

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

Week 1: The Joy of Receiving God's Blessings

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

Weekday Devotions:

- ✓ Monday **October 5:** Appreciating What We Have
- ✓ Tuesday: What Belongs to God?
- ✓ Wednesday: How the Steward Is Supported
- ✓ Thursday: Receive with Thanksgiving
- ✓ Friday: And Be Thankful

Week 1—Monday—Appreciating What We Have

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

Epicurus, a Greek philosopher in the third century BC said, "If you want to make a man happy, add not to his riches but take away from his desires."

When we desire less, we are more content with what we do have. Coveting puts us in a state of discontentment with an insatiable appetite for more, making contentment impossible. Those who are content enjoy what they have rather than complain about what they don't have. They are joyful for what they have received from God knowing that all of life is a gift.

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

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

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

Week 1—Tuesday—What Belongs to God?

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

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

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

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

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

Week 1—Wednesday—How the Steward Is Supported

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

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

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

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

Week 1—Thursday—Receive with Thanksgiving

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

The world is full of heartache. Heartaches of all kinds: financial difficulties, health problems, broken relationships, job stresses. You can name more.

Look around you, and often you can see hurt in people's eyes. More often, we learn to mask our hurt and present a "happy face." The apostle Paul had plenty of heartaches, too. He was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, without a home of his own, in danger from the elements, from enemies, and, sadly, in danger from false brothers. He suffered from hunger, the cold, and lack of clothing. He felt the pressure of concern for the new churches he established and served. (See 2 Corinthians 11:16-33.)

In spite of his challenges, Paul knew that God was in control, and he taught the new Christians to depend on God for all their needs: *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God"* (Philippians 4:6). That two-word phrase in the middle is easy to miss: *"with thanksgiving."* And why should we not pray with thanksgiving, knowing we have a

gracious God Who delights to bless us! Why should we not pray with thanksgiving, knowing we have a God Who has spared not even His own Son (Romans 8:32)! Should we lose all, we still pray with thanksgiving that nothing can separate us from our Savior (Romans 8:38-39).

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

Week 1—Friday—And Be Thankful

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

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

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

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

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

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

Week 2: The Joy of Managing God's Blessings

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

Weekday Devotions:

- ✓ Monday **October 12:** Being a Faithful Steward
- ✓ Tuesday: Attitude toward Money
- ✓ Wednesday: Being Rich toward God
- ✓ Thursday: Learning to Be Content
- ✓ Friday: Keeping our Focus

Week 2—Monday—Being a Faithful Steward

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

What if your pastor asked you to give a testimonial about your life as God's steward? If you were asked to share how you manage and care for God's property, what would you say? Perhaps you'd say that, as a God-pleasing steward, you acknowledge God as the creator and source of all things. As the creator of all, He owns everything. God's property is on loan to us. As stewards, we are to manage what He has entrusted to us responsibly, joyfully, and for God's purposes. You would go on to say that, as God's stewards, we are not to be passive managers but active and involved, that we are caretakers and managers of God's gifts so we are accountable for what we do with His gifts of time, talents, and money. You'd sum up your thoughts by declaring that stewards live lives expressing gratitude to God for both our created and redeemed lives. We live a life of saying "thank you" to God for His love and mercy. Stewardship is faith in action.

To answer the question, "Are we being faithful stewards with our lives and gifts?" we may want to check our calendars and check registers. Faithful stewards would have times marked on their calendars for helping others, church meetings, and Bible studies. We would be spending time in prayer and attending worship services.

Through faith, we try our best to use our time doing God's will. Our check book registers would show weekly offerings being made to God through our church, and there would be some checks written to help the needy. Our calendars and check registers will show us where our priorities lie.

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

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

Week 2—Tuesday—Attitude toward Money

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

The primary issue with money is attitude. While it is important to have good spending plans, to be wise investors, and to control credit, what matters most is our attitudes toward money. Do we possess possessions or do possessions possess us? Acknowledging God as the owner of our money and we as the caretakers of what He entrusts to us is a first step toward ensuring that our possessions are tools for our use rather than things that control us.

