

Transforming *Gifts*



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A Congregational Bible Study on using what God has given us toward God's glory

***An offering by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of
Northern California-Nevada***

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Welcome to *Transforming Gifts*, a Bible study series written for 2007: the Christian Church of Northern California-Nevada's Year of Covenant! If you have been on the Transformation journey so far, you and your congregation both have probably realized how necessary it is to strengthen our bonds with God through prayer in order to find the strength to continue working on transformation. This year of covenant helps us remember *who* we are (our story) and *whose* we are (our covenant with God and with each other, in baptism and in community).

That sounds really warm and fuzzy, doesn't it? The truth is, though, when we start really trying to live out our covenant with God, the obligations are not completely on God's side. And that's why it's helpful to pause, take stock of all of the things God has already done to uphold God's part of the bargain, and ask ourselves seriously: As individuals and as a congregation, are we giving God what is God's, as Jesus called us to? In other words, are we holding up our end of the covenant?

Transforming Gifts is a six-week study that will help us, as individuals and as congregations, reflect on how to move closer to the goal of giving God what is God's. This Bible study can be adapted to fit the needs of your congregation:

- ♥ The six-week format fits in with "stewardship season."
- ♥ However, if you think another season would meet the needs of your congregation, it can be used any time of the year.
- ♥ The series is set up in such a way that a group of four or a group of 100 can participate—it involves breaking into small groups at some points and large group discussions at others.
- ♥ Bible study facilitators can either use the materials exactly as written (no experience necessary!) or use the "theme talks" as a thematic outline while offering their own reflections. If there are questions you'd like to add that are specific to your congregation, feel free to add; however, the bible study has plenty of material for one-and-one-quarter hour sessions.
- ♥ A number of congregations had a different person lead each week for *And Still We Rise*, last year's bible study, so that no one person felt the entire weight of organizing!

An important message for *Facilitators*:

Some of you may have used *Talking Faith*, an eight-part study that a number of congregations throughout the region used in 2006 to facilitate conversations about how to share our faith with others, or last year's regional study guide, *And Still We Rise*. A really important point in both of those series was that *neither sharing faith nor transformation is about having all the answers*. In the same way, facilitators do not need to feel they are "experts" on the Bible or anything else in order to help lead small (or large) group discussions. Humility means being able to say to people "I don't know, let's learn about that together!"

Your Bible study group will hopefully draw people of all sorts—long-time members and people new to the church, people born into the church who know all of these Bible stories by heart and people who have never heard them before. One important job of the facilitator is to create level playing field in sessions for people of different faith levels—the questions for discussion are designed so that everyone can share; your job is to create a safe space so that everyone really can.

The other major task of the facilitator is to review the materials well in advance. On occasion you might have to track down a video to rent (and get the equipment in place for the evening's session) or look up scriptures or litanies to photocopy. You'll bring a candle for the opening worship each week, and you'll be in charge of making sure that the "Gifts for Giving" are available at the end of each session (more on that in the session layout outline).

Really, though, your most important job is encouraging conversation by following along with the lesson plans—transformation seems to happen best when people are open to it, and feeling safe to share will be instrumental in that process.

How the sessions *will run*:

Each week will begin with a list of objectives, materials needed, and preparation for the facilitators. On the first week, the group will want to commit to a covenant to direct discussion for the next several weeks. A possible covenant will be included in the first week's lesson plan. In general, however, each week will follow this outline:

Welcome. Make sure you get there early so you can greet every person individually as they enter; this models the hospitality that is part of the life of the church. You may know everyone in the room, but consider making nametags or "table tents" with names to set on the table, even if everyone knows one another—this helps remind us that we seek to be transformed into a people constantly prepared to welcome new people into Christ's community. People may roll their eyes, but like the virgins in the parable who waited vigilantly for the bridegroom, we need to be constantly prepared for that person who needs the gift of God's love, even when we're not sure they're coming.

Opening worship—10 minutes

All of these sessions are worshipful, but it's important to set the tone. By opening with worship, we remember that we are giving this time to God, and we also worship to remind ourselves that we are open to God's presence among us—something that can be hard to remember in the business of our daily lives. And so opening worship takes the following form:

- ♥ Lighting a candle—it can help remind the group of the sacredness of this time by having a candle that's lit at the beginning of each gathering.
- ♥ Music—You may want to choose one song for opening for the whole series, or you may want to choose a different song each week. The following may be used the whole time and are generally easy to sing a cappella; some weeks we may offer suggestions that fit particularly well with that week. If your group has a great accompanist or there are songs your group loves that focus on God's gifts or our gifts or that invoke the Holy Spirit into your midst, feel free to use them.

Opening worship song suggestions:

- ◆ If someone can read music, you'll definitely recognize the tune to 379 in the Chalice Hymnal, "Accept, O God, the Gifts We Bring." (Same tune as "We Sing Your Mighty Power, O God," #64)
 - ◆ From Chalice Praise, look at 152, "We Are an Offering" as a good way to start each week if you know it.
 - ◆ "Restless Weaver," Chalice #658
 - ◆ "Take My Life," Chalice #609
- ♥ The reading of a litany of Invocation. We have provided a recommended litany which you can use every week; you can make copies for the whole group and re-use them each week. The invocation is found on page 8.
 - ♥ Scripture Reading- It is useful to have the scripture printed out on a sheet for each person. The following website might be helpful: <http://bible.crosswalk.com/> (which includes the NRSV, King James, the Message, and many others). This allows you to enter any scripture and the version you desire and print it out. Here is a suggested process for reading and listening to the scripture:
 1. Have the entire group read the scripture together out loud. Pause for 30 seconds.
 2. Now, ask one person to re-read the scripture out loud. Pause again.
 3. Now ask group members to circle or underline the words or phrases that caught their attention, spoke to them in a new way, etc. Let people share their findings, but ask that each offering be kept to a sentence or two, and that no one responds for discussion or debate. This is about each one "listening" carefully to the Spirit speaking to him or her. [If you are doing these sessions with a very large group, you may start each session with people sitting in fours, sixes or eights so that people can share without taking up more than a few minutes.]

Theme talk—5-10 minutes

For each session, we have written a reflection on the scripture for the day, highlighting some of the important themes. You are more than welcome to simply read these reflections aloud (or ask someone else to do so—give them a chance to skim over it in advance, though, so that they can read it with the energy and enthusiasm it deserves!). If, however, you would rather speak

yourself, please make sure you incorporate the themes included in the reflections. These themes are important because they help focus the activity and discussion time following.

Activity and Discussion—45 minutes

This will vary from week to week. Sometimes it will be entirely discussion, and sometimes it will involve some action. The purpose is to get people thinking about the gifts God has placed in our lives, and also the barriers that we may place in the way of giving back.

Closing—10 minutes

♥ Bringing back together song

Just like with the opening song, you may want to choose one song for the whole six weeks or choose several depending on the weeks' themes. You can use ours or ones you think fit with the theme. Here are our suggestions for closing songs:

- ◆ A really fun one if anyone in the group knows it (it's really upbeat) is 381: Take my gifts. All three verses are great, but if you want to shorten it, you can use just 1 and 3.
- ◆ I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me (614)
- ◆ God of Grace and God of Glory (464)
- ◆ Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service (461)—this one is a familiar tune with different words
- ◆ Called as Partners in Christ's Service (453)—again, familiar tune with different words
- ◆ From Chalice Praise, a popular song is "(Many Gifts,) One Spirit of Love," #151

If you have broken people into small groups, you may want to just begin singing the closing song as a way to bring people back together and into an attitude of worship.

♥ Prayer practice: Prayer is a necessary part of discerning God's call in our lives. Each week, we'll offer a possible homework assignment of prayer questions for people to pray with over the week related to that week's theme. There will be a sheet of paper for you to photocopy and send home with people so they can remember their prayer practice for the week.

♥ Closing litany: As we prepare ourselves for the coming week, read responsively #591 in the Chalice Hymnal: "For God's Gifts."

♥ Gift for Giving: The last thing each week will be a presentation of that week's "Gifts for Giving," a tangible thing for each participant to take home to help them remember what they're working on that week as their prayer practice and subject for reflection and meditation. Handing these out will be your way of offering them a benediction as they leave until the next week.

Optional *components:*

There may be any number of ways you want to make this series your own. Here are a couple of things you might want to do in addition to the lesson guides provided:

Prayer Partners: If your group is a large one or you are looking for slightly more advanced homework assignments, pair people up for the duration of the series. When the Prayer practice is assigned, let people know that they should pray for themselves and also for their prayer partners throughout the week. At some point during the week they should touch base (by phone, or even in person if they have the time) with their prayer partners and talk about their reflections on the theme for the week. This can also provide an opportunity for unofficial mentoring if you can match a more mature Christian with a newer one.

Gratitude journaling: Sometimes we don't recognize God's plan in our lives because we don't notice the many great things God is already doing in our lives. A helpful spiritual discipline might be keeping a journal that records the things we are grateful for. Even (sometimes especially) during hard times it is helpful to intentionally take note of the ways God is alive in our lives. This activity can even be a means for transforming gifts in and of itself!

Shared meal: Many people enjoy gathering on Wednesday evenings to share a simple meal of soup and bread at the beginning of these gatherings. This may be a way to build up fellowship among group members, particularly if you have a set time for the meal and a set time for the study, allowing people to participate in just one or both components depending on their ability to give up that much time. [Helpful hint: if you don't have time to make soup, Safeway and most major grocery chains make beautiful soups!]

