

Stewardship

Inspiring a deeper understanding of true giving



Live a God-Pleasing Life!

Devotional Meditations

Live a God-Pleasing Life!



“May the God of peace . . . equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” Hebrews 13:20-21

Devotional Meditations

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Foreword

In this devotional meditations book are three weeks of daily devotions with important themes to “Live a God-Pleasing Life!” The weekly themes are:

Week one: “Faith Is the Foundation”

Week two: “Discipleship Is the Path”

Week three: “Generosity Is the Hallmark”

Stewards living a God-pleasing life are people of faith who have been given new hearts and renewed minds. As new creations in Christ, we no longer live for ourselves. Having been forgiven and redeemed by our gracious God, we now live to do God’s will and fulfill his purposes for our lives. Acknowledging our identity and purposes as stewards of God’s creation, we strive to please God through our faithful stewardship.

We hope and pray that God will use these daily devotions to help you grow as a God-pleasing steward.

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Week One



Faith Is the Foundation

Agents of Grace

Scripture Reading: *1 Peter 4:7-11*

A verse that all Christian stewards should memorize is 1 Peter 4:10: “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” The verse 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 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. With faith as our foundation, we are empowered to live as God-pleasing stewards.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help me to treasure the gifts you’ve given me and to use them diligently and joyfully in your service. Amen.*

Being Faithful Stewards

Scripture Reading: *Matthew 25:14-30*

God has called and designated us as his stewards (Genesis 1:28-30). As God's stewards, we are called to be caretakers of all that he has loaned to us. In order to be effective stewards in doing the Lord's work, we need to ask the Lord for faith, wisdom, compassion, and generosity. When we rely on him, God will be glorified by what we do.

A steward's motivation is not to earn salvation or gain rewards here on earth. He has no compulsion to serve other than a love for Christ. God will provide his strength and guidance for those who love and serve him so that they can accomplish the plans he has for them.

As faithful stewards, our response is not dictated by well-conceived stewardship appeals or pressure for money or time. We respond faithfully to the needs of our church, but the primary motivation for sustained giving is thankfulness for the love that Jesus has for us. "*For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again*" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). We express his love within us by what we do and what we give. Through God's grace, bestowed on us through Word and Sacrament, we become more like Jesus and we become generous people who give willingly and cheerfully. "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich*" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Prayer: *Dear good and gracious heavenly Father, we give you praise and thanks because you are the King of Kings, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. We thank you for your faithfulness to us. Forgive us for our unfaithfulness. Grant us faith so we can be the faithful stewards that you want us to be. We pray in the name of our precious Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Where Is Our Focus?

Scripture Reading: *Hebrews 12:1-3*

While Moses was speaking with the Lord on the top of Mount Sinai, the Israelites created a golden calf which became their god. The people stopped worshipping their heavenly Father, and, for a period of time, they were possessed by an idol cast in the shape of a calf. Aren't we amazed as to how foolish the people were? Doesn't it seem absurd that the people worshipped, of all things, a golden calf?

Could we ever be as foolish? Unfortunately, the answer is yes. Our idols come in different forms, but they do exist. Anything that separates us from our faith relationship with Christ takes the form of idol worship. Our golden calves today are often titles, positions, bank accounts, large homes, nice cars, etc. When things become our "life" and our dominant desire, they become our purpose for living, and God is pushed to the side. The Apostle Paul warns us, "*For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God*" (Ephesians 5:5).

As God's people, we must be careful not to draw our identity and security from our positions or possessions. Jesus directs us not to store up treasures on earth but rather store up treasures in heaven. "*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*" (Matthew 6:21). Our challenge is to stay detached from worldly things and surrender all that we are and have to the Lord and ask him to guide us in using them for his glory. Only by spending time in God's Word, in prayer, and participation in the Lord's Table can we receive the faith and strength needed to follow God's will and focus on him.

***Prayer:** Lord, you are the creator and source of all good things. Forgive us when we fail to thank you for all that we are and receive from you. We ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.*

Love Makes Us Do It

Scripture Reading: *John 3:16*

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

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

The boy’s love for his sister can help us see how much Jesus loves us. Jesus suffered abuse, torture, persecution, and death for all of us. “*Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends*” (John 15:13). He demonstrated his tremendous love not because of our worthiness, but because he is a God of tremendous love. Jesus’ love for his heavenly Father and for us changed the world. Through his death and resurrection from that death, we through faith have received the forgiveness of our sins and life eternal. God’s love to us in Christ is that power that enables us to love him. “*We love because he first loved us*” (1 John 4:19).

