

Stewardship

Inspiring a deeper understanding of true giving

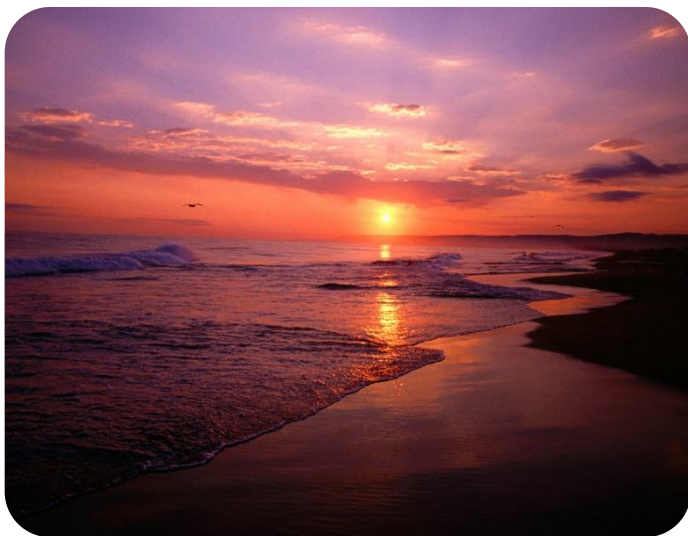


*Graced by the
Fruits of Our Labor*

Devotional Meditations

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*“Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were
serving the Lord, not men.”*

Ephesians 6:7

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A Stewardship Prayer

“This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more . . . so that you may be...filled with the fruit of righteousness...” (Philippians 1:9-10).

Stewardship is giving and helping and doing acts of service, but, far beyond that, it is being. Being children of God makes us his stewards. If we never do a single deed, we are still stewards, just not stewards who please God.

We do not choose to be stewards, and, on our own, we can do nothing to please God. It is only through faith that our good deeds are acceptable to him and only when they are done out of love in response to the love he has first shown us.

This is why the Apostle Paul prays that our love may abound more and more, but he is writing about love based on *“knowledge and depth of insight . . .”* This is love with strength, love that keeps us faithful, not only to do the tasks God places before us, but also love that discerns the best way to accomplish his will. This is God’s love that is ours through his Son Jesus who showed us what love is. This is love that his Holy Spirit matures in us through Word and Sacrament that we might be about our Father’s business. This is love that *“fill[s us] with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.”* This is love that redounds *“to the glory and praise of God”* (Philippians 1:9-10). This is love that bears *“fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God”* (Colossians 1:10). This is love that enables us to give wholeheartedly *“being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might...”* (Colossians 1:11).

Read Hebrews 11:6. How does faith relate to stewardship?

Read John 15:12. What standard does God set for our love?

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, thank you for your Word for it is the power of salvation for all who believe. Through your Word we are enabled to love even as you have loved. Through Jesus, your Son. Amen.

Christ in Me

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

As a Christian, I believe that God created all things. I believe that Jesus was born in a manger; he was without sin; he died on the cross for you and me; and he rose again to give you and me victory over sin and death. These truths we readily accept and embrace whole-heartedly. However, what I struggle with in my walk with Jesus is that I don't always live my life with the understanding that Jesus is here with me. In my humanity, I become independent. I forget sometimes that Jesus experiences my good and bad times with me, and that he is my constant companion and support.

In the way we live our lives, we can place Jesus in heaven rather than with us. Jesus gave us proof that he was alive after his crucifixion. Over a period of forty days, he appeared to the apostles, and he spoke to them. At his ascension, after Jesus was taken up into the clouds, the angels spoke to those who saw Jesus disappear into the clouds. “ ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky?’ ” (Acts 1:11).

In some ways, I find myself looking into the clouds and sky. I need to be reminded that Jesus is not off in some distant location. Yes! “*Christ lives in me.*” He is with us every minute of every day. He promises never to leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He knows us by name, and, in spite of our sinful ways, he will never stop loving us. His strength becomes our strength. He enables me to give it all I've got!

Read and meditate on Ephesians 3:14-19. What do these verses tell you about Christ's love for you?

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, we pray for your forgiveness when we do things our way, and when we don't always rely on you. We pray that you will use us as your ambassadors to tell others of the Gospel. In your name we pray. Amen.

Being Rich Toward God!

“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15).

We live in a society which is driven by the desire to have and spend money. In our culture, money and the things it can buy are king. People foolishly believe that money provides happiness and a lifetime of security, so they spend their time and resources chasing after it. Unfortunately, if they are successful in their pursuit, their lives are often filled with loneliness and despair.