Gratitude Offering: Create a "Blessing Box" or "Gratitude Giving" container for the group, and begin or end each session with people sharing some of the blessings, gifts and things they are grateful for, giving thanks for them by placing coins in the container. Decide what ministry you would like to donate the gratitude offering to at the end of the group.

PROMOTIONAL *Opportunities:*

- In the Resources section of the Bible Study (page 68) is a flyer that you can use to promote the Bible Study in your bulletin.
- If your congregation uses Chalice Praise, there is a song exactly about this Bible Study. It's called "All Good Gifts," #100. If you have a praise band to play it one Sunday before the Bible study begins as a way of getting people interested, definitely do so!
- If you use the Chalice Hymnal, "Take My Gifts," #381, is an equally good choice, and is a fun and easy song to use as a "commercial" for your upcoming Bible Study.
- There is a WONDERFUL version of the loaves and fishes story in the Resources section of this Bible Study (page 58). Please consider using it as a Children's Moment lesson in one of the Sundays prior to the first week of this series at your church. (NOTE: You can also use it as a /commercial about this Study.)
- The 57 cents story found on page 16 is also a great children's story for Children's Moment. Consider giving the kids a jar with 57 cents and seeing what they can turn it into within a month.

Overall *outline*

Week One “Cheap Grace”

James 2:1-9, 14-18. Do you think that saying the right words but not doing the right things is what Christianity is about? James didn't. We are surrounded by reasons to be grateful to God; how can we accept and celebrate those things without taking them for granted? This week we reflect on how to live out our gratitude to our abundant God.

Week Two “Trust Love”

John 13. Sometimes our resistance to giving has a lot to do with our lack of willingness to give up control, which can even extend into an unwillingness to receive! (Remember Peter refusing to let Jesus wash his feet?) What does it feel like to give over our control to God?

Week Three “Life on Loan”

Deuteronomy 26:1-11. If “we can't take it with us,” does it really belong to us in the first place? Sometimes it's worth remembering that all we have, from our birth to our death, belongs not to us but to God. That can change the way we share our blessings.

Week Four “Scarce Faith”

Malachi 3:6-12. What do we offer God, and why? God says to us, “don't cheat or rob me; test me and I'll pour abundance on you. Return to me so I can return to you.” [the Message] What is life like when we live as if we believe that God will truly bless us in our giving?

Week Five “Stywards for Jesus”

Mt. 19:16-22, Ephesians 4:1-6. The call to service, to stewardship, is not always an easy call—it asks a lot of us. Why should we respond to that call? And what if we think we already are?

Week Six “All the way Baptized”

2 Cor. 8: 1-9. There aren't any rules to Christian giving, and there aren't any guarantees of the rewards. But this final week we reflect on the fullness that is asked of us, we also take time to remember the abundance we receive from being fully stewards of God's realm on earth.

Invocation

Opening Litany¹: Divide the group in 4 so different people can read different parts.

1. Spirit of God, your love is all about us.
2. *Wherever we turn, we are overwhelmed by your bounty.*
- 3. How can we thank you enough for all your gifts to us?**
4. Your gracious goodness toward us never ends.

1. We have not earned it.
2. *We cannot repay it.*
- 3. It flows over us and around us.**
4. It never leaves us, though sometimes we fail to recognize its presence.

1. We live surrounded by your love.
2. *Just as a fish lives in the sea.*
- 3. We lose awareness that you give us life.**
4. We so easily take your love as our right.

1. We forget that relationship with you that keeps our Christian life throbbing.
2. *As if, unlike fish, we had forgotten how to swim!*
- 3. Loving God, teach us your ways again.**
4. Draw us back into rhythm with your will....

1. Forgive us and restore us again, we pray.
2. *Renew us, restore and reconcile us, we ask....*
- 3. You call forth from us a total response of every part of our life.**
4. You draw out from us our latent talents, our every gift.

ALL: You help us offer our contributions in confidence, in company with other people. Together we catch a vision of the harmony of every part of creation, knit together according to your will. Use us, Lord. Help us to say "yes" to you. What would you have us do? We pray in the name of Jesus.

¹ Written by Edith Little for the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand, found at:
<http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/2053.0.html>

Holy Manners

For Group Process

- 1. First and foremost we acknowledge that we come together as brothers and sisters in the One Body of Christ:** When we remember that Christ is in our midst, and within each of us, it is easier to behave in ways we know he expects of us—with compassion, openness and love.
- 2. Confidentiality:** What's said in the group stays in the group unless there is full agreement and permission to share a piece of information. There may be things shared or learned that might help a broader audience. If so, obtain consensus for ways this information might be shared without violating the safety or privacy of any group member.
- 3. Respect:** "Disagree without being disagreeable." Acknowledge the other person's point of view. Confirm that you heard correctly before responding. Avoid sarcasm and hurtful comments and tones of voice.
- 4. Truly Listen:** Sometimes the hardest thing to do is simply listen to a person without already thinking of what you are going to say back before they even finish. Rather than get into a "discussion," or "fixing" or giving advice, just simply receive the person's sharing and give only a response of affirmation or understanding.
- 5. Be more committed to being in relationship than to "winning" or being "right:"** It is hard to have true dialogue with people whose whole goal is to prove their point or win their agenda. Practice "holy listening" to each other and be respectful. Stay open in your sharing and receiving.
- 6. Destructive behavior is not acceptable under any circumstances:** When destructive behavior is discovered, bring the awareness of such behavior to the person (keeping in mind the above guidelines) and find ways to help him or her cease or change such behavior. Support and help should be offered as appropriate. A person who persists in disrupting the group or not honoring holy manners needs to be asked, with grace, to leave the group.
- 7. Be committed to attending each group and really "show up."** When we are busy or stressed it is easy to find reasons not to come to a group meeting, or to physically show up, but mentally or emotionally be elsewhere. Make the commitment to not only physically make the group meetings, but to be fully present to each other while you are together.

Week One:

Cheap Grace

James 2:1-9, 14-19, 26

Mt. 25:31-46

Micah 6:8

Objectives

Participants will leave this session knowing that:

- ♥ Everything that exists belongs to God, and we have been entrusted to care for it and develop God's pure potential through our love for God, each other and all creation.
- ♥ We are not called to be church members, but to be disciples—believing and serving with our whole Beings.
- ♥ When we accept the call to follow Christ, it is not just being faithful in belief or loyal in behavior, but transforming our lives to be in daily living relationship with Christ and living out what that requires of us.
- ♥ Sometimes we suffer from the ailment of “entitle-itis,” taking God's gifts to us for granted, becoming complacent and sometimes even irresponsible in our discipleship.
- ♥ The cure for “entitle-it is” is gratitude

Materials

- ♥ Bible or printout of scripture
- ♥ Copy of Holy Manners for each participant, and one on a flip chart in big writing.
- ♥ Flip chart and markers
- ♥ Copies of Prayer practice for each participant
- ♥ Copies of “Gift for Giving” for each participant
- ♥ Copies of Spirit-Given Gifts inventories on page 70 to hand out to participants to complete during the week and bring for next session. (Do not hand out until after the closing worship)
- ♥ Name tags for each participant (or “tents” to put on the table and be used each week)
- ♥ Folders with 3-hole punch brackets with paper, pens or pencils for each participant
- ♥ A TV with VCR or DVD player
- ♥ A copy of either *Children of Men* or *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.
- ♥ Gold chocolate coins, if you can find them—enough for every participant. These can be found at a party store (like Boswell's) in the party favors section. (or pennies)
- ♥ Copies of “57 cents and the Temple Baptist Church” found on page 16.

Leader Preparation

- ♥ Read the introduction section and prepare a brief summary to give the group and familiarize yourself with the full six-week outline to introduce the themes that will be covered.
- ♥ Familiarize yourself with the Holy Manners to cover out loud with the group
- ♥ Create a folder for each participant, with some blank paper. This can be used as a “journal” by each participant through the study to keep track of notes and the reflections or work assigned throughout each week.

Welcome—5 minutes

- ♥ **Introductions:** Have everyone say “My name is _____. The cheapest thing I ever bought was _____. The most gracious person I know is _____.”
- ♥ Take a minute to **overview** the purpose of study and themes for the 6 weeks (you can give everyone a copy from the introduction that summarizes each week).
- ♥ Go over **Holy Manners** and make sure everyone agrees to abide by those guidelines for the six weeks of the study. Write it on the flip chart so you can hang it every week.

Opening worship—10 minutes

- ♥ Start out with a song. If you’re using one of the suggested songs throughout the series found on page 4, feel free to start with it this week. Both “Restless Weaver,” Chalice #658 and “Take My Life,” Chalice #609 also fit with this week’s theme.
- ♥ Use the opening litany found on page 8 or read in unison the Karl Barth quote, Chalice 532
- ♥ Prayer: Invite people into an attitude of prayer. Ask them to lift up one thing that they are grateful to God for; after all have shared, simply close by saying, “God, for all these things, we thank you. Amen.”
- ♥ Scripture: (6 minutes total)
 - ◆ Read entire James passage.
 - ◆ Have someone read only verses 14-19.
 - ◆ Have each person share a word or phrase that stood out or caught his or her attention (without explaining why).
 - ◆ Take a few minutes to journal how God might be speaking to your life right now through that word or phrase.
 - ◆ Likewise read the Matthew scripture in full, then go back and have someone read only verses 41-45 and follow the instructions above.