The love of Jesus empowers us to be his stewards. Our primary reason for giving is out of love and commitment to Jesus. When needs arise, Jesus opens our eyes and hearts so we can respond to those needs. However, our primary reason for giving is a desire to express our gratitude and thanksgiving for our Lord and the love that he shows us every day. Because our love for Jesus is our motivation for giving, our giving becomes joyful. Love changes our giving from an obligation to a privilege.

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

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for loving us unconditionally. Amen.*

God Calls Us to Be His Faithful Workers

Scripture Reading: *2 Corinthians 5:16-21*

In spite of our sinful ways, God calls us to be his workers. Scripture tells us that Jesus did not pick people from society's elite when he chose his workers. Jesus' disciples were peasants, fishermen, and even a tax collector. Paul wrote, "*Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things . . .*" (1 Corinthians 1:26-28). The majority of God's work was done and continues to be done by the lowly and oppressed people.

Certainly, God can use celebrities and very successful people in his work. However, we need to remember that, even though we may not have accomplished anything of worldly significance, broken any records, or won any awards, God can use and transform us into effective workers in his Kingdom. With faith as our foundation, we "can do everything through him who gives [us] strength" (Philippians 4:13). Society gives many accolades to those who succeed, but there is no greater honor or privilege than to be chosen as God's vehicle to spread the Gospel. As John states in his Gospel, it is Jesus who does the choosing. "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit*" (John 15:16).

So why does God elevate the foolish and the lowly to be his workers? A reason may be found in 1 Corinthians 1:29: "*so that no one may boast before him.*" It is only by God's grace that we are saved, called, and equipped to be in his service. If we come into God's work with impressive credentials, we risk taking the glory and credit for ourselves. God desires the weak and the lowly. As Paul said, "*Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me . . . For when I am weak, then I am strong*" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). God uses ordinary people to do extra-ordinary things. Are you ready for duty?

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for choosing us to be your hands, feet, and mouths to the world. Help us always to depend on you. Amen.*

Our Need for Jesus

Scripture Reading: *Romans 7:21-23a*

In the beginning, there was perfect and complete harmony between man and God. However, when Adam and Eve fell into sin, the wonderful relationship that existed between God and man was destroyed. From the moment of birth, we are separated from our Father. “*Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me*” (Psalm 51:5). Unfortunately, because of sin, we live for ourselves as if everything revolved around our needs, our wants, and our concerns with little or no regard for others.

God knew our miserable state and promised to send us what we need the most: a Savior. “*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel*” (Genesis 3:15). Jesus would come “*to destroy the devil’s work*” (1 John 3:8). Now, with faith as our foundation, we can live as redeemed and sanctified people. When the time was right, Jesus came to live perfectly under the law, and to be the perfect atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world (Galatians 4:4). Through his death and resurrection, we are free to live abundantly and eternally with him.

Our faithful response to Christ’s love shown on the Cross is our stewardship. In Christ, we are new creations, people willing and eager to share his love wholeheartedly with others. By grace, his Spirit equips and strengthens us to use our lives and resources to serve him by serving others. Through faith, we acknowledge our role as stewards, rather than owners, of what he has entrusted to us. Let us always be mindful why Jesus came to live among us. Although we sin, closing the door to our relationship with our heavenly Father, Jesus, who willingly went to the Cross on our behalf, opened it again so that God no longer sees our sins.

Prayer: *Dear heavenly Father, the best gift you gave all mankind was the gift of your Son, Jesus. Through his death and resurrection, we can live abundantly now and forever with you. Thank you! In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.*

Week Two



Discipleship Is the Path

God's Draft Choices

Scripture Reading: *1 Corinthians 1:26-31*

Two of the most highly watched sporting events on television are not when teams or athletes are competing against each other; rather they involve the drafting of players for the National Football League (NFL) and National Basketball Association (NBA) teams. For many hours, fans of professional sports will watch intently to see whom their favorite teams will draft.

