

# Stewardship



Inspiring a deeper understanding of true giving

*Fulfilling God's Purpose!*  
**Devotional Meditations**

# ***Fulfilling God's Purpose!***



**“And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.”**

Colossians 1:10

## **Devotional Meditations**

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## *Building Relationships*

### *Joining Together*

**Scripture Reading:** *“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:15-16).*

**A**re you a joiner? Our insurance companies call us “members.” Some publications refer to their readers as being part of their “family of subscribers.” Regardless of what organizations we belong to, most of us have “joined” them in order to extract some kind of benefit for ourselves.

We may even join a church in order to derive some personal, temporal benefit, but God has something much greater in mind. It is through the Church that he pours out his gifts of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation by means of his Word and Sacrament. Nourished by these gifts, we become spiritually mature and stable (Ephesians 4:14). We *“grow up into Christ.”* From him, each member of the body receives his/her strength to do the work God gives him/her to do.

And God gives to us all the gifts we need, but how difficult it is for us to follow his plan! As sinners, we’re often quick to judge how others use their gifts but slow to use our own. We are tempted to compare our gifts, finding some to be more valuable than others. Yet St. Paul tells us that each is equally important in the functioning of the church.

How are these failings overcome? In worship Christ comes to us through Word and Sacrament to forgive our failings and to equip us to build up one another in love. St. Paul writes in Colossians 3:16, *“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom . . .”* Then we will grow up in Christ, the Head. Then we can more ably use our gifts to build each other up for service to God’s people and the spreading of the Gospel

to the lost.

**Prayer:** *Lord, thank you for blessing me with gifts to use in service to you through serving others. Help me always to acknowledge you as the source of all good things. Forgive me when I fail to be loving and obedient. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.*



## ***Love Filled the Need***

**Scripture Reading:** *“We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).*

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, 16). 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 our heavenly Father does, he does out of love for us, his dear children. Because of his love, 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 claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us,*” the Apostle John states positively, but his words that follow demonstrate what God’s love does: “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify 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.

*“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers”* (1 John 3:16). He gave us himself, and he wants us to give ourselves to him in return. Having given ourselves to him, we develop an intimate relationship with Jesus, and it becomes a joy and privilege to share our resources, our time, and our abilities with him by sharing them with others.

**Prayer:** *Father, I thank you for the gift of life. Please grant me your wisdom so I can see the foolishness of my ways. Help me, Lord, to use my time wisely so that I may glorify you. Guide me in your path. In Jesus’ precious name I pray. Amen.*



## ***Choosing Our Path***

**Scripture Reading:** *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”* (Matthew 6:33).

God wants us to follow him, but he gives us the freedom to choose what path we will take and whom we will serve. As we stand at various crossroads of life, God reaches out to us through his Word. In Jeremiah 6:16 we read, *“This is what the Lord says: ‘Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.’”* As Yogi Berra said, “When you get to a fork in the road, take it.” The road we take will have eternal consequences. Will we choose God’s way or the ways of the world? God’s Word tells us how to make that choice. By the power of God’s Spirit, our answer can be like Joshua’s. *“But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in*



*whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).*

Joshua’s choice was that he and his family would be servants and stewards of the Lord. When you reach the crossroads in life, you will hear God’s call, “Follow me.” The call to serve yourself and the ways of the world will be loud and boisterous. If you answer God’s call and follow the ancient path, as Jeremiah recommended, you will turn away from your self-interests and focus on ways to serve the Lord. Your lifestyle will reflect your relationship with him. As followers of Jesus, we acknowledge God’s ownership and love. We become stewards of what he entrusts to us. We see others as brothers and sisters in Christ. We live with an eternal perspective.

**Prayer:** *Lord, grant me the same courage and conviction you gave to Joshua. Thank you for the faith you give me to follow your will. Let your love and grace flow through me to others. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.*



## ***Living with Conviction***

**Scripture Reading:** *“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness” (Colossians 2:6).*

**F**or sports fans, March Madness is an exciting time of the year. Because of their intense interest, people spend many hours watching their favorite teams playing in the NCAA College Basketball Tournament. Among basketball fans, there is strong dedication to the sport of basketball.