The desire for wealth and prestige was just as prevalent in Jesus’ time, so these topics were the central focus of many of his illustrations. However, in his illustrations, we find a different focus toward money than our society has. Rather than being “rich toward money,” God wants us to be “*rich toward God.*” Money is to be used instead of being idolized. As Christian stewards, our motive is not to amass more money solely for our use and enjoyment. We understand that money is a tool that can be used for the furtherance of the Gospel.

Money is one of the subtlest attractions in our lives. At any age and at any time, greed and the love of money can overcome us. In the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21), Jesus tells about a greedy farmer who wanted to build bigger barns. He had no time for God or his neighbors. Jesus called him a fool. Luke 12:20 reads, “*But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’*”

At the end of the parable, Jesus warned his disciples as he warns us today that, if we store up money and things of this world for ourselves and are not “*rich toward God,*” we will not live in eternity with him. If we are not “*rich toward God,*” we will receive what we have prepared for ourselves ... nothing!

Read Luke 12:13-21. What kind of riches do you treasure?

Prayer: Lord, Help us to keep money in its proper perspective and grant us giving hearts. In your name we pray. Amen.

Love Compels Us

“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died” (2 Corinthians 5:14).

God seeks a relationship with us that is rooted in love. *“For God so loved the world that he gave . . .”* (John 3:16). God has never stopped pouring out his love for us. It is with the love that he gives to us that he wants us to return to him. His love for us compels us to give, serve, and honor him.

God is pleased when we serve him as faithful stewards out of love rather than out of obligation. To illustrate this, say I give my wife a dozen red roses on Valentine’s Day. Upon greeting her I simply tell her “Happy Valentine’s Day.” She says, “They are beautiful, but you shouldn’t have spent so much money.” I respond by saying, “Don’t mention it. Today is Valentine’s Day, and as your husband it is my duty to get a gift for you.” Of course, my wife wouldn’t be pleased. If I had responded differently by saying, “Honey, there is nothing I’d rather do with my money than use it for you because I love you so much,” her response would be quite different. It is the same money and the same gift. However, one gift is motivated out of duty and obligation and one is motivated out of love. God is pleased when we give to him cheerfully and willingly because we love him.

Abraham, King David, Zacchaeus, and Barnabas are just a few of the many people in Scripture who gave out of love for the Lord. The widow in Luke chapter 21, who gave her last coins, provides a wonderful example of how love compels us to give so sacrificially. *“ ‘I tell you the truth,’ [Jesus] said, ‘this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on’ ”* (Luke 21:3-4). Her love for Jesus was so great that she gave everything she had. Through faith, we understand God’s love and that love will compel us to give freely.

Read 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Why did the Macedonians give freely?

Prayer: *Lord, we thank you for your love that is given to us, not because we merit it, but because you are a God of love. Amen.*

Rating Your Effort

“Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men” (Ephesians 6:7).

On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the absolute best, how would you rate what you are doing as a steward in giving it all you’ve got? As you think about this for a moment, you will begin to realize that, by your own efforts, you will never come close to being a “10”. On God’s grading scale, we all rate a zero without him. Fortunately, God knows that we are not perfect. Since the fall of Adam, God has used ordinary sinful people to do the extraordinary.

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

God doesn’t expect us to be perfect stewards, but he expects us to have attitudes that desire to praise and serve him. Jesus didn’t say, “Blessed are those who achieve their potential and never make a mistake,” nor did Jesus say, “Well done, good and successful servant.” What Jesus did say was, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . those who mourn . . . the meek”* (Matthew 5:35). He also said, *“Well done, good and faithful servant”* (Matthew 25:23). In our humanity, it is easy for us to make a mess of things, but we please the Lord when we, through faith, willingly use our time, talents, and treasures to help others and his church.

The good news for us is that, in Christ, our “0” becomes a “10.”

Memorize Colossians 1:10. Why should we give wholeheartedly?

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for your strength that enables us to do what we can to give you honor and praise. In your name we pray. Amen.

The Lord Is with You

“God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5b-6).

Why are we so timid when it comes to sharing the Gospel with others? Would-be witnesses often cite rejection as a fear. Do you think Jesus has sympathy for us in this area? Isaiah wrote, *“He was despised and rejected by men . . . ”* (Isaiah 53:3). Jesus knows what it’s like to suffer rejection. He lived the phrase, “Been there, done that.” Others are afraid that they will be inadequate for the task; they do not know their Bibles well enough and their defense of the Gospel is weak. Again, is Jesus unaware of our state? Read the interchange between God and Moses in Exodus 3-4. Yes, we are inadequate; yes, there are mysteries in the Scriptures that we will not understand until we’re in Heaven; and, yes, we won’t have the proper words to say. Jesus said, *“Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time [the time when you need it] you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you”* (Matthew 10:19-20).