Most of us won't be drafted by professional football or basketball teams, but, as Christians, we receive a greater calling. We, in essence, are God's draft choices. *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit"* (John 15:16). God has made us a part of his team. We are not chosen by God because we are successful in our careers, great athletes, or wealthy. God chooses ordinary people to do extraordinary things. God chose the foolish, weak and lowly to do his will (1 Corinthians 1:27-28).

Through faith, we understand that we are among the foolish and weak through whom God carries on his life-saving work. *"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us"* (2 Corinthians 4:7). God entrusts us—clay jars—with this treasure—the Gospel. Even though we are frail and unworthy of our tasks, God has chosen us to carry his message of love to the world. As humble people of faith, we are empowered by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He transforms and molds us. *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"* (2 Corinthians 5:17). It is God who does the drafting and the changing. Through faith, we will stay on God's team, and we will bear the fruit that he calls us to bear.

The professional athletes who are drafted are expected to perform. They are paid large sums of money to do very athletic things. As God's chosen people, we may not receive large compensation, but our benefits are out of this world! Therefore, we are eager to use our lives and resources in God's service for his glory. Paul wrote, *"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). What a privilege it is to be part of and serving on God's winning team!

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for choosing and accepting us. Amen.*

Witnesses for Christ

Scripture Reading: *Matthew 28:18-20*

The story is told of a young man who had been out of work for some time. Jobs were scarce, but he was at last offered a job for the summer in a logging camp up north. His parents and friends were somewhat concerned about the reaction of the rest of the crew when they found out the young man was a Christian. If the story-book image of a lumberjack was true, they were sure his life would be quite unbearable. Upon his return home in the fall, his mother immediately inquired as to what had taken place when the word got out that he was a Christian, to which he replied, “They didn’t find out!”

Most of us don’t find ourselves in logging camps, but do those around us, wherever we are, know we are Christians? Are they aware that we are God’s children? Does what comes out of our mouths ever leave any doubt as to who is in control of our lives? Jesus said, “*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). We are his witnesses. The question is: What kind? When Jesus’ disciples were told to stop preaching the Good News, they said, “*For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard*” (Acts 4:20).

So how about us? God blessed us with minds and mouths to speak. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God will give us the words and the courage to use them (Matthew 10:19). Let’s be aware of the opportunities he places before us and make sure that the whole world hears the Good News. Make up your mind, right now, to become a joy-filled witness of God’s love and forgiveness for all people.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, we come to you as grateful people who thank you for your love and patience with us. Help us to be your faithful witnesses to our family, friends and those in our community. Place in us a desire to seek the lost. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.*

Counting the Cost

Scripture Reading: *Luke 14:25-27*

Jesus told his listeners about the cost of following him: “*Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple*” (Luke 14:33). He said we must hate our families and even our own lives if we want to be his disciples. He said that, unless we carry our crosses and follow him, we cannot be his disciples (Luke 14:25-27).

Jesus is one of those true leaders who commanded only what he himself was willing to do. He gave up his family; he left the close fellowship with his Father in Heaven to come to earth. Here he had a family – brothers who ridiculed him and “did not believe in him” (John 7:5). Here he had fellowship with twelve disciples, one of whom betrayed him (Luke 22:48), another who disowned him (Luke 22:60-61), and the rest who fled in the face of danger.

And he picked up his cross and carried it to Calvary so that those family members and friends and we, too, might be forgiven for our sins of betrayal and denial and desertion. He carried the cross in our place, for it is we who deserve to die (Ezekiel 18:4). But, “*you see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly*” (Romans 5:6).

What can we say to the reality of such great love? How can we count the cost of Jesus’ sacrifice for our sins? We obey his command to deny ourselves and get rid of all encumbrances, and we pick up our crosses and follow him. He does not place an unreasonable burden on us. He tells us that his yoke is easy and his burden is light (Matthew 11:30). Like those early disciples who, by God’s grace, were reinstated after their failures, we, too, are forgiven our sins and renewed in mind and spirit to witness for our Savior, rejoicing that we are counted worthy to suffer, if need be, for his name (Acts 5:41).

Prayer: *Lord, you have chosen and called us to be your disciples. Thank you for this privilege. Grant us passion to share your love with others. Help us to be the disciples that you want us to be. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.*

Living a Life of Light

Scripture Reading: *Matthew 5:14-16*

Can people see God's light through you? Actions, words, and life-style can be visible indicators of God's presence within one's life. Our character, compassion, gratitude, humility, perseverance, and faith will reflect God's light when he is glorified and honored above all things. Within each of us are lights that can show others God's glory and majesty, and we are to let that light shine. Our light may seem to us like a twinkling candle in a dark world, but God will use it and magnify it.