We all have passions that occupy our time, thoughts, and energy. Many people have different interests than we do. Some of us are

runners, others like to hunt, or travel, while still others are avid readers. Some of our interests may be noteworthy in that they can impact life itself, or they may be very insignificant as far as importance in life.

Perhaps at one time we had little more than passing interest in spiritual things. Then, as the Holy Spirit worked in us through God's Holy Word and Sacraments, our commitment deepened. An intimate relationship with Jesus developed and was manifested by the use of our time, talents, and money for his purposes. We willingly started devoting time daily to the reading of God's Word as well as spending time with him in prayer. We found ourselves eager to attend weekly church services and Bible studies so we could worship the Lord and receive his nourishment. A desire to commit a generous portion of our money to the Lord through giving to our churches and to others was born in us. Our lives and blessings were turned over to God to be used in his service.

Our relationship with the Lord is God's gift to us. God calls and chooses us, and he gives us faith to follow him. Paul wrote, "*For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our Gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake*" (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5). May God bless and deepen our conviction for him.

**Prayer:** *Good and gracious heavenly Father, thank you for your presence in my life and for your protection and guidance. Place within me passion and boldness to share the Gospel with all people. In the name of Christ I pray. Amen.*





## *Mutual Edification*

**Scripture Reading:** *“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).*

*“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Ephesians 4:29).*

God has provided a support system for us as Christians through His Body, the Church. Within this Body, we participate together in Word and Sacrament along with speaking words of exhortation and encouragement to one another. It is necessary at times to speak Law in order to correct and discipline, and it is essential to speak Gospel to bring forgiveness and peace to the repentant. Fulfilling these duties complies with the command we receive through Paul who tells us to *“build each other up.”*

Traditionally, we have depended on our pastors and elders to do this task of edifying, or building up. Possibly we are hesitant to carry out this obligation. We may feel inadequate, or we may shy away from confrontation. However, we are exhorted to be God’s instruments through which he will work. *“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation . . . And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).* As members of God’s family, we have the privilege and responsibility of encouraging others. As his ambassadors, we can be sure he will equip us for every task he requires us to complete.

If we truly are inadequate due to lack of knowledge of God’s Word, there is a simple remedy for the problem. Start reading your Bible regularly and begin attending an adult Bible class! If there is no class that meets your needs, ask your pastor or elder and take steps necessary to prepare you to be Christ’s ambassador.

**Prayer:** Lord, I thank you for my church and Christian friends. Help me to be an encouragement to them by sharing your love for me with them. Allow me to be a light in a dark world. In Jesus' precious name I pray. **Amen.**



## ***Expressing Your Love***

**Scripture Reading:** “*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8).

**T**he three words “I love you” are very powerful. Love is expressed not only in words but also in action. In fact, it has been said, “Talk is cheap.” To tell someone that you love him is good to do, but love also needs to be expressed by what we do and how we act. As God’s people, we convey love through our giving and serving.

In God’s Word, he tells us how much he loves each of us and then proves it by giving his Son to die 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). Jesus gave his life for us and he keeps on giving. We respond to his love for us through our giving. When we give faithfully of our time, talents, and treasures, we show our love for Jesus.

God takes love seriously. He loves us, and he expects us to love one another. Jesus said, “*Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another*” (John 13:34). We love others by serving them. Serving communicates love. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

The love that Jesus places in our hearts can be our fuel to make a difference not only in our lives, but in the lives of those around us. It is important to express our love as we thank God for his abun-

dant grace, mercy, and blessing, but our words must be supported through the greater expression of our love as seen through our giving and serving, as God gives us grace to do.

***Prayer:*** *Dear heavenly Father, thank you for loving me in spite of my sinful ways. Help me to live a life that is worthy of your tremendous sacrifice for me. I thank you for my gifts. Help me to use them in ways that give you honor and glory and benefits others. In your precious name I pray. Amen.*





## *Witnessing for Jesus*

### *Becoming Workers in the Harvest*

**Scripture Reading:** *“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field’ ” (Matthew 9:35-38).*

Jesus knows that people need a shepherd. Jesus said to his disciples, as he speaks to us, *“Ask the Lord of the harvest . . . to send out workers into his harvest field.”* It is God’s will that all people come to salvation (2 Peter 3:9). The harvest field belongs to the Lord, and God will see that the people needed for the harvest will be available.