Theme Talk—5 minutes

[You might want to draw on the flip chart the following words on opposite sides:
GRACE WORKS]

The question of whether we are saved by God’s grace or our works has plagued theologians since the time of Paul. The book of James seems to be saying our works are the crucial thing. [Circle the word “works.”] Many scholars see this passage in James as part of a debate with Paul: Paul preached that the saving of our souls came only through God’s freely given grace through Christ—salvation could not be earned through our actions. [Circle the word “Grace.”]

It seems, however, that neither James nor Paul are presenting an either/or argument where works and grace are concerned. It is quite clear in the larger body of Paul’s teachings that he expects the person who has experienced and received God’s grace through Christ to be a changed person. If you’ve really experienced God’s grace, Paul argues, your change of heart will result in changed behavior matching the actions and teachings of Jesus. [draw an arrow from Grace to

Works.] James is emphasizing that belief is not enough, if the belief does not lead one to a desire to live in a way congruent with the call of Christ, kind of the flip side.²

What we've drawn here is the tradition of theology ever since the time of Martin Luther (and ever since, some would say, Paul and James!). But what we've drawn on the chart misses the point that our behavior DOES affect how open we are to experiencing the grace of God that is all around us. We can't earn God's love and forgiveness and total acceptance of us, but when we are negative, selfish and in survival, grace is present, but we don't necessarily experience it, and therefore don't live from its gifts or share it with others. While our actions don't FORCE God to extend grace to us, *[draw a dashed arrow from works to grace]* when our behavior changes, sometimes that opens us to experiencing the grace that was always around us. Again, this is not saying that we can earn grace, but that living the life James tells us about can make us AWARE of God's grace.

True Christian discipleship comes out of the Call to Love God with all our heart, body, mind and soul. This leads us to the response in Micah 6:8 to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God. Shorting God on any part of this takes our God-given life and potential for granted, and to practice "cheap grace" rather than pay the cost of discipleship. *[write "Cheap Grace"]*

The term "cheap grace" was coined by German theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer when he outspokenly criticised Hitler's sins against humanity but even more so what he saw as the complacency of the Christian church in its failure to rise against Hitler—the church had stopped questioning what was happening in the world around it, trying instead to function within that society. For Bonhoeffer, it was the result of distorting Paul's (and later Luther's) claim to salvation by grace alone. Forgetting that this should result in a total change of the person, this "cheap grace" removed caring and accountability of personal and social justice. Bonhoeffer stated that "Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." *[ask someone to write this on the flip chart]*

Faith can no longer mean sitting still and waiting; the Christian must rise and follow Christ. When we come to church, we should expect to receive knowledge, insight and experience which challenges us and changes us; we need to be opened to seeing where and how God desires us to serve for our own good and the good of the world.

Notice that in the Matthew passage, both the sheep and the goats responded the same: "Really—when did we see you..." which means the "sheep" were not acting out of some self-righteous place, but a natural state of discipleship. Real grace is understanding that everything we have belongs to God, and if we have accepted the gift of God's grace, then we also accept the accountability and responsibility of living a life that is worthy of that gift. To do any less is to dishonor yourself, the gift and the giver.

² If you have a group that likes to learn about theology, you're welcome to mention that there aren't very many theologians any more who argue that works can bring about God's grace: in 2001, the Catholic Church joined the Lutherans in a statement that people are saved by grace and not works. That's why the arrow only goes from grace to works, and not the other way.

Activity and Discussion—40 minutes

Cheap Grace in the Cinema—10 to 20 minutes

This idea of cheap grace is pretty deep—let the group know that an easier way to think about this complex idea might be with a film clip. There are two different clips you might want to use. You don't need to preface this with anything other than to say "This clip gives us a way to think about the dangers of taking the gifts in our lives for granted."

One film clip you might want to use is Scene Four from *Children of Men*, "the court of the crimson king." Please be aware that at the very end of the scene, the main character uses a curse word that may not be appropriate in your congregation. For background to the scene, explain that the film is about a period in the future where people stop being able to reproduce; the youngest person on the planet is eighteen years old. The main character, Theo, is trying to help a woman who is miraculously pregnant escape from the political chaos of Britain to a group of benevolent scientists trying to find a way to save the planet. To do so, he turns to his cousin Nigel, a high-ranking member of the British government. If you are using VHS, the scene begins with the main character driving through the filthy streets of London to Nigel's palatial home, and ends with Nigel saying, "I just don't think about it."

After watching the clip, ask a couple of questions:

- ◆ What contrasts did you notice between the world outside and Nigel's home?
- ◆ Are there aspects of Nigel's life you find disturbing?
- ◆ Does taking his possessions for granted help make Nigel's life any better?

It's interesting to reflect (and if others don't notice it, you're welcome to point out) that Nigel's life is sterile, lifeless and numb despite being surrounded by the greatest riches available. By taking his access to those objects for granted, Nigel's life is actually less vital (even if less desperate) than the lives of the people in the streets.

Another film clip (and one that has no curse words in it at all) is from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Either version will probably work, but we viewed the Johnny Depp version. For background to the scene, explain that there is a competition for the five golden ticket winners to receive a tour of Willie Wonka's chocolate factory, closed to the public for decades.

Find the scene just prior to Veruca Salt winning the second gold ticket and show it all the way to the end of that scene (where she tells her father she wants a pony). If you have time for a longer session, show all four of the winners prior to Charlie! They're all horribly self-involved. ☺ After showing the clip, open up the conversation to what people think that clip has to do with cheap grace, or to the idea about responding to what God has given us.

Cheap Grace in Writing—20 minutes

Divide a flip chart page in half vertically. Title the left column "cheap grace."

Ask the group to share gifts, relationships, blessings, possessions, and other aspects of creation and environment that they don't thank God for all that often, that they have been taking for granted, or that they feel entitled to or claim as "theirs" (Allow about 3 minutes.) This will be a hard exercise for some; you might want to have a few thoughts of your own in reserve, maybe even based on the films: "I take my financial stability for granted. I kind of think I've earned my

status or title at work. I don't thank God for the rolling hills I drive through on my way to the office. I think of this church as 'mine.' I've never thought my flatscreen belonged to God."

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God? This is our discipleship formula—it says it all. Cheap grace can only be countered with rich gratitude. When we start recognizing all the things around us are from God, it will probably change the way we honor them. Instead of making God do all the work (grace without works, or cheap grace), we might respond in changed ways as Paul would ask. Rich gratitude leads automatically to a desire to live our life in this way: to work towards God's equality of all (do justice), to be generous and giving in community (love kindness), and most importantly for today, to remember that we would not even exist if not for the love and grace of God, therefore we owe God everything, and humbly live a life so that every word and every action and every attitude and every result says, "Thank you."

Now title the right column "Rich Gratitude" and ask the group about ways they can express gratitude for each thing on the left. (3 minutes)

(6 minutes) In your journal write down 6 behaviors from the right column, or others you might think of, as ways to say "Thank you" to God in the way you live your life. Pick one each week and practice living that behavior from your heart of rich gratitude each day that week.

Canadian pastor David Ewart says that in a healthy and faithful congregation there is an attitude of service, not "serve us!" Decisions about program, budget, music, purpose, etc. are not prioritized to serve members, but are shaped first by how best to serve those **not** in the church. Cheap grace has members who say "serve us." Rich gratitude has disciples that ask, in the words of Frederick Buechner, where does our deep gladness meet the world's great need?

Closing Worship— *10 minutes*

Bringing Back Together Song: Any suggested song, or "Thank you, Lord," CH #531

Closing Litany (#591)

Prayer in Chalice Hymnal # 650, by Timothy Dudley Smith

Gift for Giving: As soon as you've read the closing prayer, hand each person a chocolate coin and say "This is a token of what God has given you. Each morning, look at this token and think, 'Today I will _____ (some action) _____ to give back a token of what I have been freely given by my generous God.'" (Those words are on the "Week One Practices" sheet.)

Also hand out copies of "Week One Practices" and "Temple Baptist church and 57 cents." Let them know they can read the story and reflect on it however they desire this week, and the prayer practice and journaling opportunities might be ways to hold themselves accountable for really reflecting on how they live their gratitude to God.

Finally, give everyone a copy of the "Gifts Inventory" found on page 70 of the Resources section. Let them know we'll be using it next week, and they should take time to fill it out and score it this week.

WEEK ONE PRACTICES— *Cheap Grace*

Prayer Practice, week one: Choose one thing from your “cheap grace” list and offer God thanks for it each morning and night all week. You’ll use a different one each week of the series, and will practice living your gratitude for it during the week.

Discipleship seed, week one: Each morning, look at your gold coin and think to yourself, “Today I will _____ (some action) _____ to give back a token of what I have been freely given by my generous God.”