St. Peter said, *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"* (1 Peter 2:9). It is our purpose that our lives reflect our Redeemer in the midst of an unbelieving world. By word, deed, and actions, we are to acquaint those around us with the wonders of his love and the redeeming power of his death upon the cross.

When Christ is within us we are dead to sin, but our spirit is alive because of righteousness. With Christ, we live confidently *"know[ing] that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose"* (Romans 8:28).

"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light . . . the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). We are not to walk in the light of our own conscience but in God's light. When we walk in the light, things that are of darkness will hold no attraction for us.

Through Christ, we can live lives of light that don't flicker, fade, or glow dimly but with light that radiates bright intensity. The Lord, who is the light of the world, brings life and light to us all. In fervent gratitude, we are to hold up his light.

Prayer: *Lord, you provide light in a dark world. Through your light, we see our need for you as our Savior. Help us to reflect your light among those around us. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.*

Rejoicing in Being Counted Worthy

Scripture Reading: *Acts 5:17-42*

What a mission field those first disciples had! Eleven of them and a whole world full of people who had not heard about God's grace in Christ. It doesn't seem they missed an opportunity to share this Good News as they went about as their leader, Christ, had done, healing the sick, raising the dead, and teaching the people. And just like their leader, they were persecuted for it. Acts 5:17-42 tells of such an incident. The jealous Sadducees had the apostles put into prison. "*But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out*" (verse 19). In obedience to the angel's command, they went right back to the temple courts and preached the same message that had brought about their arrest.

Brought before the feared Sanhedrin, the apostles boldly stated, "*We must obey God rather than men!*" (verse 29). Then they preached God's Law to the Sanhedrin! That didn't set well, but, due to the intervention of Gamaliel, all they did was flog them and order them not to speak about Jesus again.

ALL they did! Have you ever been flogged for speaking the name of Christ? We should eagerly thank God that we live in a country where we can speak the name of Jesus. Even though there may be evidence of discrimination against Christians, our freedom of speech is still protected by law.

We can be thankful that we have the Word of God in its entirety – something else those early disciples did not have – to encourage us and build us up in faith. We can be thankful for the saints who have gone before us upon whose shoulders we stand as we seek to carry out our task as stewards of the Gospel. From verse 41 we learn something about the disciples' attitude: "*The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.*" How does your attitude compare to theirs? Is witnessing for the Gospel, even though you may be rejected or made fun of something you rejoice in? May God give us grace to rejoice in being counted worthy and let us, like the apostles, "*never [stop] teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ*" (verse 42).

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for allowing us to be counted worthy. Amen.*

Hope in God

Scripture Reading: *Titus 2:11-14*

Do you have a roof over your head? What about money set aside for retirement? Surely you carry house and vehicle insurance. Now, is your heart at ease? You've taken care of everything, right?

It certainly is wise to plan ahead, especially so that we will not be burdens to others, but listen to the words of Paul as recorded in 1 Timothy 6:17: “*Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment*” (1 Timothy 6:17). In this Scripture, Paul reminds us that worldly wealth is still uncertain. He boldly states that, if we're trusting in worldly wealth, we are acting arrogantly. The only thing that is certain is God's love for us. He loves us and enables us to make our livings. He loves us so much that he “*richly provides us with everything*” – and here's the surprising part – “*for our enjoyment*”!

How do you plan to “enjoy” God's rich blessings to you? Take a cruise around the world? Buy a new luxury car every year? What really brings you enjoyment? God has blessed us, not so that we can enjoy his gifts by hoarding them, but so that his purposes in the world can be fulfilled. In verse 18, Paul tells us how to enjoy the gifts God gives us: “*Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.*”

When our hope is in God, we have no need to amass worldly wealth. When our hope is in God, we trust him to provide for us all that we need and even more, so that we'll always have something to share. In 2 Corinthians 9:11, Paul makes this point with these words: “*You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*” God has called us to be his stewards. He also enables us to carry out his will. And there's another bonus! We receive enjoyment from sharing God's gifts, and we “*may take hold of the life that is truly life*” (1 Timothy 6:19). Put your hope in God.