God invites all of us to be his workers in the harvest field. He gives us the privilege of using our time and our talents as he involves us in this important work. Through Christ, we can do work that will be blessed into eternity. We begin this all-important work by praying for a successful harvest with many workers being sent into the harvest field. God’s harvest field is always ripe with people needing to hear of Jesus’ love.

As we pray for God’s work to be accomplished through workers in the field, we are, in essence, allowing him to make us the answers to our own prayers. God will find ways to use our gifts in ways that will touch others. We are encouraged to pray for God’s work to be done, and to be involved in doing this work personally. God will give us the strength to overcome the excuses that often plague us such as “I don’t have the time” or “I’m not equipped.” As Paul wrote, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for your love, grace, and mercy. There are many dying people who need to hear the Good News. Help me to be an instrument through which you can work. I give you all the praise and glory. In Jesus' name I pray. **Amen.**



## ***Let Your Light Shine***

**Scripture Reading:** Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16).

We are dull, dead sinful creatures with no light of our own. The world itself was dark and empty, we read in Genesis 1:2, until God spoke those words, “‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Genesis 1:3). What the Creator God did for the earth, the Redeemer God does for us humans. John, the apostle, tells us how this has come about: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world” (John 1:1, 14, 9).

We are to keep that light within us burning brightly and shining for the entire world to see. Jesus said, “You are the light of the world . . . let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16). This we can accomplish on our own no more than we could put our own



lights within us. God is light. As Jesus' followers, we reflect the light that comes from him. Receiving God's light, our light is intended to give light to others. Our Sanctifier God nourishes us through Word and Sacrament and equips us to be that "light on the hill." He is the one who enables us to obey Paul's command: "*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light*" (Ephesians 5:8). Those who live in God's light produce good fruit by which God is glorified.

**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, you are the only true light in a darkened world. May your light that shines within me be a light to others. I pray for steadfast faith that will always seek to do your will and fulfill your purposes for my life. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*



## ***Why Witness?***

**Scripture Reading:** "*I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.*" Philemon 6

**P**aul, a prisoner, writes an appeal to Philemon, one who was or had been a slaveholder, one who kept others in chains. Yet Paul refers to him as "our dear friend and fellow worker" (verse 1). Thus we know that Philemon is a believer. Paul informs Philemon that he gives thanks because of Philemon's faith in Jesus and his love for other believers.

Then he offers the exhortation we read above: "*I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith.*" Surely we understand Paul's hope. As stewards of the Gospel, we are to be busy at fulfilling the Great Commission to go to all nations, baptizing and teaching (Matthew 28:19-20). We know that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). We know that we have the "beautiful feet" that bring the Good News of Jesus

Christ (Romans 10:15).

In writing to Philemon, though, Paul states another reason for witnessing: “so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.” This understanding that flows from witnessing about our faith benefits both the one witnessing and the one hearing the Good News. Certainly when one hears and believes the Word of God and is brought from death to life, he begins to understand all the good things he has in Christ. The speaker also profits, for, as he shares God’s Word, his own understanding and knowledge are increased as his faith is strengthened through obedience to God’s command.

Let us pray that we might “be active in sharing [our] faith” for the saving of souls as well as our own edification.

**Prayer:** *Dear heavenly Father, thank you for the trust you place in me to be a witness and an ambassador for you. Use me as a witness to those who need to hear of your amazing love and unsurpassable mercy. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.*



## ***The Power of the Word***

**Scripture Reading:** “*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed*” (2 Corinthians 4:7-9).

**T**he Word of God has been described in many ways, but each description carries the connotation of worth and value and power. The Word, we read in Hebrews 4:12, is “*living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword . . .*” The prophet Isaiah declared that the Word that goes out of our Lord’s mouth “*will accomplish what [he] desire[s] and achieve the purpose for which [he] sent it*”

(Isaiah 55:11). By the word of his mouth, God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1, 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). God himself called his word a fire and a hammer (Jeremiah 23:29). In Ephesians, Paul wrote about the Armor of God, topping off all the defensive weapons God gives us with one offensive weapon, “*the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God*” (Ephesians 6:17).