Journaling Opportunities, week one: This journal is only between you and God; use it as a time for raw honesty and confession as you reflect on any or all of these themes this week:

- ♥ Describe 1 or 2 persons you have judged as unworthy or somehow less than you or others. How might God be challenging you through this person to respond or use your gifts as a disciple?
- ♥ Do you expect special privileges or influence in the church because of how long you’ve been there, family ties, level of giving, or education? (Think of others in the church who are younger or newer or poorer or less articulate—what opportunities are they given? Does this have to do with your “having earned” your place in the church?)
- ♥ In what ways have you fallen into “cheap grace?”, perhaps settling for going to church and claiming to be a good Christian, but not really paying the price by living in the way Christ calls us to live?
- ♥ What places might you be justifying cultural acceptance and practice instead of the radical, countercultural ways Christ calls us to give?
- ♥ Ask Christ to help you in some aspect of your discipleship in which you want to be stronger. Say a prayer of gratitude.

God and 57 Cents



A sobbing little girl stood near a small church from which she had been turned away because it was *too crowded*. "I can't go to Sunday school," she sobbed to the pastor as he walked by.

Seeing her shabby, unkempt, appearance, the pastor guessed the reason and, taking her by the hand, took her inside and found a place for her in the Sunday School class. The child was so touched that she went to bed that night thinking of the children who had no place to learn about Jesus.

Some two years later, this child lay dead in one of the poor tenement buildings and the parents called for the kind-hearted pastor who had befriended their daughter to handle the final arrangements. As her poor little body was being moved, a worn and crumpled purse was found that seemed to have been rummaged from some trash dump. Inside was found 57 cents and a note scribbled in childish handwriting that read, "This is to help build the little church bigger so more children can go to Sunday School." For two years she had saved for this offering of love.

When the pastor tearfully read that note, he knew instantly what he would do. Carrying this note and the cracked, red pocketbook to the pulpit, he told the story of her unselfish love and devotion. He challenged his deacons to get busy and raise enough money for the larger building. But the story doesn't end there! A newspaper learned of the story and published it. A realtor who read it offered them a parcel of land worth many thousands. When told that the church could not pay so much, he offered it for a 57 cents. Church members made large contributions. Checks came from far and wide. Within five years the little girl's gift had increased to \$250,000.00—a huge sum for that time (near the turn of the century). Her unselfish love had paid large dividends.

When you're in the city of Philadelphia, look up Temple Baptist Church, with a seating capacity of 3,300, and Temple University, where hundreds of students are trained.

Have a look, too, at the Good Samaritan Hospital and at a Sunday School building that houses hundreds of Sunday scholars, so that no child in the area will ever need to be left outside during Sunday school time.

In one of the rooms of this building may be seen the picture of the sweet face of the little girl whose 57 cents, so sacrificially saved, made such remarkable history.

Alongside of it is a portrait of her kind pastor, Dr. Russell H. Conwell, author of the book, *Acres of Diamonds*.

Goes to show what God can do with unselfish love for others and 57 cents.

WEEK TWO

Trusting Love Living Gifts

John 15:1-17

Luke 12:22-40

Objectives

Participants will learn that:

- ♥ We create trust through inner experience of God's love for us.
- ♥ We need to identify our Spirit-given gifts and build a deep relationship with Christ for guidance and discernment to use those gifts.
- ♥ We can be empowered through treasuring—finding out our passions and our spiritual gifts so that we are motivated and empowered to joyfully serve.

Materials

- ♥ Spiritual gifts inventory from Appendix (participants received them last week, but have some extras on hand)
- ♥ Printout of scriptures or bibles
- ♥ Chalice Hymnals
- ♥ Flip Chart and markers (if desired)
- ♥ Journals
- ♥ A copy of the film "A Bug's Life" and a TV and DVD player (OPTIONAL)

Leader Preparation

Take the spiritual gifts inventory from page 70, score yourself and read through the descriptions and application. Be prepared with the scripture references for participants as they come, hopefully, with their inventories filled out and scored. Have a few extra inventories available for folks joining for the first time this week.

If you would like further information on the inventory and gifts, you can find additional information at www.davidewart.ca

Gifts for Giving: Buy a bagful of bows—the bows that you would put on top of a gift box. Take the Gift for Giving found on page 22, cut it into individual prayer strips, and attach those prayers strips to the bows.

Welcome—*5 minutes*

As people arrive, make sure they've filled out their spiritual gifts inventory; if they haven't, give them some time at the beginning to work on it.

Have everyone go around the circle and say, "My name is _____. The best gift I ever received was _____."

Opening worship—*10 minutes*

Use opening worship suggestions on page 4, including the invocation. Consider using the song "Tis the Gift To Be Simple" found in the Chalice Hymnal, #568 if you're not using one song for all six weeks.

Scripture: Use the Lectio Divina suggested for opening worship, but only using it for the shorter version of scripture: first read the full John scripture selection, then just verses 12-17—do Lectio Divina for verses 12-17. Repeat with the full Luke scripture, and then just verses 22-26.

Theme Talk—*10 minutes*

Hearing these words of Jesus in the Luke scripture can grate on our cultural sensibilities like fingernails on a chalkboard! Every survival skill we were taught sends up a red flag and warns us never to leave ourselves vulnerable or out of control.

Yet Jesus seems to call to us to reach beyond our survival mentality and cultural insecurities to trust God to provide for our every need. It can be terrifying to ignore our instinct to provide for our worldly needs, even when God directly calls us to free up our energy and our resources to put towards Godly work.

Think about something over which you have spent a good deal of time worrying. When you are worrying, where are your focus and energy going? How much of your energy goes towards God? We often worry about things or think that it is up to us to ensure for our survival financially, emotionally, even spiritually; sometimes we don't think we should bother God with things that are "our" responsibility to take care of. Even if we don't mean to, we are actually saying to God in those moments, "I don't trust you. I think I can do it better."

In the passage from John, we learn more about the relationship we are called to have with God through Christ. From that interconnected relationship, Jesus expects that we will experience the love God has for us; he expects us to learn just how valuable we are. With that knowledge, hopefully we will be able to trust at the level the Luke passage calls for. And the funny thing is, when we open our hearts to God, we learn more about the gifts that God has already placed within us—the gifts that the servants in the Luke passage could call on to serve their master.

This is true for our congregations as well. Declining congregations are often filled with members who worry about their own and their church's survival; their giving and worship reflect this worry. But when we stop to think about what it means to trust that God will provide, and when we recognize how God has already given us so many gifts, we begin to give and worship in completely new ways, ways filled with spirit and excitement about the ways we'll meet God in the future, rather than fear about whether we'll have enough.

For a congregation to be healthy and faithful, its disciples must first have experienced this deep, abiding, healing, abundant love of Jesus, and then be able to express the joy that comes from being able to share this same love with others--to love others as we have been loved. This really emerges from daily study and spiritual development, to find the gifts God has given us, and to live into them more fully.

Activity and Discussion—40 minutes

Sometimes we don't notice our own gifts, and sometimes those around us don't help us recognize them—but that doesn't mean God has left us out of the gift loop! You are welcome to show a clip from the movie "A Bug's Life," scene two—Flik's invention. It starts at 4:30 in the film and is a few minutes long. Who noticed Flik's gifts? Who didn't? Were they good gifts? What would happen if the other bugs focused less on their fear about whether they had enough, and started paying attention to the gifts that give them more than they need?

Now's the chance for the whole group to reflect on their gifts. As Jesus notes in the Gospel of John, we are all branches bearing fruit; here's our chance to see which fruit God has blessed us to bear. But this isn't just about what we have to give; it's also about trusting the God who made us for a special purpose, the God who supplies our needs.

Why discern our spiritual gifts? David Ewart, the author of the spiritual gifts inventory we are using for this session, says that your Spirit-given Gifts are the place where God is closest to you in your life. If you can't find your gifts—it's hard to have a deep relationship with God; and if you feel you are having trouble finding God in your life, then you most likely haven't found your true Spirit-given gifts.

Ewart says, "First, in order to know God's desire for us, we must have an intimate and accurate knowledge of who God is. Second, in order to know God's desire for us, we must have an intimate and accurate knowledge of who we are. If our knowledge of God is sketchy and inaccurate, there is no way we can properly know God's desires for us. If our knowledge of ourselves is sketchy and inaccurate, then how can we possibly know what God truly desires for our true self? It will be our own ego and not God that we will be hearing."

Then, from here we have the continued challenge of putting this knowledge into purposeful work--figuring out what needs to be done and actually doing it in order to live out our discipleship.

You can recognize a healthy congregation by the disciples there who put this inner work at the top of their list and live and give from its practice.

Discussion of the Spirit-Given Gifts Inventory (25 minutes)

Small group work (15 minutes)

- ♥ Break into small groups of 4 and ask those that are willing to share their top 3 highest-scored. Don't discuss or comment at this point—just list the top three.

- ♥ Then go around and share one thing that maybe fit your expectations about your gifts and one thing that surprised you.
- ♥ Share one way in which fear or worry might block you from serving with one of your gifts.
- ♥ Think about the feeling of being loved by Christ totally and absolutely. Share one way in which that knowledge and feeling might empower you to serve others through one of your gifts.
- ♥ Name one way in which the congregation might benefit from one of your gifts.
- ♥ Close with prayer, each person saying a short prayer out loud for the person on their left, lifting up what that person has shared and asking God to bless that person's gifts.

Return to the larger group. Ask 2 or 3 to share how learning about their gifts might strengthen their life of discipleship and giving. (10 minutes)

(If there is time, invite the group to reflect on how our individual gifts might be connected to God providing for the whole congregation's needs.)