Prayer: *Dear heavenly Father, we thank you for the Hope that we have in Jesus. With hope, we can finish the race. Help us to show our gratitude by being faithful until our prize has been won. Amen.*

Do Not Be Afraid!

Scripture Reading: *Isaiah 43:1-3a*

“A young man dressed in a white robe . . . said, ‘You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter . . .’ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid” (Mark 16:5-8).

Who wouldn’t tremble and be afraid! You go to anoint a body to prepare it for a proper burial, but the body is missing. Then some ethereal creature tells you the body isn’t there because it is no longer dead but alive. Who could take it in? “Don’t be alarmed” the man in white said. Yeah, right!

Yet, looking back, perhaps the women remembered the thousands he had fed with only two fish and five loaves of bread (Matthew 14:15-21). Maybe they thought again about the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38-44). After all, he was the one who had stilled the raging sea (Mark 4:35-41).

Somewhere, sometime, that trembling and bewilderment turned to joy and faith, for they did go tell his disciples and Peter (Matthew 28:8). And Jesus met them and greeted them, and they worshipped him. *“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers . . .’”* (Matthew 28:9-10).

Jesus’ last command is the same as this one: Don’t be afraid. Go and tell. We can understand the fear of the women at the empty tomb. What are we afraid of? Trouble? Or hardship? Persecution? Or famine? Nakedness? Or danger? Or sword? There is no fear in these things! “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:35, 37). We have the benefit of history. The women at the tomb couldn’t fathom the outcome, but we have God’s Word that assures us of our victory in Christ. We have his promise, *“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”* (Matthew 28:20). So don’t be afraid! Go and tell!

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for being our protector and Savior. Thank you for never leaving or forsaking us. In Christ’s name. Amen.*

Week Three



Generosity Is the Hallmark

Giving a Cup of Cold Water

Scripture Reading: *Matthew 25:31-46*

During Jesus' last three years on earth, he spent much time nourishing and teaching his disciples. Only when they were prepared to go out into the world to preach, teach, and heal did he send them. Leaving without provisions, the disciples were totally dependent upon those to whom the Lord would send them for their support. The disciples relied upon the power of the Gospel to move the hearts of their listeners to willingly provide for their needs. They were to travel light and trust in the Lord.

In Matthew 10:40-42 Jesus, referring to his disciples, said, "*He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the One who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.*" Jesus told his disciples that whoever gives to others is also giving to him. Still today we assist the spreading of the Gospel by supporting disciples and missionaries around the world. As we provide for church workers locally and abroad in the name of Jesus, we are serving the Lord himself.

As we express our Christian faith through our giving and serving, God is pleased. God notices every act of compassion and kindness that we express. Even the simple gesture of giving a cup of cold water to a thirsty person is an act God blesses. Through our faith, we are empowered to do acts of service. When we act in response to the Lord and not for recognition, God blesses us. Having already been assured of salvation by God's grace through faith, blessings such as peace, contentment, patience, and hope are added rewards.

Only a small number of people make their living as full-time church workers, but we all are given the privilege and opportunity to support them with our prayers and our money. May God bless us all as we work to further his kingdom.

***Prayer:** Lord, enable us to be generous and joyful givers. Help us to see the needs and opportunities to help and serve others. Amen.*

Disciplined Giving

Scripture Reading: *Proverbs 3:5-12*

Webster's Dictionary defines discipline as "training that develops self-control, efficiency." An essential ingredient for success in many of life's endeavors is discipline. God's Word places discipline as important as wisdom and understanding. Proverbs 23:23 reads, "*Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding.*" Good discipline contributes to our personal success, whereas poor discipline squanders missed opportunities. Solomon wrote, "*... fools despise wisdom and discipline*" (Proverbs 1:7).

Through discipline, we benefit a great deal. In the same way that discipline benefits us when we eat right, exercise regularly, and save often, as stewards, we benefit from our disciplined giving. Through giving, God promises to bless us. When we sow generously, we will reap generously. Jesus said, "*For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you*" (Luke 6:38). When we honor God with our tithes and offerings, God said that he will "*pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it*" (Malachi 3:10).