God loves us so much that he gave his only Son to die for us. That child was born into a powerless family living in an unstable world. Yet the will of God was accomplished. Will he not also accomplish his purpose through us, powerless and inadequate as we are? It is God’s plan and God’s work, not our own, and he reiterates his promise to be with us to accomplish his will through us. So give it your all!

Read Joshua 1:5-9. List as many times as you can find where God promises to be with us in all kinds of situations.

Prayer:** Dear heavenly Father, forgive us for our excuses. Help us to learn through the lives of Moses and Joshua and the prophets and disciples that you never forsake your people and that you are present to help us carry out your will on earth. Thank you for the opportunity to be stewards of the Gospel. Through Jesus Christ. **Amen.

Faithful Use of Money

“So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?” (Luke 16:11).

What we do with our money reveals to us and others what we value. When we make a purchase, give a gift, or make an investment, we communicate what we care about. Our priorities dictate how we handle and use money. What we do with money speaks louder than words.

Money has power. For example, have you ever been tempted or actually given the maitre d’ in a fancy restaurant some money after being informed that without reservations there is no seating available? Miraculously, a table can become available. Money gets people’s attention. Money talks, and, unfortunately, we often listen. Money is one of Satan’s best tools to separate us from a loving relationship with Jesus.

A major problem in our attitude toward money and our relationship with it is greed. Because of greed, we are never satisfied. Jesus said, *“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed . . .”* (Luke 12:15). Greed affects people of all ages and people at all income levels. We can have lots of money and not be greedy, or we can have little money and be very greedy.

As Christian stewards of God’s money, we are called to keep it in its proper perspective. Jesus said that we can’t serve two masters. We must choose between God and Money (Matthew 6:24). With God’s help, we can keep money from becoming too important. When we faithfully follow God’s will for our lives, we will use money as a tool to extend his kingdom.

Read Ecclesiastes 5:10. How old is the problem of greed? Read also Matthew 6:20. Should we be greedy for spiritual treasures?

Prayer: Lord, we pray that you will grant us proper attitudes regarding our money. We pray for discipline so that we may use it properly and faithfully. In your name we pray. Amen.

Our Offerings to God

“Honor the Lord with your wealth . . .” (Proverbs 3:9).

In the church service, the offering is an important part of our worship of God. God is honored when we faithfully and cheerfully give to him. In our offering, we are giving to the Lord through the church. Because our money represents our God-given time, inspiration, energy, and perspiration, we are giving, in reality, ourselves. It is as if we are putting ourselves into the offering plate.

When we give to God because of who he is and out of gratitude for what he has done and continues to do, he is pleased. The focus of our giving must always be on God rather than on institutions or people. To illustrate this point, there is a story about a church that had a fund-raising campaign to raise money for a new sanctuary. On their commitment Sunday, the members were ushered to the front of the church to place their pledges on the altar. One of the people moving forward was a young handicapped woman who had a very meager income. Over the years, the people in the congregation had come to love and admire her. As she reached the altar, the members of the congregation noticed that she placed a ring that had been given to her by her mother in the offering plate. After the worship service was over, the elders decided that this precious ring was too valuable for this lady to give. One of the elders went to her apartment to return the ring to her. In talking with her, the elder said, “Because of your financial condition, we’ve decided that we want to give your ring back.” Upon hearing this, the young lady started crying and gave the ring back saying, “This ring was not given to you; I gave it to Jesus!”

Read Luke 21:1-4. How is the woman in the illustration above like the woman in this account?

Prayer: Lord, we pray that you will grant us the faith to be faithful stewards of the treasures which you entrust to us. We pray that we will faithfully surrender to you our first and best so that through our giving you are honored and glorified. In your name we pray. Amen.

Whom Do You Serve?

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men . . . It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23-24).

It is a very human quality to desire the recognition of others. Should our names or faces be publicized for some achievement, we go out of our way to make sure we get copies of that publication to save and savor and show to our friends and relatives.

In our employment, if we don't receive the raise or promotion we think we deserve, we may begin to slack off on the job, coming in late, leaving early, taking long lunch breaks – in essence, stealing from our employers because we perceive them as not appreciating us.

This dissatisfaction results because of a faulty perspective. We have forgotten who our boss is! As we have focused on the situations we're in and on what should rightfully be ours, we have lost sight of whom we are to be serving.