Closing Worship – *10 minutes*

Use closing worship suggestions on page 5. If you don't have a closing song all six weeks, consider using "Come and Find the Quiet Center," Chalice Hymnal #575
The suggested closing litany fits particularly well this week.

After the closing litany, hand everyone their Gift for Giving, and remind them to read it and practice it each morning and evening this week. Also give them the sheet on the following page, which includes possible journal activities and preparation for next week.

WEEK TWO PRACTICES—*Trusting Love, Living Gifts*

Gift for Giving: Carry the affirmation attached to the bow with you and read it morning and evening.

Prayer Practice:

♥ In addition to praying with your Discipleship seed, continue to pray for the blessing of the gifts (you don't have to remember what they were) of the people in your small group.

Journaling: CARRY OVER FROM WEEK ONE: (6 minutes) In your journal entry from last week, look at the behaviors you listed, or others you might think of, as ways to say "Thank you" to God in the way you live your life. Pick a new one this week and practice living that behavior from your heart of rich gratitude each day that week.

Additional this week: Each night, think of a gift you see in somebody else in your congregation (or in your life). Think about the ways God has placed them in your church (or your life) to meet its (your) needs. Write down the ways they are helping to be a part of God's abundant blessing so that you need not fear about tomorrow.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK: Next week, YOU'LL be supplying the Gift for Giving! You are invited to bring something small that represents **you**! Something no larger than the palm of your hand. We strongly suggest you do NOT bring a picture of yourself, rather bring some small object - something you are willing to (possibly) not get returned back to you. This could be an item that shows your interests, your age, your work, or your hobbies. And remember - small is good!



Gift for Giving: *I trust in God to provide for all my needs. I let go of judgment and control and surrender to God's wisdom.*



Gift for Giving: *I trust in God to provide for all my needs. I let go of judgment and control and surrender to God's wisdom.*



Gift for Giving: *I trust in God to provide for all my needs. I let go of judgment and control and surrender to God's wisdom.*



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Gift for Giving: *I trust in God to provide for all my needs. I let go of judgment and control and surrender to God's wisdom.*

WEEK THREE

Life on *Loan*

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Psalm 139: 7-16

Objectives

- ♥ Participants will reflect on the fact that life is a gift from God, and that the things we have are not necessarily our own.
- ♥ Participants will be encouraged to think about possessions, including their own life, as something not entirely their own, and to let go of possessiveness and entitlement as a result.

Materials

- ♥ Chalice Hymnal
- ♥ Flip chart
- ♥ A big basket for this week's Gift for Giving.

Leader Preparation

- ♥ Bring and set out several small household objects collected from your house. These are objects that folks could use if they forgot their Gift for Giving representing them.
Suggestions - old keys, small toy, band-aid, paper, candle, river rock, tape, pencil.
- ♥ Copy the Loan agreement found on page 28 for participants.
- ♥ Write the following scriptures on the flip chart, big enough for the whole group to read.

Psalm 139:13-14

“For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

Romans 14:10-12:

“For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.’ So then, each of us will be accountable to God.”

Welcome—5 minutes

- ♥ As folks walk in ask if they have brought the item that represents them. If not, invite them to pick something from the table that might represent them before you begin. This will get folks talking, which is OK. Resist explaining the object, however.
- ♥ Make sure the two scriptures from the previous page are written on a flip chart in big print so everyone can read them during the theme talk.
- ♥ Go around the room, saying your name, and in one or two sentences tell about the item you brought or found this evening. Encourage people to really pay attention to each other, since they'll have to remember these stories at the end of the session. As each person shares, have him/her place his/her item in the big basket in the center of the room.

Opening Worship—10 minutes

Follow opening worship on page 4. If you don't have a weekly opening song, this would be a great week to do "We are an offering," from Chalice Praise, #152. You can also use it as the closing song.

Theme Talk - 15 minutes

Over and over the scripture reminds us of *who* we are, and *whose* we are. Have the group read Psalm 139 (on flip chart) out loud together.

God knew us before we were born, and is with us every day of our life. What sticks out in this scripture for you? [discuss]

We are God's - created in a vast universal creation. Our very life is given by God. It's kind of like our life is on loan from God. But that also means it isn't ours to do with as we please. If we recognize God's role in our existence, this "life on loan" carries some responsibilities. Let's listen to what the apostle Paul says in the book of Romans. Let's read that together. [read out loud in unison.]

You may have heard of, or even read Rick Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Life*. Well, he takes this text as a call to each of us on that good day when we come before God our maker at the pearly gates of heaven, who will ask us: "So what did you do with all the gifts, talents, opportunities, energy, relationship, and resources I gave you?"³

A lot of us believe in a God of grace, so when that good day comes, God will welcome us - for God is a God of grace. Still, Rick Warren's question is a sobering one. Does it not give us an opportunity to imagine, honestly, what we make of this gift of life if we were really held accountable for it, knowing it wasn't our life to begin with? What if that question did happen? What if God held us accountable for this life on loan?

The Apostle Paul once said we should offer our whole lives as a living sacrifice in every single thing we do. Our scripture offers another option - to give first to God what God has

³ P. 34 of *The Purpose Driven Life*.

already given us. Remember that passage from Deuteronomy that we used at the beginning of worship? (Have them look at the scripture again.) It is a description of a ritual of offering. But specifically it is an offering in remembrance of the great gifts of deliverance already given by God. This ritual described so completely has people publicly speak WHY they give their offering, the first fruits - the first batch of the harvest, because first God has given to us. And not only to us, but we share in this bounty with those around us - the “foreigners” among us. There may be some old-fashioned language in this passage, but can you imagine an offertory moment in your church with the same message?

Activity and Discussion - 30 minutes

1) Discussion questions

It is easier for us to feel guilty about what we have not done than celebrate what we have. Our human ego tends to focus on inadequacies, missed opportunities and hidden gifts. So let us focus on opportunities, not regrets, as we continue this evening together. (The discussions can be done in small groups if you would like.)

Discussion 1 – 8 minutes

Option A

Positive memory Moment:

Recall a moment when you were made aware that it was good to be alive.

(E.g. a sunset, a word of affection, a holiday, a movie you have seen.)

Share that briefly with the group.

Try not to analyze the experience. Don't focus on the 'why.' Recall the 'what' and 'when.' Try to remember as much detail as you can. Who was there, what was said, time of day, dark or light, colors, smells, sounds.

OR...

Option B

Challenging memory moment:

Remembering our scripture from Deuteronomy, the story is one of challenge, perseverance, and hope. Is there a time when a struggle, a conflict, a challenge or a trial caused you to be aware of the gift of life God has given you? Describe that memory.

Avoid wondering about 'Why;' stay with the 'What' and 'When,' and specifically the hope, awareness, or gift that came out of this experience/memory.

After any who wish to share have done so - continue with:

In a way each of your sharing has been an offering much like the Deuteronomy text. Thank you!

Discussion 2 – 5 minutes

What benefit or blessing did you ever receive that brings you joy as you remember it?

Has your mood changed from when you walked in?

Does this memory bring to mind another situation in your life? How?

Deut 26:10 “So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me.’ You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God.” Consider that God might also bless this offering. Would anyone like to say how God might be pleased with your offering of remembering the gifts we’ve received?

Discussion 3 – 5 minutes

Deut 26:11

“Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.

Knowing God blesses this memory offering, what might you take to your church family, your worship life, or your stewardship of your life, from this conversation? How might “you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you” celebrate with all the bounty that God has given to you and your house?

Talking and thinking are all good. But the reality of ritual, and indeed of faith, calls us to action.

Ritual Activities:

#1—Loan Agreement

Sign a loan agreement with God. This is found on page ___ at the end of this unit. If you’re in small groups, sign this and move to the large group again.

#2—Loaning yourself

“We have discussed the value of this life on loan, and we brought objects that symbolize some part of us. Tonight you are invited to share your life, to loan this symbol of your life, to another. We are going to loan our lives to one another for a week.

“As you take the item in a moment we ask that keep it with you, as close as possible, as much as you can, within reason. As best you can, try NOT to notice who has your item - it is not about ‘who has you’ but about who you are carrying. Try hard not to look for your object - even though that will be tempting.”

Gather in a circle with your backs to one another, holding hands if possible. Pass the basket of items around the room, with each person reaching in (but NOT LOOKING). If you grab your own, put it back in and “fish” for another. Do not show your object to others if possible. Quickly put it away and re-gather for closing time.

Closing

Follow the closing ritual from page 5.

Pass out the practices sheet, which describes the Gift for Giving.

PRACTICES FOR WEEK THREE—LIFE ON LOAN

Gift for Giving: Your Gift for Giving is the object you received from another person. Pray for the person whose object you received. Pray for the gift or passion the object represents, and pray that the person will experience God’s abundance in their life as you pray for them, and that God will open their eyes to all the gifts God has placed in them.

Prayer practice: Try to incorporate this week’s lesson into your daily activities this week. As you walk into the grocery store, say, “God, I know this is your money. Help me use it in a way that honors your will.” As you get into the car, say, “God, I know my life and the lives of others on the road belong to you. Help me protect your creation.” Try to do this with any objects or people or activities you come across. See how this affects the way you do things.