The Apostle Paul tells us clearly how we are to give. "*On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made*" (1 Corinthians 16:2). Paul tells us that we are to train ourselves to be Godly (1 Timothy 4:7). God wants us to be disciplined in both the regularity of our giving and the proportionate amounts that we give. Our giving is not to be haphazard, but, on the first day of each week, we are to give in proportion to what God entrusts to us. We can see that discipline is essential for us to receive many of life's blessings. When we discipline ourselves to give faithfully to God our first and best, we will receive God's blessings, which are the greatest blessings of all.

Prayer: *Lord, you bless us in so many ways, especially through your Son, Jesus. Help us to show our thanks through our faithful giving. In the name of Jesus, we commit to be good stewards. Amen.*

Eternal Value

Scripture Reading: *Matthew 6:19-24*

A well-known poem contains the lines, “Only one life, it will soon be past; Only what’s done for Christ will last.” Along with other things, these words can help shape our perspective regarding money. While it is necessary to spend money on things such as shelter, food, clothing, transportation, and similar items, these are still temporary things which will all pass away. Knowing that God is more concerned about things that have eternal value than those that are of temporal good only should have an effect on our attitudes toward money.

We practice good stewardship when we use our money wisely, planning our expenditures, investments, and savings; yet giving is the only money activity that has lasting eternal value. Even though the bagful of groceries you give to the family with little or no income is soon consumed, the act of giving it is of lasting value. Even though the heating bill you paid this month for the family whose breadwinner is out of work will need to be paid again next month, the act itself is of eternal value.

We give not because God needs our gifts, but because he uses those who have an abundance to help those who are in need. In 2 Corinthians 9:10-11, the Apostle Paul writes, “*Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*” God himself ensures that our giving will have eternal value.

We give what we can because God has first given us all we truly need: eternal life. Through our giving we can help others to see that the gift of eternal life is theirs as well. Our gifts to our church may help to support a missionary who brings the Good News of Christ to those who might never hear it. Our gifts help to support ministries that reach out to those in all kinds of need, spiritual and physical, and witness to the love of God. This giving results in benefits to the recipients, blessings to the givers, and thanksgiving to God.

***Prayer:** Lord, help us to store up treasures in heaven by obeying, serving and giving in Christ’s name. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

True Motivation for Giving

Scripture Reading: *Hebrews 13:5, 15-16*

The announcement is made that a family has lost its home to a fire. All their belongings are gone – the furniture and appliances along with the photographs and scrapbooks. People eagerly open their wallets and eagerly and lovingly give what they can give and often beyond in order to provide for the needs of this family. This is indeed what Christ would have us do. Scripture is full of admonitions to give to those in need (James 2:14-17, for example).

Unfortunately, these same givers can be very frugal with their weekly offerings. They are “need givers” rather than “love givers.” When need is our motivation for giving, we may actually be limited in our giving. Once we perceive that the need has been met, we restrict our giving.

God, who does not need our gifts, still asks us to give them. He tells us, “*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*” (Psalm 50:9-10). He doesn’t ask us to give because he needs our money. He asks us to give our gifts in response to who he is and what he has done and continues to do for us. He asks us to give out of love so that we ourselves and others might be blessed.

First Corinthians 16:2 urges us to give regularly, proportionately, and of our firstfruits. When love for God becomes the motivating force behind our giving, we will find ourselves following that exhortation joyfully, freely, cheerfully. Week after week, we will give our tithe or beyond, writing out that check before we pay our bills. A love-motivated commitment puts God in charge. We give up our right to worry about providing for our needs. With God in control, what is there to worry about? Jesus warned us against worrying: “*Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!*” (Luke 12:22, 24) Here is God’s promise to care for you. He will meet your needs as you give out of love for him and his people.

Prayer: *Lord, use us to help those in need and to extend your Kingdom. Open our eyes and hearts for opportunities to give. Amen.*

Christ's Love Compels Us

Scripture Reading: *Luke 19:1-10*

Through his gifts of faith and grace, God changes us from reluctant to willing and joyful givers. As the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:14, “*Christ’s love compels us*” to give generously. Christ’s love for us and ours for him releases our grip on our time and money. When we give cheerfully, we display the Macedonian spirit, which Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians chapter 8.

Some time ago, there was an elderly man named Alfred. He retired in a Midwestern town where he once owned a large factory. As an immigrant to the U.S. from Denmark as a young man, he made a promise, “Lord, as I prosper, I will share the Gospel with others overseas.” Later in life, Alfred built a hospital in India, supported the leprosy clinics in India and Tanzania, and helped fund special medical work in Liberia.