The Christian steward needs to remember that all he is and has are gifts from God. Moses had to remind the Israelites of that fact also: *“But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth . . . ”* (Deuteronomy 8:18). The Apostle Paul, who earned his living by making tents, urged us to use our gifts from God to work with enthusiasm and with a whole heart in the realization that it is God we really are working for and that it is he who gives us our reward. Since you're working for God, give it all you've got!

Read Ephesians 6:5-6. How does this corroborate the thoughts expressed above?

Prayer: *Dear heavenly Father, help us not to complain about our work situations or our employers but help us to be grateful for our employment and strive to be of benefit wherever we work, keeping in mind that it is you we are serving. For Christ's sake. Amen.*

Giving God our Best

“Bring the best of the first-fruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God” (Exodus 23:19).

Giving is part of life. We probably give many people birthday, anniversary, Valentine’s Day, and Christmas gifts. As Christians, we also give to God who first gave to us. In contrast to our giving to other people, our gifts to God should represent our first and best because he is our creator and redeemer. Our giving to God reminds us of his sovereignty and expresses our gratitude to him for what Jesus did on the cross for us. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). Through giving, we express our love. We give to others because we love them. Our attitude towards or love for that person will determine what and how much we give. When we know the love and mercy of God, we become giving people who want to give to him by sharing with others. It has been aptly said that the mind grows by what it takes in, whereas the heart grows by what it gives out.

The account of the brothers Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:3-5) exemplifies how giving or lack thereof reveals what is in the heart. Abel raised animals while Cain worked the soil and harvested grain. Abel loved the Lord and gave him the first-fruits of his flock. However, Cain merely gave some of the harvest. The Lord honored Abel’s offering because of his loving and obedient heart, but he was not pleased with Cain’s offering.

As we examine our giving, we should ask ourselves whether God is getting our best or just our leftovers? Is our giving a proper response to God’s love for us? As we read and meditate on his word and participate in the Sacraments, God changes our hearts so that we are willing to give him our best.

Read 2 Chronicles 31:5. What was the attitude of these givers?

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for your tremendous love for us which enables us to give you our best. We thank you for your promise that you will never leave us nor forsake us. In your name we pray. Amen.

Boasting in the Lord

“Let him who boasts boast in the Lord” (2 Corinthians 10:17).

When my children were small, they would sometimes get a little carried away with self-commendation. “I got the best grade on the spelling test, “one would boast. “Well, I was the last one out in dodge ball,” the other would counter. “Don’t toot your own horns, boys,” I would reprimand and then read them Proverbs 27:2: *“Let another praise you, and not your own mouth.”* Soon just the words, “Toot, toot,” would be enough to curtail the boastful words of any of us.

The Apostle Paul would appreciate this practice, for he reminds us that our only reason for boasting lies in the Lord. Without his gracious gifts, we are nothing, have nothing, and can accomplish nothing. Let the “self-made man” examine his life, and he will see that without intelligence, ambition, ingenuity, and helpful people along the way, he would not have attained the success that he enjoys. All these are gifts from God. Well-being in any area of our lives can be traced back to the goodness of God who so tenderly watches over us and provides for our needs.

The question then is, “Are we boasting in the Lord?” As stewards of the Gospel, we have something to tell others about. Are we as eager to work into our conversations examples of what God is doing in our lives as we are to talk about how smart our kids are or what a good deal we got on the last cars we bought? When the subject of the weather comes up, as it always does, it is easy to boast in the Lord who has created the Heavens and the Earth and sends the snows, the rains, and the sunshine. Let us give wholeheartedly as we boast in the Lord so that his name may be made known to all and that the seed of faith may be planted and watered in the lives of those around us.

Read Psalm 34:1-3. How can boasting in the Lord cause the afflicted to rejoice? Read also Isaiah 40:21-31 and rejoice in God!

Prayer: You are indeed an awesome God! There is none to compare with you! Give me courage to boast in you. Through Christ. Amen.

Why Should We Give?

“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:3-4).

These are the words of Jesus who was warning us to avoid a very common temptation – that of a desire for recognition. Some can handle the praise of others, but most of us probably cannot.

Paul had a partner in ministry whose name was Joseph. You may know him by his more familiar name, Barnabas, which means Son of Encouragement. Barnabas *“sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet”* (Acts 4:36-37). All of us recognize that as a very generous act. It’s likely that word of this went through the early church and that he was spoken of very highly. This seems probable because of what followed his act.

Ananias and Sapphira, husband and wife, also sold some property. They, too, brought the proceeds and gave them to the apostles. The only difference was that they only pretended to give all the money while keeping a portion for themselves. Just as we recognized the generosity of Barnabas, we now recognize the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira. The punishment for this treachery was instant death! (Acts 5:1-11).