In our reading, we find Paul describing the Word as a “treasure in jars of clay.” This great treasure is God’s Word. It lives inside us; it strengthens us; it encourages us; it gives us hope; it never fades away; it enables us to persevere. Indeed this is a treasure!

Many don’t know that this treasure exists. They may have it beautifully leather-bound and on a shelf in their homes, but they don’t realize they have a priceless treasure in their possession. It is up to us who have this treasure to share it, for it can never be used up, never decrease in value, and never lose its newness and vitality.

***Prayer:*** Lord, thank you for your Word through which you speak to me and all people. Through your Word and the working of the Holy Spirit, my faith is strengthened for which I thank you. Help me to spend time each day reading and meditating on it. Through Christ I pray. ***Amen.***



## ***Sharing the Good News***

**Scripture Reading:** “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8)

God’s plan for his people has always been for us to take responsibility for sharing the Good News. When he called Moses to lead the Hebrews out of slavery, he told Moses to tell the people, “*I am the Lord . . . I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will*

*redeem you with an outstretched arm . . . I will take you . . . and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God . . .”* (Exodus 6:6-7). When the Philistines terrorized the Israelites by sending Goliath out before them every morning and evening for forty days, God sent David, a young shepherd boy, to answer the giant’s taunts. How did David respond to Goliath’s threat to “*give [his] flesh to the birds . . . and the beasts . . .*”? Defiantly he said, “. . . *I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me . . . and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel*” (1 Samuel 17:44-46).

What we want people today to know is the same message: there is a God who cares for us and is almighty and powerful, yet loving and compassionate. This is the God who, while we were still sinners, sent us a Savior to redeem us from our slavery to sin (Romans 5:8). This is the God, who, at just the right time, “*sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons*” (Galatians 4:4-5).

Through Christ, we know the Father. Through Christ, we can come to the Father. Through Christ, we have life everlasting in Heaven. This is the Good News that we as stewards of the Gospel will want to share. May God give us courage to use the opportunities he gives us.

***Prayer:*** *Lord, forgive me when I’ve been timid and have wasted opportunities to share the Gospel with others. Grant me courage and boldness and give me the words I need to tell others how much you love them. Thank you for your love and patience. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.*



## *The Fields Are Ripe*

**Scripture Reading:** *“I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest” (John 4:35).*

Easter is the most joyous, the most victorious celebration of the Church year. It is an opportune time for us as stewards to “*declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples*” (Psalm 96:3)! What deed can be more marvelous than the resurrection of our Lord from the dead? Yes, “*Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*” (1 Corinthians 15:20), and we, too, shall be raised from the dead to live with him forever in Heaven.

As stewards of the Gospel, we have this good news to tell. Jesus reminded us of the urgency of the proclamation of his redemption. We read in John 4:35 that Jesus said, “*Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.*” There is a need for us to tell this message effectively, passionately, clearly, and with perseverance so that all may be led by God’s grace to respond to Christ’s gift of salvation.

Along with pronouncing this good news with our own lips, we have a responsibility to give. We respond to the needs of others by taking groceries to our food banks, by contributing funds to be used for helping families with various financial difficulties, by sending money to areas hit by natural disasters, such as floods and hurricanes. What greater need is there than to provide financial support for those who minister to the greatest need of all—the spiritual needs of Jesus’ lost sheep? Our giving should be done willingly, cheerfully, generously, even as God in Christ has given to us.

Jesus promised that, as we carry out his commission to “. . . *make disciples of all nations . . .*,” he will be with us “. . . *to the very end of the age*” (Matthew 28:19, 20). Paul reminded us that “*God is able to make all grace abound to [us], so that in all things at all times, having all that [we] need, [we] will abound in every good work*” (2 Corinthians 9:8). Every day, the Holy Spirit provides opportunities

for us as stewards to tell the good news and to give according to our abilities that the message of God's love in Christ may be spread throughout the world.