A national magazine wanted to print a story about Alfred’s generosity. He declined saying, “No, I want no one to see me. I want people to see the Lord only.”

For men like Alfred, giving is a natural response to the love given to him by Jesus. When hearts are filled with love, giving is a by-product of that love. Giving is not done for recognition from others or to earn God’s favor, but in response for all that God has done for us in Christ Jesus. “*And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them, and was raised again*” (2 Corinthians 5:15).

The same love that compelled the Macedonians to give compels us to grow in our faithful giving. Through faith, we understand how much God loves us, and we cheerfully show our gratitude by giving generously of our time, talents, and treasures.

Prayer: *Lord, thank you so much for your unconditional love for us. Through faith, we know that, in spite of our sinful and wayward ways, you love us. Empower us, Lord, to respond as faithful and obedient stewards. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.*

Seed for the Sower

Scripture Reading: *1 Kings 17:7-16*

As Elijah neared Zarephath, he saw the woman gathering sticks. She was the one to whom God had sent him. Was Elijah aware of her situation? Certainly he wouldn't ask a destitute widow for food, would he? Especially one who had a son to feed as well as herself. But he did. *"Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink? And bring me, please, a piece of bread."*

He had a lot of nerve, don't you think? The widow didn't even know him – had never met him. Yet she answered both truthfully and politely that she had no bread to share, only enough flour and oil with which to make a small meal for herself and her son. Then, she figured, they would die of starvation, since there was no food anywhere.

Elijah persisted. He first assured her, "Don't be afraid," and then he asked her to carry out her plan, only to make his bread first. He also assured her that God had promised that her flour and oil would not run out until the drought they were experiencing ended.

What would you do if you were the woman? Well, what have you done? God has asked that you, too, give him the first portion of whatever you have, even if it's as small a quantity as the widow had. He tells us, "Don't be afraid. I will make sure that you have all you need." The Apostle Paul said it this way, *"Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God"* (2 Corinthians 9:10-11).

The widow did as Elijah asked, and God provided the seed for that sower. *"So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family . . . in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah"* (1 Kings 17:15-16).

God's gift of faith enables us to believe that he will provide seed for us sowers, too, as we share even out of our poverty. What joy and confidence in the Lord result when we take him at his word! What a witness we are to others as they see us giving our firstfruits to the Lord, trusting him for all that we need!

Prayer: *Lord, grant us trusting hearts as this widow had. Amen.*

Giving Transforms Life

Scripture Reading: *Luke 21:1-4*

Jesus said, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (Acts 20:35). Putting these words into practice, we experience the truth of Jesus’ statement. In order to help us understand the blessings that come from giving, we can use the illustration of two bodies of water in the Holy Land.