As Christians, we are not honest if we use the disclaimer, "Jesus can have our hearts but not our money." We can't compartmentalize the Christian life. Our relationship with Christ impacts everything we think and do, including our money management. Money, more than anything else, can separate us from our heavenly Father. Money can be Satan's best tool to deceive God's people. Money has the power to change us and may win the battle for our hearts as we are deceived by the thought that more money is the answer to our financial problems instead of God. Having money and possessions can make us proud, crowd out the real God, and cause us to place our security in our financial well-being instead of our God (Proverbs 30:8-10).

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

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

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

Week 2—Wednesday—Being Rich toward God

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

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

Jesus did not condemn the rich farmer because he had wealth, but He did condemn his wrong attitude toward his riches. His wealth had become the most important thing in his life. Through this parable, God is warning us about the problem of greed and our need to use our wealth properly. Rather than being rich toward money,

God wants us to be *“rich toward God.”* In Luke 12:21, Jesus is telling His listeners that, if we store up things only for ourselves and are not *“rich toward God,”* we will have the same fate as the Rich Fool. In order to be *“rich toward God”* with our money, we need to acknowledge that God is the source of all that we have and to glorify God through the use of our money.

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

Week 2—Thursday—Learning to Be Content

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

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

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

There are two ways we can strive to have enough. We can try to accumulate more, or we can learn to be satisfied with less. If we pursue the first way, accumulating more, we will discover that more is never enough.

Those who have followed that route have found that money can’t buy lasting satisfaction. As hard as it is, we need to curb our desire for more by concentrating on the blessings we do have. Being satisfied with less and being willing to use what we have in God-pleasing ways are attitudes that contribute to our contentment. Those who have less and are content are better off than those who have much and always want more. But how can we be satisfied? The answer is found in the words of Jesus: *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you”* (Matthew 6:33).

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

Week 2—Friday—Keeping our Focus

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

Have you ever felt that life is so full of distractions and that there are such pulls on your time that you have lost your focus? As God’s stewards, our goal is to live our lives for God’s purpose according to His grace given us by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament. Getting our priorities straight and sticking to them is one of the

most difficult tasks we face. We are called to be faithful and not misdirected by the world, our flesh, or Satan. *“As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as He Who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do”* (1 Peter 1:14-15).

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

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

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

Experiencing the Joy of Generosity

Week 3: The Joy of Sharing God’s Blessings

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

Weekday Devotions:

- ✓ Monday **October 17:** Blessings through Giving
- ✓ Tuesday: Giving from the Heart
- ✓ Wednesday: Overcoming Selfishness
- ✓ Thursday: Giving Honors God
- ✓ Friday: The Spiritual Discipline of Giving

Week 3—Monday—Blessings through Giving

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

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

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

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

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

Week 3—Tuesday—Giving from the Heart

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

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

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

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

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

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

Week 3—Wednesday—Overcoming Selfishness

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

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

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

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

Week 3—Thursday—Giving Honors God

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

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

When we give to God first, He is honored. We dishonor Him when we give our leftovers and when we give haphazardly. In Proverbs 3:9 we read, *“Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first-fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.”*

Because most of us don’t farm for a living, we don’t give the first-fruits or the first portion of our crops, but we can give the first-fruits of our incomes. In an agricultural society, the first part of the crops was given before farmers had harvested the rest of their crops. They truly trusted that God would provide as they gave the first part to Him. God asks us, too, to place our faith and trust in Him to provide for us as we give the first part of our incomes as well. God promises His people that He will bless them if they give faithfully and generously. In Malachi, God tells us that He wants to be put to the test by our giving, so He can prove to us that He is faithful in His promises.

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

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

Week 3—Friday—The Spiritual Discipline of Giving

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

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

Giving requires discipline. Discipline is the key for success in every area of life. God’s people become more faithful in their giving through spiritual discipline. With God’s help, we can develop a discipline of systematic giving. Putting God first in the managing and giving of our money is a part of the stewardship journey of faith. In practicing the spiritual discipline of giving, we learn to make giving a priority. Jesus said, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:21).

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

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