are we enabled to give. We tend to want to hang on to what we think of as ours, out of greed, insecurity, and for other reasons as well. However, we, as redeemed children of God through whom the Holy Spirit is working, can learn to rely on God instead of money for the provision of our needs.

Giving begins by acknowledging God’s ownership as well as trusting that God will provide. When you give generously, you are saying that you believe God to be the owner and provider of all things. May your faithful giving be a response to our faithful Lord Who has first given to you.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I thank You for Your provisions this day. Help me not to be anxious about tomorrow. Grant me the faith I need to share my gifts freely and generously. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

GOD OWNS EVERYTHING

Week 3 - Monday “Giving Cheerfully”

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

One day a second-grade boy came to school without his lunch. He did not think about it until his classmates started washing their hands and getting out their lunch boxes. He was a shy little kid, and he did not want to say anything because he was embarrassed, but his stomach was really growling. Against his will, his lip started to quiver and his eyes filled with tears. Soon his teacher noticed and then all the students, and he was forced to tell them his problem. No sooner were the words out of his mouth than his classmates were looking into their lunches. One student had two sandwiches and gave the hungry boy one. Another child had an apple and an orange and gave his friend his choice of fruit. Another had too many cookies (could that ever be?!) and shared them. In short, the hungry boy had a feast, all because of the generosity of others who had more than they needed.

This kind of thing happens often. One person is in need and others give so that the need is met. This is just as God has planned it. The Bible says that *“your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness” (2 Corinthians 8:14).* Sometimes we need to get, and, at other times, we need to give. God gives us the sun and the rain, homes to keep us warm and dry, food to nourish our bodies, clothes to wear, and many other things we could name. In other words, most of us have plenty. God uses those who have plenty to help others. Yet all of us should prayerfully consider giving part of the income we receive from work or other sources of income away. Our first gift should go to our church in the weekly offering. Certainly, we can think of many ways we would like to spend that money and maybe we’re not such cheerful givers. God can handle that problem, too. As we ask Him to help us give and to make us happy about giving, God will answer our prayers and change our attitudes. Everything God asks us to do, including giving, He helps us to do and gives us the right attitude about doing it.



Prayer: Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, thank You for Your generosity toward me. Help me to be generous with what You entrust to me. Grant me a giving and loving heart. I ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.



Week 3 - Tuesday “The Pump Needs to Be Primed ”

Scripture: *“Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your [income]; then your [wallets] will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine” (Proverbs 3:9-10).*

If you’ve ever been on a farm, you may be familiar with old-fashioned water pumps. When pumps have been out of use for a time, they can often be pumped fruitlessly. The problem can be solved by priming the pump with water, which expands the cork, bringing up water, rather than just air.

Life can be compared to that pump. In order to receive, one may need to give first. We have to put something into life to get something out of it. Paul stated this principle in Galatians 6:7: *“Whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”* Rewards and successes in life are earned; they result from hard work and time.

This principle of priming the pump, of sowing and reaping, applies to our giving as well. It is true that God provides for all. Jesus Himself said, *“For He [God] makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and unjust”* (Matthew 5:45). However, He also promised a special blessing on those who are generous in their giving: *“Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you”* (Luke 6:38).

As redeemed children of God, our main motivation for giving is our desire to respond with grateful hearts to Him for His marvelous gifts, especially the gift of His Son, Jesus, Who brought us forgiveness of sins and life eternal. We will desire to give, not for reward, but to honor Him with our lives and our time, talents and treasures. We will find that we cannot out-give God. Speaking through the prophet Malachi, God promised, *“Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. And thereby put Me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need”* (Malachi 3:10).

Accept God’s challenge: put Him to the test. Prime the pump.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for accepting me as I am and for Your desire to adopt me as one of Your children. Place in me a desire to please You, especially in how I give to You through the giving to my church and my generosity to those in need. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Week 3 - Wednesday “Whose Money Is It Anyway?”

Scripture: *“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1).*

Please ponder the following questions: Who owns the money that you have? Who owns the cash in your wallet? Who owns your paycheck or business income? Who owns your bank account? Who owns the equity in your house and car? Who owns the stocks, bonds, mutual funds and other investments in your portfolio? Who owns all this? Whose money is it?

You might say, “That’s obvious. It’s mine, of course. It’s my cash, my paycheck, my bank account, my house, my car, and my portfolio. If it’s in my possession or under my name, it’s obviously mine.” But not so fast. What if someone else actually owns it and you have it only in order to manage it for him?

It makes a huge difference who really owns the money you are handling. If the money belongs to you and you alone, then you can do with it whatever you like. But if the money is really someone else’s and you’re only managing it, then you have to handle the money the way the real owner wants, and you have to answer to the owner for how you manage his money.

And the truth about money is this: you don’t own a single penny. I don’t own a penny. Nobody on earth owns a penny. So, whose money is it? It’s God’s money – every penny of it. Whatever money we have is ours to manage, not to own. We must handle money God’s way and answer to Him for the way we deal with His money. May God grant us all the desire and ability to be faithful managers of all that He entrusts to us.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for the faith that You’ve given me that enables me to understand that You have given me the ability to earn money. Help me to understand that it is Your money and I’m a steward of it. Amen.