Aren’t you glad God hasn’t administered the same punishment to you for your impure motives and hypocrisy? It is no wonder Jesus spoke so strongly on this topic. He knows our human nature and wants us to avoid falling into these sins. Only by God’s grace can we give without thought of any kind of reward, only out of joyful response to what God has given us and done for us.

Read about another person who was more eager to please others than to please God (1 Samuel 15, especially verse 30).

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, help me to keep my eyes on the cross for therein lies my only cause for boasting. Forgive me when I search for human recognition, forgetting that I am only your servant. Through Christ I pray. Amen.

He'll Be Back!

“It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing [good] when he returns” (Matthew 24:46).

A man who worked the night shift received a lot of ridicule from his fellow workers who thought he took his job too seriously. “Hey, take a break,” they’d call to him as they lounged long past the normal coffee break period. “Who are you trying to impress? The boss doesn’t come in till morning.” He wasn’t oblivious to their remarks, and he was tempted at times to join them. It wasn’t easy to remain free of resentment, as he often had to complete their tasks in order to fulfill his own responsibilities. However, one night the employer stopped in unannounced. It didn’t take him long to size up the situation and issue some pink slips. Word had gotten around, however, about the one employee who was faithful in his work, and that employee was rewarded with a promotion.

Jesus made it very clear that he would ascend into Heaven, but that he would return again one day. Even he, the Son of God, does not know when that will be. What we do know, though, is that he has put us in charge until that day (Matthew 24:45). He has left us with specific tasks – feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick – and he has given us the gifts of time and talent and treasure necessary to carry out his will. Above all, we are here to spread the Good News of Jesus’ love for us and of his sacrifice for our sins that we might be forgiven and live with him forever in Heaven.

Jesus asked, *“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time?”* (Verse 45). God’s grace enables each of us to be that faithful and wise servant until our Master returns once more.

Read Jesus’ exposition on “The Sheep and the Goats” in Matthew 25:31-46. Explain the relationship between faith and works.

Prayer: heavenly Father, keep us faithful to our task of caring for others with the love of Jesus. Help us to please you in all we do in faith and love for you. Through Christ we pray. Amen.

Lessons from the Wise Men

“Magi from the east came . . . On coming to the house, they saw the Child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh” (Matthew 2:1-11).

We don't often think of the Wise Men as stewards, but we can learn some valuable stewardship lessons from their actions. First they came. They didn't stay in their homes, studying the ancient books and watching the stars and wondering. They followed the one star some distance in order to find the newborn King. They entered his house and bowed before him. They were kings in their own right, yet they submitted to a baby, because they acknowledged that baby to be who he was. They didn't come empty-handed, either. They brought expensive gifts to present to him. By all these acts, they worshiped him.

As stewards, we, too, are to seek the Lord where we can find him. We are to enter his house where we find him in Word and Sacrament. We are to submit to him in reverence, acknowledging him as King of kings. We are to come with gifts in our hands to offer him.

Will our worship require sacrifice? Look at the sacrifice of the Magi. They left their luxurious surroundings and endured difficult travel for many days, weeks, maybe much longer. They sacrificed their own power as they knelt in worship before the baby. They sacrificed their treasures. Does our sacrifice compare? (We haven't even mentioned the sacrifice of our Savior himself in coming to this sinful world!)

Search your Bible to find other examples of people sacrificially worshiping their Lord (Start with Matthew 26:6-13).

***Prayer:** Dear heavenly Father, forgive me for considering my own comforts and convenience and neglecting proper worship of you. Give me joy in sacrificial stewardship. Return to me the joy of my salvation that results in grateful service through all the gifts you've given me. Through Christ I pray. Amen.*

Live for Today

“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).

This is a verse every Christian steward has probably memorized. It seems to cover every aspect of stewardship. “Each one:” every Christian; “whatever gift he has received”: everyone has at least one gift and that’s just what it is – a gift; “to serve others”: the reason we have these gifts is to help others, not ourselves; “faithfully”: consistently, without fail; “administering God’s grace”: without God’s grace working within us, we would not be able to use the gifts he has given us; “in its various forms”: God is a God of diversity who gives different kinds of gifts to different people. This is pretty basic stewardship, but we should examine the verses surrounding this one (verses 7-9,11) as well.