***Prayer:*** Lord, open my heart and eyes for opportunities to share the Gospel. Help me to be a witness by what I say and do. May all that I do give you praise and glory. In Jesus' name I pray. ***Amen.***





## *Living as Servants*

### *Are You Living as a Channel or Terminal?*

**Scripture Reading:** *“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him”* (John 7:38).

**T**hroughout life we receive and give. We must receive in order to give and live at all. God gives us all the resources and talents to make living and giving possible. Keeping what we have brings little or no blessing to us, certainly none to others. If we consume all of our time, possessions, and energy ourselves, we become empty, spiritually dead, unhappy, friendless people.

The need to give and the benefits of giving can be illustrated by contrasting the Sea of Galilee with the Dead Sea, both of which are located in the Holy Land. The Sea of Galilee receives water from the northern mountain streams, which then flows into the Jordan River. Because the sea allows water to flow through it, it lives. On its banks, flowers bloom and bushes grow. Birds and animals drink from its waters. People swim in it and enjoy water activities. Nearby communities enjoy the waterfront.

The Jordan River flows south into the Dead Sea, which, having no outlet, keeps all the water it receives. The Dead Sea simply takes without giving. The water has become stagnant with no birds or animals willing to drink from it. No fish live in it. No plants spring up around it. There is no life; in fact, the water destroys life. The very fact that the sea takes without giving has created death in and around it. It is a reservoir rather than a channel. Just as there are these two different kinds of seas, there are two kinds of people. People who share nothing and serve no one act as terminals. They will end life unhappy, empty, and stagnant. Others are like the Sea of Galilee, a channel which receives and gives. Our purpose is to be channels of God’s love and goodness. By his grace, God transforms us into generous givers willing to allow his blessings to flow through us to others.

When we focus on “I, me, mine, and myself,” we take care of “number one” to the exclusion of others. Since others are not important, we don’t look for opportunities to help or serve.

Individuals who act as channels of God’s love and gifts put self aside. Jesus said, “*Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him*” (John 7:38). God refills serving people with more love, time, gifts, and abilities to share with others. “*And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work*” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, help me to be your mouth, hands, and feet in service to others. Let me not hoard your blessings but allow them to flow through me to others. Amen.*



## ***Living to Serve***

**Scripture Reading:** “*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love*” (Galatians 5:13).

**A**s God’s people, we are urged to “fix our eyes on Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2). The writer to the Philippians asserted, “*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 2:5). What is that attitude? When we “fix our eyes on Jesus,” what will we see?

We see the Suffering Servant about whom Isaiah wrote. The one who “*took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows*”; the one who was “*pierced for our transgressions . . . crushed for our iniquities . . . and by [whose] wounds we are healed*” (Isaiah 53:4, 5).

We see the Son of Man who, in his own words, “*did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Matthew 20:28). This is the Son of Man who lived a childhood in

obedience to his Father and to the earthly parents who were chosen for him. This is the Son of Man who preached and taught, who healed the sick, confronted the wicked, and comforted the despairing. This is the Son of Man who calls us to “*deny [ourselves] and take up [our crosses] and Follow [him]*” (Matthew 16:24).

We follow him in paths of service. Just as Jesus did, we serve when it might be inconvenient or when the person needing our service is unlovely. Just as Jesus did, we put others first. Just as Jesus endured the cross “*for the joy set before him*” (Hebrews 12:2), we, too, will find joy and fulfillment in serving in Jesus’ name.

**Prayer:** *Lord, just as you came not to be served but to serve, grant me a serving heart. Help me to see opportunities to share your grace and love with others. Help me to put my love for you into action. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.*



## ***Putting God’s Words into Practice***

**Scripture Reading:** “*Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fail, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand*” (Matthew 7:24-26).

God not only wants us to hear his Words, he expects us to put them into practice. “*Dear children,*” wrote the Apostle John, “*let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth*” (1 John 3:18). We put God’s words into practice by doing that which we were created to do: “*good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*” (Ephesians 2:10). Good works are evidence of

the faith that we have. James wrote, “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:17). Through faith, we are enabled to understand God’s will and equipped to do it. As wise people who build their foundations on the Rock, we . . .

- are poor in spirit.
- are peacemakers.
- are salt and light.
- don’t resist an evil person but turn the other cheek.
- love our enemies.
- give to the needy without seeking recognition.
- pray humbly and sincerely.
- serve only the Lord rather than money.
- serve others.
- store up treasures in Heaven.
- trust God to provide for our needs.