Journaling: Continue your “Thank you’s” to God in the way you live your life. Pick another behavior and practice living that behavior from your heart of rich gratitude each day that week.

Alternately, write about how your prayer practice affects your activities, and write about how you feel about caring for the person whose Gift for Giving you have this week.

LOAN AGREEMENT

THIS AGREEMENT made this _____ day of _____, by and between God, herein called "Lender," and _____ (first name) _____ (last name), herein called "Recipient."

Lender hereby agrees to loan to Recipient the real life located in the Body of Christ, in the form of the human being named above, in the City of _____, State of _____.

The named Recipient above herby acknowledge that Lender, who offers free (but not cheap) grace, has loaned this gift of life.

Lender offers this gift to Recipient on the following terms and conditions:

1. Loan

Recipient agrees to receive life freely given by Lender (God) at the base rate of the terms outlined in GRACE.

2. Repayment of Loan

Lender may observe monthly payments in the following way:

Knowing that faith (rich grace) will show up in the way Recipient's life is lived, Recipient herby agrees to let said faith be visible by the acts/expressions/attitudes/behaviors of Recipient – herby known as 'works.' These good works may include, but are not limited to: prayer, reading scripture, attending worship services, telling a friend or coworker about their faith, showing care for stranger, random acts of kindness, Miracle Day volunteer, seeking justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with Lender (God).

3. Use

The Recipient agrees to use the life given for the Glory of God as a Child of God. Recipient agrees to assume all responsibility for actions taken in this life, according to the Priesthood of all Believers. Lender will hold Recipient solely responsible for all damages to property or for violations against this loan agreement according to agency of Recipient – herby know as FREE WILL.

4. Conditions

The Recipient acknowledges that said life is given in good condition and is to be considered sacred. If there is anything about the condition of the life that is not good, Recipient agrees to report it to Lender within 3 days. Recipient DOES NOT own the property of life, and has no claims to permanence, herby known because of MORTALITY.

5. Recipient Responsibility

Good housekeeping is expected. Recipient agrees to keep life clean and in sanitary condition. The Recipient agrees not to intentionally destroy the life on loan. Recipient agrees to follow Lender instructions, especially where posted.

6. Waiver: There are no waivers or exceptions to this contract (refer to item 1 and item 4).

The Recipient signing this Loan Agreement hereby acknowledges not all questions about said Agreement have been answered, but fully understands all the provisions of the agreement and the obligations and responsibilities of each party, as spelled out herein, will come in Lender's time. Accepted this ___ day of _____.

Lender signature given in sign and symbol of the cross



God , Lender

_____, Recipient

_____, Witness

_____, Witness

WEEK FOUR:

Scarce Faith

Malachi 3:6-12

Luke 12:16-21

Objectives

Participants will learn the following:

- ♥ Tithing is more than a financial matter; it is a spiritual matter.
- ♥ Tithing is “touchy” subject because it gets at the heart of our relationship and commitment to God.
- ♥ Tithing is not only about giving, but also about being richly blessed.

Materials

- ♥ Printed copies of Malachi 3:1-6 passage (NRSV or NIV if possible)
- ♥ Printed copies of Luke 12:16-21 (NRSV or NIV)
- ♥ Flip chart and markers
- ♥ “Tithing Testimonies” from the resource section page ____
- ♥ Yearbook and Directory of the Christian Church OR the information needed from that book for this session.
- ♥ Two copies of the “stewardship pie chart” are needed for each participant. These are included at the end of this session.
- ♥ Chalice Hymnals using #381, “Take My Gifts.”
- ♥ Copies of the week’s PRACTICES, and the Gift for Giving (page 36)

Leader Preparation

- ♥ Prepare information from the Yearbook. Find your congregation and get the figures from the far right that tell the per capita giving of your members as well as the Disciples outreach per capita giving. (Your pastor can help you with yearbook info)
- ♥ Be familiar with the Malachi passage in order to read it with meaning, or ask someone in the group to be prepared to do so. This needs to be read with meaning.
- ♥ If you haven’t used it already, try to learn, “Take My Gifts,” so you or another member of the group can lead in the singing. If there are no good singers in the group, then be prepared to read it with meaning.
- ♥ See if the pastor is willing to use this offertory prayer in church on the Sunday before the Bible study, and then mention that it is what the Bible study will be talking about this week.

“O Generous Giving and Giver God, bless this day all of the gifts we have placed in these offering plates. We dedicate this money and the time and talent it represents. Now, God, bless also all the money and time and talent that is ours, that we **did not** put in the offering plate. We know it belongs to you as well for you are the Giver of all that we have. Remind us all week long of these gifts from you that we may use them wisely, unselfishly, and humbly for good and good-will. Amen.”
- ♥ Select three or four “Tithing Testimonies” to be read aloud, found on pages 64-68.

Welcome—5 minutes

- ♥ As people enter, ask them to place the item they've been carrying all week on the "altar" table. If there's time, ask what it felt like to "carry" someone for a week.
- ♥ Make sure each participant has a name tag or name tent.
- ♥ As an introduction, have people finish this sentence: "My favorite ten percent of my week is the 17 hours when I _____." OR "My favorite ten percent of my salary is the part I spend on _____."

Opening Worship - 10 minutes

- ♥ Follow the opening worship from the Introduction (page 4), EXCEPT that the scripture will be done differently:
- ♥ Scripture- Have someone read the Micah passage out loud alone. Request that people close their eyes and listen. Immediately after the reading, allow 20 seconds of silence and then go directly into the theme talk.

Theme Talk - 10 minutes

Having just heard it, ask the group what emotions, feelings, and reactions they have.

Read it again in unison, out loud, this time listening for those words or phrases that really catch your attention. After the reading, discuss what those words or phrases are, and what about them stood out?

Who here knows what the word "tithe" means? Tithing is a very "touchy" subject for the people who know what it means. Many Disciples pastors do not or have never preached on this topic and many stewardship/finance committees seldom mention it in annual budget campaigns. Lots of young people in the church have no idea what the word means if they have even heard it before! We seem to steer clear of it... it may have five letters, but is "tithe" a four-letter word in the church?

It certainly is a Biblical word: it appears about 40 times in scripture! Most scholars agree that Malachi was written in the 4th or 5th century BC but they also agree that the practice of tithing dates back as early as the 8th century. It means "one tenth"...a tenth of possessions such as animals, grains, spices, produce, etc. It was to be the **best** tenth or "first fruits" and was **required** by all!

Jesus affirmed tithing but also challenged his followers to a full and complete commitment of heart and life. He said to the rich young man, "Go and give **all** that you have to the poor, and come follow me." (Matt 19:16-22) Jesus must have felt that it was very important to address a person's possessions or money since more than 50% of his teachings and parables dwell on this very subject! Jesus knew that financial giving is only one aspect of stewardship, but it sure was a big one! And yet it's one we don't like to talk about as much as Jesus did.

Why is that? Why did Malachi accuse Israel of robbing God? Why did Jesus tell the rich man to give all he had to the poor? And why don't we like to talk about that?

One reason might be fear. What if we give and don't have enough for ourselves? What if we give and then can't make ends meet? There is a lot of risk in giving, and there are always reasons we are afraid to give, with bills and rent and college funds and job insecurity. So why does God expect us to give in light of the financial uncertainty in our lives?

It will be easy during this week's study to get caught up in things that distract us from what tithing means: we could debate whether it's just church giving or all benevolent giving. Is it pre-tax or post-tax income? Does it include bonuses, college graduation gifts, social security?

These questions can serve to protect us from facing our fears about and the potential gifts of tithing. Instead of getting caught up in the legalisms, let's prayerfully ask *why*? Why did Jesus care about possessions and property so much? Why give when we're so stretched? Why focus on mission giving when our church building is in decline? And let us prayerfully risk asking these questions without defensiveness about the hard decisions we make around God and money.

Activity and Discussion-45 minutes

We are going to try to wrestle with five questions about tithing in less than an hour! If the group slows down, choose three and get to the other two if you have time. Whew! Let's try to keep moving, but also recognize that we are only scratching the surface on the exciting and rewarding concept of tithing. Yes, exciting and rewarding is what I said.

Question #1: (ten minutes)

How is tithing about our spirits, and not just about our pocketbooks?

Let's explore that a bit...

First, if anyone's brave enough, ask them to list the reasons a person might NOT tithe. Write those on one column of a flip chart page. Answers might include, "lost job, high rent, spike in utility or gas costs, new baby, child going to college, medical costs, on a fixed income," and other financial worries. If they seem mostly to be about those types of things, write "FINANCIAL FEARS OF TITHING" across them in bold caps, or at the top.

Then ask, "How would you see tithing being a spiritual matter?"

Write the responses on the other column. Some of the answers that might come easily are words and ideas like:

- ✓ Forces us to prioritize our "needs" vs. our "wants."
- ✓ We get to choose who we serve (God or Mammon)
- ✓ Requires us to trust God to care for us-- How fearful are we that we will not be able to pay our bills?
- ✓ Discourages us from the greed our society encourages.

If the group is having trouble articulating responses, read again Malachi 3:8..."Will you rob God? Yet you rob me." (Think about last week's lesson—who does this stuff really belong to?)