Peter tells us the end is near. Some scoff and say that that warning has been repeated for thousands of years and we’re still here. While that is true, it doesn’t guarantee that Christ won’t come today and, when he comes for you, the end will not only be near, it will be here! In light of our mortality, how should we practice stewardship of our lives? *“Be clear minded and self-controlled,”* Peter says, *“so that you can pray”* (1 Peter 4:7). Thanking God, asking his forgiveness, and expressing your deepest thoughts to your Father in Heaven are necessary acts for the faithful Christian steward. Our strength to obey his command to love as we’ve been loved and to use our gifts to the greatest potential comes from communion with God as he speaks to us through his word and Sacrament and we speak to him in prayer. Christ in us enables us to give wholeheartedly!

Compare Peter’s exhortations with Paul’s as found in Romans 12:6-13. Note similarities and additions.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, giver of every good and perfect gift, help me to treasure your gifts to me and to use them diligently and joyfully in your service. Help me to live each day as if it were my last, that you might find me faithful when you come for me. Through Jesus. Amen.

Fellow Workers

“Help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the Gospel . . . whose names are in the book of life” (Philippians 4:3).

The women Paul was talking about were two servants of the Lord who were quarreling over something. What it is we aren't told, and it doesn't matter, for haven't we all been involved in similar situations? How can Christians, “*whose names are in the book of life,*” be fighting, we wonder? Once again we are made aware of our status as simultaneous saint and sinner.

What is important is that we handle the situation in a God-pleasing manner. Paul urges the Philippians to “*help these women.*” We are to help them to discover what God would have them do in order to resolve their differences and continue as fellow workers in the Kingdom of God.

How is this done? The verses following show us how we are to relate to each other as fellow workers as well as others to whom we are ministering. “*Rejoice in the Lord always*” (verse 4), is Paul's first counsel. “*Let your gentleness be evident to all*” (verse 5), he continues. “*Do not be anxious about anything, but . . . present your requests to God*” (verse 6). God, who has chosen us to be his stewards will also give us his peace, “*which transcends all understanding*” (verse 7).

Sometimes our greatest challenges as stewards present themselves within the community of believers. It would be good for us to follow Paul's counsel in 1 Corinthians 1:10 in order to meet these challenges.

Read Acts 15:36-41. What good came out of this parting of the ways? (See also 2 Timothy 4:11)

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, forgive us when we cause you grief through our arguing and dissension. Give us the mind of Christ that we may serve you with unity of spirit, to the praise and glory of your name. Through Christ we pray. Amen.

Help for the Helpless

“I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger” (Job 29:15-16).

Job *“was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil”* (Job 1:1). He was also extremely wealthy and blessed with a large family. Then disaster struck – disaster allowed, even suggested, by God – and Job lost everything. Job was confused, bewildered, and unable to understand why God would allow all this misfortune to come upon him when he was such an upright man. *“I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame . . . father to the needy . . . took up the case of the stranger.”*

We find this difficult to comprehend also. Is this the thanks we get for doing good? Shouldn't we be rewarded for the good we do?

It is true that, through faithful giving, we may receive material blessings, but that is only a possibility, not a promise, and certainly not a reason to give or love or serve. Because of our giving, God does promise us spiritual blessings, but, if receiving is our motive for giving, if the thought of reward is our incentive for serving, we are not showing love for God or others, but love for ourselves.

We cannot understand God's reasons for doing what he does. Job himself tried and concluded, *“Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know”* (Job 42:3). Let us emulate Job by helping the helpless and, as we give and serve and love, let us also ask God to give us a pure mind, a selfless attitude, and a true desire to glorify God and not ourselves. With God's help, we can give wholeheartedly in helping those in need.

Read Luke 6:35. What kind of reward should we expect for righteous living? Read John 16:33. What should we expect from this life?

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, we are quick to cry, “Why me?” when disaster or even inconvenience strikes us. Forgive us and help us to accept your will for us in all things. Help us to look beyond our own circumstances to see the needs of others and to give help gladly. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Cause for Thanks

“This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God” (2 Corinthians 9:12).

For all that God in Christ has accomplished for us, it is our duty to give him thanks and praise and to serve him by serving those around us. Just as we should give willingly of our financial blessings, so should we be eager to give of our time and abilities to help those in need.

Even though we have sinned and disobeyed our Lord, he continues to forgive us and pour out his blessings on us. So should we forgive others as we have been forgiven and continue to share with them out of our abundance. God promises that he will provide so richly for us that we will always be able to be generous with others.

There are many results from your selfless service, not the least of which is the joy our Lord gives us as we give of ourselves. It is one of God’s principles of giving that the giver benefits as much as the recipient. Of course, the one on the receiving end benefits as well. After all that’s the purpose of your serving. The Apostle Paul, in our text for this meditation, offers another and perhaps the most important outcome of giving and that is that your act gives cause for thanks and praise to be given back to God who has enabled the whole exchange! He writes that *“men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel . . . “* (verse 13).