With our lives built on the Word of God, we will be able to withstand all the dangers and temptations in life. God will protect us and see us through all difficult circumstances and empower us to be the servants he has called us to be.

***Prayer:*** *Lord, just as you came not to be served but to serve, grant me a serving heart. Help me to see opportunities to share your grace and love with others. Help me to put my love for you into action. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.*



## *Called to Serve*

**Scripture Reading:** *“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).*

**P**aul 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). The instruction is clear that, as sinners saved by grace alone, we are to render service and not sit in idleness.

In Matthew 20:28, we read, “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”” The very nature of Jesus, as revealed in Scripture, is the example that should be our encouragement to serve others. 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 a life 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 willing to live lives in faithful service.

As God’s people, we are called to love God with all of our hearts, souls, and minds and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37). The key to our service is to live with an attitude that is God-centered. With God as our focus, we will want to love and serve him and others. Unfortunately, because we are by nature self-centered, our interest is in serving ourselves instead of serving others. When we succumb to the temptation of putting ourselves first, we place ourselves in the center of life, and we become less interested and ultimately unaware of the needs of others. God’s grace turns us around. In Christ, he has put us first, so now we are freed to put others first.

Jesus said in Luke 4:8, “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.” Our prayer is that God will enable and strengthen us to put others first as we faithfully respond to his call to serve.

**Prayer:** *Lord, thank you for calling me to be one of your stewards. Grant me faith to be faithful in my stewardship. Help me to use my talents and gifts in service to you and others. You are the source and owner of all things. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*



## ***What's on God's Refrigerator Door?***

**Scripture Reading:** *"May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant" (Psalm 119:76).*

If you are a parent or grandparent or even just an admirer of a young child, your refrigerator door may be the showcase of one or more paintings or drawings. To a visitor, that work of art may be just a mass of scribbles, but to the one who loves the child it is a masterpiece. We love the gift because of the person who made it and gave it to us. It is precious to us because it was a gift from the heart. The motive of the child was pure and loving.

Perhaps our gifts to God are similar. We're such amateurs, such babies. God could accomplish his work so much more efficiently by himself. Our works, even if monumental by human standards, are just scribbles if God would judge them in relation to his ability. Because he loves us, though – and loves us far more than a parent or grandparent loves a child – he looks at our works with eyes of love. He sees our hearts and knows we are motivated by love and faith, and he is pleased. He is so pleased that, if he had a refrigerator, he'd use it to display our works done for his glory.

God has given us gifts to use for this purpose – to glorify him by serving others. In 1 Peter 4:10 we read, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." God has seen to it that each of us has something to offer. He gives us the privilege of serving and then



provides all that we need to do so.

Just as the budding art student improves with the help of a teacher and with appropriate tools to create his work, so does God teach us through his Word how to fulfill our purpose and how to improve our service. So also he gives gifts of time and money and talents and then his Word and Sacrament to strengthen us for service.

**Prayer:** *Lord, by nature I am a selfish and self-centered person. Change me into a person who sees others as brothers and sisters in Christ. Help me to love others. Amen.*



## ***A Life of Service***

**Scripture Reading:** *“Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality” (Romans 12:13).*

Whatever our position or status in life we are called to share God’s love in acts of service to all people. “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31) is a command that reaches out to everyone. Paul exhorts his readers, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10).

Lydia was one believer who lived out Paul’s admonition: “Practice hospitality.” Luke writes that, when Paul and those traveling with him gathered outside the city gate, Lydia was one listening. She “was a worshiper of God [and] the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.” She responded first by being baptized along with the members of her household and then immediately inviting all the missionaries to “come and stay at [her] house” (Acts 16.11-15). What a model of hospitality, sharing, and serving this early Christian steward is!

We may find it easy to write a check, a somewhat simple way to

show kindness for another, but how willing are we to open up our homes and lives to those who spend their lives in service to God's Kingdom? The writer to the Hebrews gives us a list of ways to serve others: "Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering" (Hebrews 13:1-3). A life of service brings joy to those serving and those being served and to the heart of God as well.