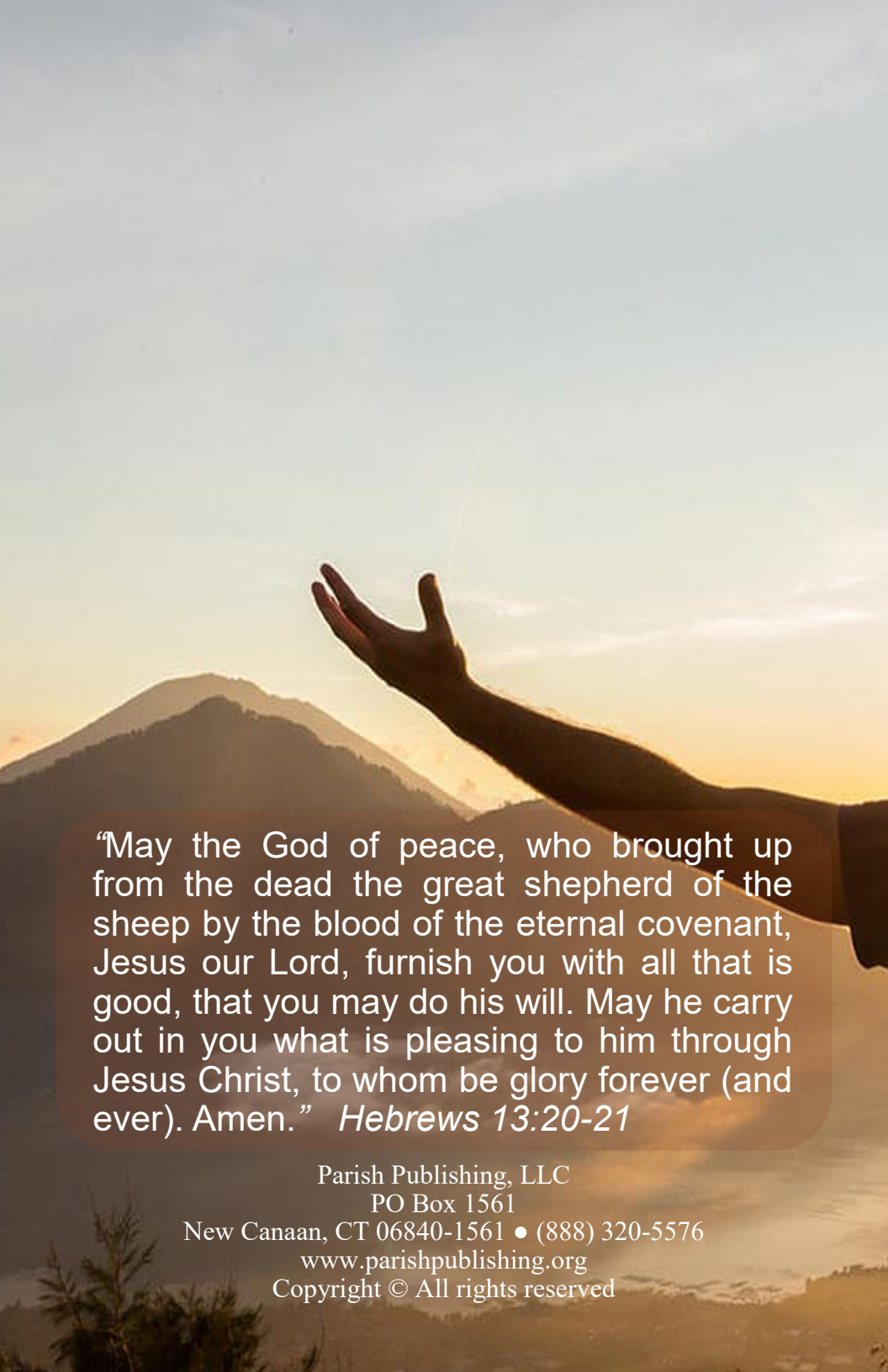
The northern body of water is the Sea of Galilee. This large lake receives water from the melting snow of Mount Hermon to the north. Water flows out of the lake through the Jordan River to the Dead Sea in the south. Around the Sea of Galilee and within the sea is abundant life. On its banks are little towns and beautiful vegetation. The water is full of life with schools of fish swimming in its waters. In contrast, the Dead Sea is as dead as its name implies. Nothing lives in it, and nothing lives around it. Its waters are stagnant.

The contrast in these two bodies of water points out how giving can transform our lives. The difference is that water flows into the Sea of Galilee and out of it down the Jordan River. It lives because it gives. In contrast, the Dead Sea only takes water in. There are no outlets leaving the Dead Sea. It simply takes without giving. By only receiving and not giving, the water is never refreshed and life is destroyed.

Through our giving we are either like the Sea of Galilee or the Dead Sea. Do we look for ways to share God’s blessings with our church and others so as to resemble the Sea of Galilee, or do we hoard all that we can or, at best, give God some leftovers, which causes us to be similar to the Dead Sea?

By the grace of God, we can give and be transformed. Giving enables us to experience joy and live fulfilling lives. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, God can remove our attitudes of greed and covetousness. We can become the giving and generous people that he wants us to be.

***Prayer:** Lord, you are the owner of all the animals in the forest and the cattle on a thousand hills. Enable us to be generous and joy-filled givers who give you all praise and honor. Thank you for your grace that makes our living and giving possible. Amen.*

A silhouette of a hand reaching up towards a sunset sky over mountains. The hand is positioned in the lower right quadrant, with fingers slightly spread. The background features a soft, golden sunset over a range of mountains, with the sky transitioning from a pale blue to a warm orange and yellow. The overall mood is peaceful and hopeful.

“May the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant, Jesus our Lord, furnish you with all that is good, that you may do his will. May he carry out in you what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever (and ever). Amen.” *Hebrews 13:20-21*

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