What a marvelous God we have who makes all things work for our good and to the praise of his glory!

Study more closely Paul’s exposition on this principle of giving producing gratitude to God in 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

Prayer: *Our gracious heavenly Father, thank you for all you’ve given us and for the opportunity to serve you as we serve others. Help us to remember our calling; to love and serve and obey you in all we do as you give us grace to do. Through Jesus we pray.*
Amen.

Rejoice in Your Work

“And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy” (Nehemiah 12:43).

Nehemiah had been chosen by God to return to Judah to rebuild the city walls. There were many obstacles to overcome before Nehemiah could complete this work. First, as a servant to the king who had taken him captive, he had to be allowed to leave. Before he asked for permission, Nehemiah *“prayed to the God of Heaven”* (Nehemiah 2:4). God heard his prayer and even caused the king to grant Nehemiah’s requests for help in his work.

The enormity of the task before him became clearer as Nehemiah rode around the city at night before approaching the officials and others who would be his fellow-workers. Without minimizing the effort that would be required, Nehemiah told them *“about the gracious hand of [his] God upon [him],”* and together they began the *“good work”* (Nehemiah 2:18).

The work was further complicated by troublemakers, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, who did all in their power to subvert their plans and activities. Even when his life was threatened, Nehemiah continued his work, and, when it was finished, everyone, including their enemies *“realized that this work had been done with the help of our God”* (Nehemiah 6:16). Then came the return of many exiles, and the wall was dedicated. Once the work was done, it was time for celebration, *“and on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy . . . The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.”* Set before us in this account from Nehemiah is a pattern for work: God ordains it; God directs it; God blesses it; God completes it; God gives us joy in the undertaking.

Read the inspiring book of Nehemiah. Read also Ephesians 2:10.

Prayer: *Dear Father in Heaven. I know that you have a plan for my life and have prepared work for me to do. Help me to listen so that I can know your plan and give me courage to do it. Through Christ I pray. Amen.*

You Can't Take It with You . . . or Can You?

“Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death” (Proverbs 11:4).

First Thessalonians 5:2-3 informs us that *“the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night . . . destruction will come . . . suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman . . .”* These words do not evoke a pleasant image. We imagine chaos and fear. We do not imagine anyone holding out his wallet and offering to pay to get himself out of a dire situation. Even the wealthiest who have used their financial means throughout their lives to get what they want or need will realize that *“wealth is worthless in the day of wrath.”*

It is *righteousness [that] delivers from death.*” To that end our wealth can be rightly and effectively used. Jesus said, *“I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings”* (Luke 16:9). What this means for us is that, through our financial support of our churches’ ministry and mission, we can make a contribution to the building up of the Kingdom of God. We can have a part in the winning of souls as we support missionaries. We can reach out to the needy through our donations of food and offers of service. Then, when we reach Heaven, we will find ourselves *“welcomed into eternal dwellings”* by those *“friends”* we have made on earth. You see, by **giving it all we’ve got** in this life, we **can** “take it with us!”

Read the Parable of the Shrewd Manager in Luke 16:1-13. Can you relate that to Jesus’ command in John 21:17?

***Prayer:** Dear Lord, you have given us all we have. Help us not to grasp our money with clenched hands. Help us instead to find our treasure in Heavenly riches and to use our resources to further your Kingdom. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

Finish the Race

“However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24).