***Prayer:*** *Dear Lord, you want me to love all people. Place in me a loving and serving heart. Encourage me to roll up my sleeves, get involved, and be in service to others. Amen.*



# *Give Joyfully and Generously*

## *Blessings through Giving*

**Scripture Reading:** *“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:38).*

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

*While Jesus was in Bethany . . . a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.” Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to Me. I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her” (Matthew 26:6-13).*

What an uplifting account this is! Can we imagine the thoughts going through Jesus’ mind as this woman gave such a precious, costly gift to him? Expensive, extravagant, wasteful, some thought, and vehemently expressed their thoughts. Sometimes it takes something out of the ordinary, something impractical to show our gratitude, to offer encouragement. We know Jesus was encouraged. “She has done a beautiful thing to me,” he said and then rewarded her with words that did more than compliment; they lifted her up. The incident is recorded for our benefit as well, for her example of encour-

agement is a lesson for us. Her selfless act of giving resulted in her being encouraged in her faith, even as she had encouraged her Lord.

This account truly illustrates Proverbs 11:25. “A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.” As Christians, we should give without reservation, without expectation of receiving anything in return. Our gracious God, who loves us so much, thrills to reward us. He has put within us the joy of giving and finding reward in another’s pleasure.

**Prayer:** *Lord, I ask that your Holy Spirit would change me into a giving and generous person who wants to worship you with my life and blessings. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.*



## ***Glorifying God through Giving***

**Scripture Reading:** *“He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God” (Psalm 50:23).*

**O**ur chief purpose in life is to glorify God. We glorify God by how we live our lives and by giving him our thank offerings or gifts. Gifts given in faith and thankfulness honor and please God. In fact, through God’s Word, we learn, “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6). It is through faith that we as believers give our gifts of gratitude, and it is by grace that God gives his gracious gifts to us.

In Psalm 50:9-12 we read, “I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it.” The world and everything in it belongs to God so he has no need of our

gifts. However, he has chosen to use us as his channels to others. We are God's hands, feet, and mouth. Through us, he feeds the hungry, gives water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, shelter to the homeless, and care for the handicapped.

God invites us to join in the work of missions, not because he needs us but because he wants to give us the privilege of working with him. If we choose to ignore God's invitation, we are the poorer for it. Either with or without us, God's kingdom will move forward.

When we give our offerings to God through our churches, we need to remember that the only gifts that are pleasing to him are those gifts that are given out of faith and love.

**Prayer:** *Dear heavenly Father, thank you for calling me to be your steward. Use me as your instrument to reach out to others. Help me to hold onto the material things you've given me loosely so I can give generously. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.*



## ***How Much to Give?***

**Scripture Reading:** *"For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will" (2 Corinthians 8:3-5).*

**H**ow much should I give? we ask ourselves. Unfortunately, from our selfish perspective, we may really be asking: "How little can I give and still call it a gift?" Giving is not something that comes naturally to most of us. By nature, we are selfish people who are interested only in the accumulation of more and more things for our own comfort and enjoyment. Without a relationship with Jesus, our

giving is nominal at best.

In our Scripture reading, Paul used the giving of the Macedonians as a model for the people in Corinth as the Corinthians considered their gifts to the distressed Christians in Jerusalem. The Macedonians pleaded for the privilege of sharing. They did not know the people in Jerusalem personally, but they wanted to help fellow believers. The Macedonians gave sacrificially beyond their ability. They didn't give their leftovers or what they could afford. They gave to the extent that it impacted their lifestyle.

The Macedonians gave because they were new creations in Christ. Paul wrote, "They gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will" (verse 5). Giving came naturally after God had control of their hearts. As we spend time in God's Word and participate regularly in the Sacraments, God will grant us hearts that will plead for the opportunity to give.

**Prayer:** *Good and gracious Lord, grant me the same passion to give as you gave to the Macedonians. Help me to be eager to use my gifts and resources to extend your kingdom and to share with others. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.*



## ***Proportionate Giving***

**Scripture Readings:** "A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord" (Leviticus 27:30).

*"On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income . . ." (1 Corinthians 16:2).*

**F**rom the beginning, God has given us all we need for our physical and spiritual lives. God is the creator, owner, and provider of all things. God gives us 100 percent, whereas we are called to return only a portion of our blessings to him. One of the first references in



Scripture to proportionate giving was when Abram gave Melchizedek, the King of Salem, a tenth of his harvest (Genesis 14:17-20). In Genesis 28:10-22, Jacob promised to give God a tenth. These verses show that Abram and Jacob gave the tenth before God made it a requirement.