Now read over the list that the group has made and ask the participants to silently decide if they might need to address anything on the list in their spiritual life. This is something for each one to consider seriously because *spiritual* matters are at the heart of how we live as Christians. Acknowledge that our fears are real, and that the spiritual issues are also real. Do not seek out-loud responses and do not pause long, but if someone does respond, allow that to serve as a moment of confession. This is not a time for a long discussion but is meant to be a time of self discovery and personal discernment.

Question #2 (ten minutes)

So all I have to do is give 10% and I'm all good?

According to Malachi, tithing is not the goal, but is the beginning point of giving that results in generous offerings. In Malachi 3:8, when the people ask God how they are robbing him, God responds “in tithes and **offerings.**” The offerings were the additional contributions the early Hebrew people brought to support the priests and leaders of the faith. Their covenant with God was for a tithe. They showed their further love for God with their offerings, not for brownie points, but as a thankful response that God had remained faithful to them even when they had not remained faithful to God. “I the Lord do not change.” Malachi 3:6 is fully about the steadfastness of God’s love and God’s trueness to the covenant God made with the Hebrews, even though “you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them.” (3:7) See, the Hebrews got scared, too! But they turned back to God with grateful hearts, with tithes and offerings.

We’ve talked about how everything we have is borrowed from God. What might our giving look like if we took that seriously?

Question #3 (fifteen minutes)

So the offering is about gratitude—is the tithe about obligation?

Tithing is not just about giving. God promises that in being faithful to our covenant with God, we will receive blessings upon blessings: “And see if I do not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room for it.” Wow!

Let’s think about it concretely. Have you ever known any person who tithes who regrets it? Have you ever known anyone who tithes who does not give witness to the incredible blessings of their lives?

Pass out three or four of the “tithing testimonies” in the resource section of this study (pages___) and ask for them to be read aloud. These come from pastors and lay people around our region.

Do these stories resonate? What sounds familiar? What are you skeptical about?

Imagine we in this room were to line up by our tithing percentage. Where do you think you would fall? To be honest, we would have to begin at 1% and go upward, because the average church member in America gives less than 3% to **all** charities, not just the church.

Think of the ministry your church could do if every member only gave 5%! Now think of the miracles of ministry 10% would allow.

Explain that you are now going to pass out a “Stewardship Pie” Chart. What they are to do, using the words describing basic ways Americans spend money, is to guess-timate the percentage each one receives. Write that percentage by the expense or cost category and then roughly draw in the slices of pie and write the word in that slice. This is to be a very rough estimate basically to focus on what percentage they give to the church and other benevolent causes. This is all to be done privately.

Without asking anyone to reveal their “Stewardship Pie” Chart, simply ask, “What are you seeing or learning from this exercise?”

Explain that as they leave, their “Discipleship seed” for tonight will be a second “Stewardship Pie” Chart which is about how they use their time...stewardship is about more than money! This is an exercise they might do this coming week as part of their devotion moments.

Question #4 (fifteen minutes)

If my church wants me to do this, can I expect my congregation to tithe as well??

Ask the participants if they have any idea what percentage of their congregational income goes for outreach? What percentage do they give away?? Those who know will probably be members of a church committed to tithing to outreach. Many will not know because their church has not made such a commitment.

Here are two statistics you can share:

- ✓ 50 Disciples churches in our region reported their total budget and the number of participating members. The Yearbook takes those figures and calculates total per capita giving...that is how much an average Disciples member in this region gives to the church per year. That figure is:\$2,224.80. That amounts to \$42.78 a week. That amount is hugely skewed by two churches whose average is \$13,766.46 and \$20,359.12. Remove those two and per capita giving is about \$20.00 a week. Comment: I wonder how many of our members make just \$200 a week? (If you have the per capita giving for your own congregation from the yearbook, share that now).
- ✓ 50 Disciples churches in our region reported Disciples outreach giving along with the number of participating members. The Yearbook takes those figures and calculates total per Disciples outreach giving...how much an average Disciples member in this region gives to Disciples outreach. That figure is \$116.12 which is less that \$2.00 a week. Take out the top four figures and that amount is easily less than \$1.00 a week. Now, this does not include other outreach giving of the congregation (Habitat for Humanity, local food bank, etc. It does include disaster giving like Week of Compassion), but I wonder how close that is to being a tithe?

Board members sometimes get frustrated that members don't tithe, but how does our church model tithing? If we keep it all for ourselves, why wouldn't members do the same thing? Do we notice any similarities between our own fears and those of the church when it comes to giving away our money?

Do not allow this final principle to get bogged down in statistics and details, reasons and excuses, as it easily can. (Well, we give to local causes where we can see the results... We don't always agree with everything the Region does...etc.) If you have access to a church financial statement that shows you're tithing to the combination of region and local charities, celebrate that! But a question to present without discussion (in a word or phrase) might be "How would your congregation respond to Malachi 3:8, '_____ Christian Church, will you rob God? But you are robbing me?'"

#5 Is this just me and God? (ten minutes)

Turn to the altar and remind people they carried an object last week that represented someone else in the class. Quickly ask:

- What was it like to carry someone else's item for a week?
- What was it liked to be carried around by someone else for a week?
- Did you necessarily know what they needed? And yet you prayed anyhow.
- What kind of connection do you feel after praying for them?

Tithing is one of the ways we carry people we don't know. We don't necessarily know exactly who the other person is, all their intimate details, but we know God calls us to care for them. When we don't share from our abundance (or even from what sometimes feels like scarcity), God's not the only one we rob. We rob ourselves of the opportunity to be in relationship with the people God gave us as family. We miss out on the opportunity to carry them. Carrying a person changes you, doesn't it? It takes you out of yourself, just a little bit. Has tithing ever affected the way you feel connected with God's people as well as your connection to God? How *might* it, in light of the fact that God has given us one another to care for?

Closing- 10 minutes

Ask people to take a moment to reflect on their learning and sharing this night. Ask the question, "Did God have something to say to you in this session?"

Follow the closing worship (page 5), including the singing or reading of "Take My Gifts" as a closing benediction.

Hand out the Gift for Giving ("Money Talk" story) and the practices sheet.

As you hand them the time pie charts, ask the participants to find someplace they can put their charts so they can be seen, or brought out for their prayer time so they will look at them each day.

PRACTICES FOR WEEK FOUR: *Scarce Faith*

Prayer practice: Offer the following prayer:

“Giving and Giver God, thank you for your generosity. Help me to let go of any scarce faith this day and affirm my belief that you truly are a God of Abundance! May I see the blessings you pour out on me and may I respond with my own generosity. Challenge me with the thought of tithing. Amen.

Each day, spend a brief time reflecting on the two charts and what it really tells you about your spiritual life. Close that personal time with the prayer above.

Journaling: In addition to the “Thank you” activity (where you pick something from your Week One list and practice living that behavior from your heart of rich gratitude each day that week), consider reading Luke 12:16-21 each night. Verse 21 in The Message reads, “That’s what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God.” Think about how your life feels like God’s vision already, and how it could feel more like God’s vision.



GIFT FOR GIVING—WEEK FOUR
Money Talk

The preacher never stopped talking about money.
The congregation clutched their billfolds and squirmed.
He told them not to worry so much about
stuff that'll rot and rust.
He told them that the folding stuff was not the currency
to buy meaning and happiness.
He singled out one man and told him to sell everything
and then give the proceeds to the poor.
He had them shaking their heads when he said,
"Happy are the poor."
Some of the best-dressed stomped out,
their noses in the air.
A few of the wealthy and powerful slipped quietly
into a backroom and had a contract put out on
the young preacher's life.
And it only cost them thirty pieces of silver.

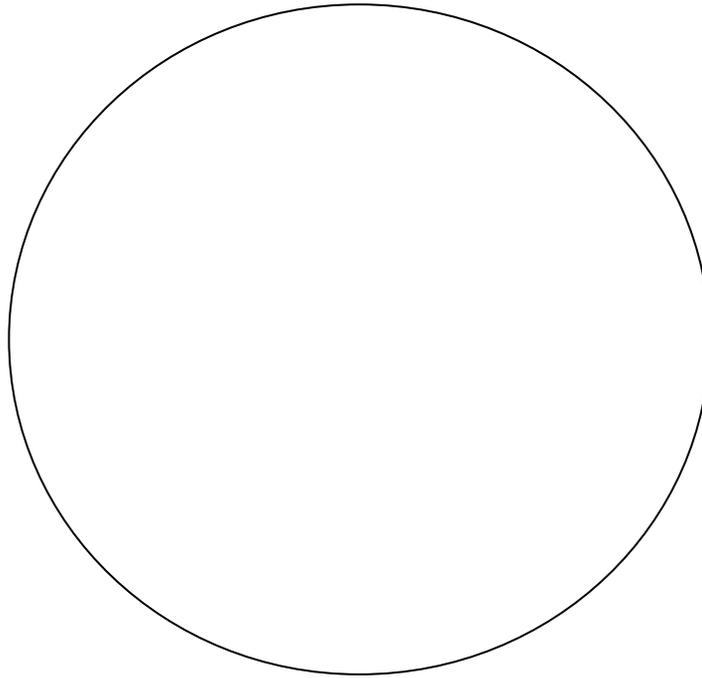
George White
alive now!, May/June 1986

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Stewardship Pie Chart- Financial



Directions for this process:

1. Look over the following broad categories of ways in which Americans spend their money:

- _____ monthly bills (home, car, etc.)
- _____ food
- _____ entertainment
- _____ medical
- _____ church and benevolent giving
- _____ savings
- _____ debt reduction (credit card payments)
- _____ other

2. Guess-timate the percentage of money you spend each month on each category. Write that percent by each category. This is not meant to be an exact detailed budget analysis. Keep it simple with your best guess.