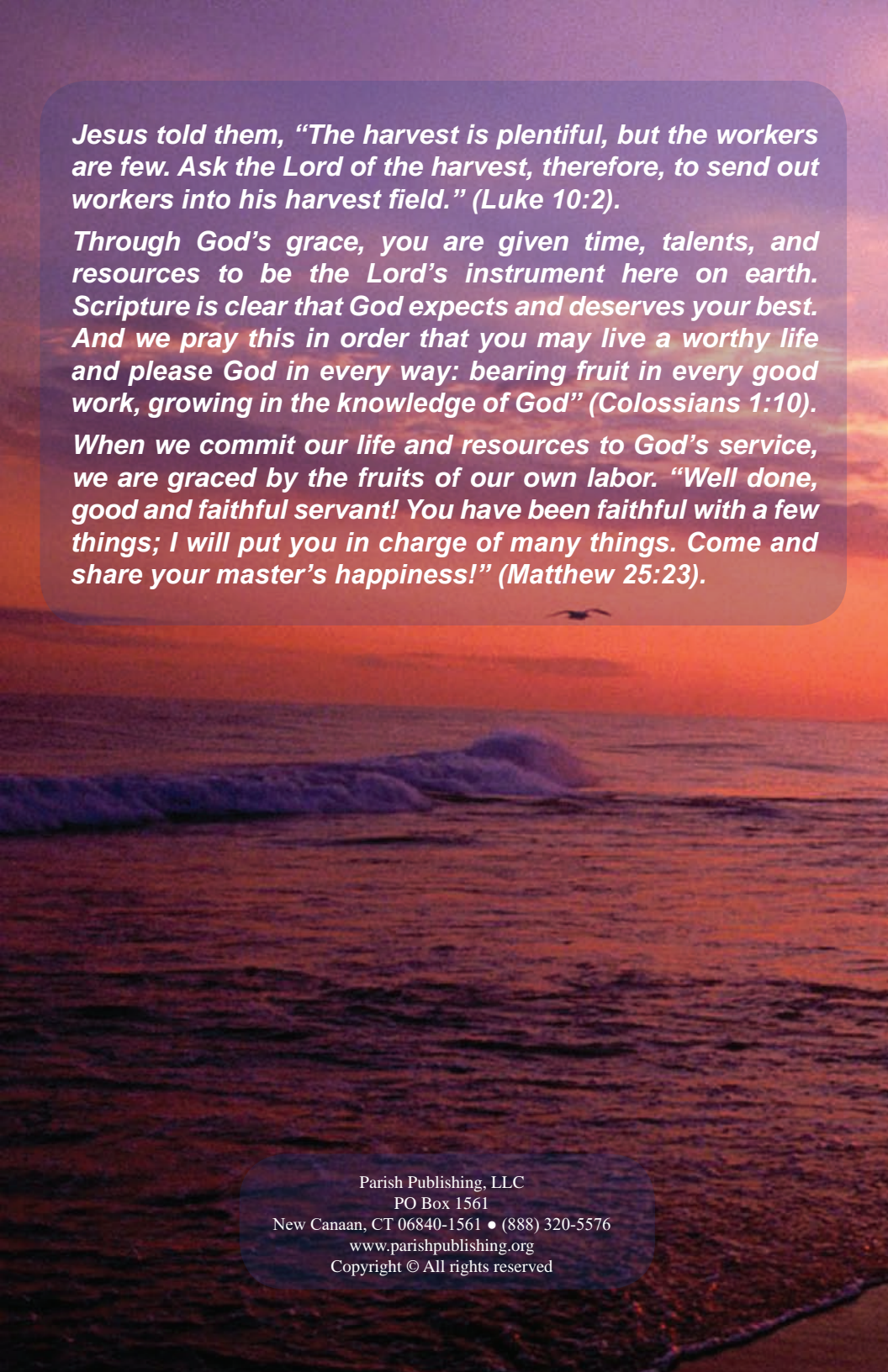
What is your life worth? To those who love you, the worth of your life is incalculable, but what would **you** say your life is worth? Paul said his life was worth nothing to him. He said that because he had a higher goal in mind. Paul lived for one purpose only, and that was to serve the Lord. His life was valuable only in that it was used to *“finish the race and complete the task.”*

Why are we put on earth? And why are we left here? Paul spoke of the *“earthly tent”* in which each of us lives and said we are *“longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling”* (2 Corinthians 5:1-2). This place is alien to believers who long to be in Heaven, our real home. There is a definite reason for our remaining here, however brief our time on earth may be. Paul said his life was worth nothing unless he completed the task the Lord had given him. Paul was talking about stewardship! He was talking about what we do while we wait to be transported to our final destination. He was talking about using all God has given us in this great task of *“testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”*

Just as Paul, having been called to faith by the Lord Jesus Christ, was a steward of God’s gifts, so are we. Let us pray, along with Paul, that we will *“finish the race and complete the task the Lord has given [us].”* Let’s **give wholeheartedly!**

**Read 2 Timothy 4:7-8. What promise do you find in these verses?
How was Paul – how are you – able to run this race?**

Prayer: *Gracious Lord, we are awed by the life of the Apostle Paul, and, yet he declared his life worth nothing to him! Help us to see that it is only by your grace to him and to us that either Paul or we can run this race set before us. In Jesus’ name.
Amen.*

A sunset over the ocean with a seagull in flight. The sky is a mix of orange, red, and purple, and the water is dark with white foam from the waves. A seagull is flying in the sky above the water.

Jesus told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Luke 10:2).

Through God’s grace, you are given time, talents, and resources to be the Lord’s instrument here on earth. Scripture is clear that God expects and deserves your best. And we pray this in order that you may live a worthy life and please God in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10).

When we commit our life and resources to God’s service, we are graced by the fruits of our own labor. “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” (Matthew 25:23).

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