Proportionate or percentage giving gives all Christians an equal privilege and opportunity to share in extending God's kingdom. Since God blesses us in different ways and amounts, the sizes of our gifts will vary, but God directs us all to give in proportion to our blessings. *"For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have"* (2 Corinthians 8:12). The person giving \$100 from \$1,000 of income is just as faithful as someone giving \$10,000 with earnings of \$100,000. We can give proportionately whether we are rich or poor.

We are able to give proportionately by faith. The proportionate percentage we give will be determined more by our spiritual maturity than by our financial ability. To give generously is a leap of faith, and it shows our trust and dependence on the Lord.

***Prayer:*** Lord, thank you for being so generous with me, especially for the giving of your one and only Son. Help me to show my gratitude to you through my giving and serving. In Jesus' name I pray.  
***Amen.***



## *Warnings about Money*

**Scripture Readings:** *“Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless” (Ecclesiastes 5:10).*

*“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’ ” (Hebrews 13:5).*

In 1 Timothy, Paul alerted his spiritual son Timothy about the consequences of loving money. “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Timothy 6:9-10). Paul warned his readers about the danger of money becoming our security and god. If we are obsessed with money, it becomes our love and treasure, and our thoughts and activities will become preoccupied with having more of it. When money has a hold on us, it is difficult to give money to God and others because we feel compelled to hoard it rather than give it. The only way we can overcome money’s power to possess us is to give it away freely and cheerfully. Then we will see money as a tool that God gives us to provide for our needs and for the help and support of others who are in need.

Sounds easy, right? Just give your money and be cheerful about it, too. As we know all too well, we’re all too much like Zacchaeus who treasured his money. Zacchaeus, however, had an encounter with Christ—an encounter that brought about a total transformation of his thoughts, desires, and actions. The same Savior who changed Zacchaeus so completely can turn us into generous givers as well.

Jesus said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew

6:19-21). These words from Jesus tell us that our hearts will follow our treasure. When God is our treasure, money no longer has control over our lives. God will open our eyes so we can see opportunities where our money can be used to further God's kingdom.

**Prayer:** *Lord, your Word warns me about the attraction that money can have on me. Keep money from becoming overly important to me. Help me to see money as a tool that can be used to extend your kingdom and to help others. In your precious name I pray. Amen.*



## ***Grow in the Grace of Giving***

**Scripture Reading:** *“My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because My name will be great among the nations . . . But you profane it . . . you say, ‘What a burden!’ and you sniff at it contemptuously . . . “ (Malachi 1:11-13).*

**I**nstead of being cheerful about giving, we may complain about giving our money to God through our churches. This is nothing new, as we see from reading the passage above from Malachi. We must keep three facts foremost in our thoughts: All we have is God's, not ours (Psalm 24:1); God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7); and he is very displeased with grumblers and poor givers (Malachi 1-3).

What God wants is that we give from the largesse he has first given us, not to a budget. He has given us a plan for giving. Scripture tells us to . . .

**1.** Give to God first. *“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).* This is Jesus' promise: Seek Me first, and I'll take care of all your needs. St. Paul tells us how to work this out in our daily lives: *“On*

*the first day of every week . . . set aside a sum of money in keeping with [your] income . . .” (1 Corinthians 16:2).*

**2.** Give a predetermined amount each week. As we read in the passage above, we are asked to give according to our incomes, not according to what we don’t have.


**3.** Give generously. Old Testament believers were required to tithe. As New Testament believers under grace, we are free to give beyond the tithe, free to give generously, free to give sacrificially. Jesus said, “*Freely you have received, freely give*” (Matthew 10:8).

**4.** Be faithful. Stewards are required to be faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2). Faith sets the standard for giving.

By grace, God will change us into cheerful and generous givers.

***Prayer:*** *Dear heavenly Father, you have given so generously to me. Forgive me when I fail to thank you and take your many blessings for granted. Grant me a giving and generous heart. In your name I pray. Amen.*





***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 the Kingdom. God also equips and empowers us for service. As God 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.***

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