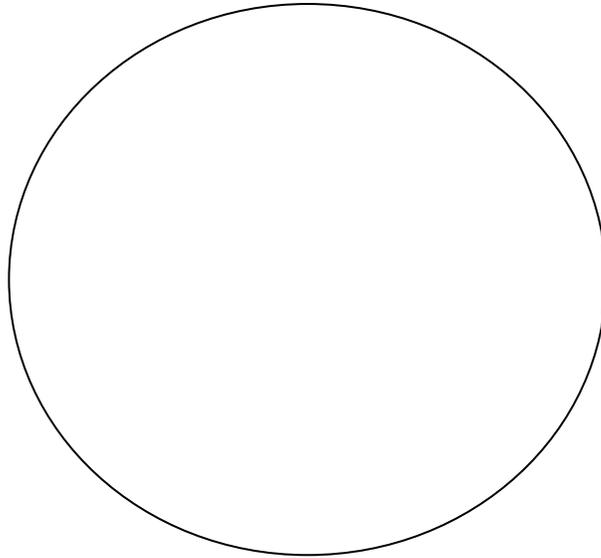
3. Now roughly draw in slices of pie for each category according to the percent and write the word of that category in the slice or just outside the pie with an arrow pointing to the slice. (If you have some slices that are only 2% or 3% there may not be room for the word).

4. This is a private exercise so you will not show your pie chart to anyone unless you choose to do so.

Question for discussion: “What are you seeing or learning from this exercise?”

Stewardship Pie Chart- Time

This is an exercise for you to do in the week following Session #2.



Directions for this process:

1. Look over the following broad categories of ways in which Americans spend their time:

- _____ family
- _____ work
- _____ sleep
- _____ entertainment
- _____ church and charity volunteering/service
- _____ personal care
- _____ home care
- _____ computer
- _____ meal preparation/eating
- _____ other

2. Guess-timate the percentage of time you spend each month on each category. Write that percent by each category. This is not meant to be an exact detailed budget analysis. Keep it simple with your best guess.

3. Now roughly draw in slices of pie for each category according to the percent and write the word of that category in the slice or just outside the pie with an arrow pointing to the slice. (If you have some slices that are only 2% or 3% there may not be room for the word).

4. This is a private exercise so you will not show your pie chart to anyone unless you choose to do so.

Question for discussion: “What are you seeing or learning from this exercise?”

WEEK FIVE:

Stywards for *Jesus*

Matthew 19:16-22

Objectives

Participants will learn the following:

- ♥ God does not intend the blessings in our life to stagnate.
- ♥ Following Jesus means turning outward.
- ♥ Holding onto our gifts harms our relationship to the world AND to God.

Materials

- ♥ Flip chart and markers
- ♥ Three printed copies of the skit “The Teacher and the VIP” on page 47.
- ♥ enough copies of the three stories on pages 45-46 so that 1/3 of the group will have a copy of each.
- ♥ Copies of the week’s PRACTICES, and the Gift for Giving (pages 48-52) (this week’s Gift for Giving is actually a five-page story from a newspaper.)

Leader Preparation

- ♥ Be aware that today is a more conversation-oriented session. Read over the materials carefully this week so that you can be aware of where the conversation might be headed. The goal is to help people think about how to focus their lives and service to God outward, so be prepared to keep the conversation focused around that theme if it begins to move into other areas. This will require that you read the materials in advance so you understand the overall purpose of this lesson.

Welcome—5 minutes

- ♥ As people come in, pick three good readers to read the skit on page 47 (you've already made copies). Ask them to read over their parts quickly, since this will be part of the opening.
- ♥ To open, ask people to introduce themselves and complete the following sentence: "The messiest job I've ever done is: _____."

Opening Worship - 10 minutes

Follow the same opening worship as in the introduction (page 4), but instead of reading the scripture, do the skit that you handed out at the beginning. Ask people if that story is familiar to them. Ask what the point might be of that particular re-telling. (Today we are afraid of being tacky or pushy by encouraging people to share their gifts with others. Jesus certainly wasn't, though!)

Theme talk - 15 minutes

A lot of people get mad at today's passage: "Is Jesus saying we have to get rid of all our money? If there were no rich people, who would take care of the poor?" There are a lot of ways to interpret this scripture, but one of them is about the original meaning of stewardship.

Remember two weeks ago, how we talked about how everything we have is actually God's—our life is on loan.

You may remember stewards in fairytales—the ones whose job it was to take care of the king's needs. They took care of things, made sure things ran smoothly, but they didn't own anything.

In fact, the old English for "steward" is sty-ward...it was the guy who cleaned out the pig-pen, the sty! Not a glamorous job. But could there be something to that old saying, "'Tis better to give than to receive?"

Let's put aside for a moment the question of whether we should get rich and give it all away or whether we should live a life of poverty. Let's think about the issue that may have been most central to this passage: that we need to discard **WHATEVER** is separating us from God's love, as the rich man's love of money kept him from getting close to God even though he followed every rule perfectly. Today's lesson will help us reflect on that issue. How does tending to others help us connect with God? Why would taking care of ourselves hurt us? These are the questions that today's scripture really dwells on. So let's hear the scripture again, this time the version with Jesus and the rich young man.

[Have someone read Matthew 19:16-22]

Does anyone know what Jesus says as the rich man walks away? [If not, have someone read verses 23-24]

Why would Jesus say something like that? [let them discuss briefly]

Today, we're not going to focus on what Jesus was saying to the rich young man, but what he was telling us in that moment, even if we are not rich. Sometimes we're entrusted with things—we're guardians of those things (since we're not the owners). That means that what we do with those things matters to the true owner. Ultimately, though, it also matters to our well-being.

In week one, we talked about our desire for God's grace without changing the comfort in our lives, and how experiencing true grace causes us to want to live differently.

In week two, we talked about the gifts God has placed within us, and what a joy it can be to share those gifts with our community.

In week three, we talked about how all that we have actually belongs to God—we are borrowing it, and should treat it with that level of respect and interest.

Last week, we talked about how sometimes we do not trust God to provide for all of the things we need, which causes us to fear that tithing would leave us without the resources we need. We also reflected on the great things that can happen in our lives if we live out of generosity and not just fear.

This week, we think about how living as stewards, slopping out troughs instead of lounging on gold thrones, brings us closer to God. Some people call this "Getting dirty for Jesus." Sometimes our "stuff" gets in the way of the work God wants us to do, and as a result, that "stuff" gets in the way of our relationship with God! Later on, we'd like to have a conversation about times in our own lives that we've discovered letting go of something, or giving it away, has actually freed us up. To start with though, we're going to break into groups around three very different stories.

Activity Time – 30 minutes

Giving Gifts in story (10 minutes)

Break the large group into three small groups, and give each group copies of one of the stories for today. (Found on pages 45-46)

Read the story in your group, then ask the following questions:

- 1) Was the person in the story rich?
- 2) When was he/she close to God? Far?
- 3) What "stuff" did he/she have?
- 4) How does this story compare to the skit?
- 5) In this story, what does the storyteller think should happen with the money? Is the destination of the money the important part of the story?
- 6) Have you ever had an experience where letting go of possessions or giving away more of your resources and/or time made a difference in your life, or in your relationship with God?

Large group Discussion (20 minutes)

Ask the large group to share reasons we usually associate with volunteering or sharing our financial resources. Write those on the board.

Ask the group to talk about what should happen with the money in each of the stories they read (in the first to the poor, in the second to the church which may go many different places and in the third to the poor—but that particular author thought the self-satisfaction of the rich man was the problem more than the fact that the poor needed it). Write those on the board also. Is there a difference in those lists, or do you see similarities? (Do we already understand some of the reasons God wants us to do this work in the world?)

Ask if anyone is willing to share their answer to the final small group question, about giving things away. Ask if they believe *where* the money or time or possessions went made a difference in their experience. (God desires us to be engaged with others as an essential part of the way we live out our faith. Can we feel a difference when our faith life is exclusively one-on-one versus connecting with others?)

If the group agrees with the premise of lesson 3 (that we do not have the right to claim our possessions as our own, but we recognize them as belonging to God), write on the top of a clean sheet, “Sty-wards,” and then ask which pens we’re in charge of mucking out.... if we possess these things, and if we are supposed to care for them on God’s behalf (if we’re stewards), what are the things we’re supposed to care for?

(They may have plenty, but listing poor people, children, the planet, the sick, those in prison, people who are alone and isolated, and the elderly are all biblical examples that might show up. If your church has talked at all about modern day or child slavery, make sure to include that in the list.)

How is our community meeting those needs? Are we meeting those needs fully? How is our congregation meeting those needs, or partnering with others to meet those needs? How do we think our congregation would feel like a different place if we made that a priority of our work for *all* our members? (If the word isn’t scary, let people know this is the basic premise of the “missional church” movement: everyone is supposed to be engaged in mission, and everyone is supposed to be engaged in sharing the story about how God’s love has changed their lives so that people who are suffering receive care and also receive hope for the future. It’s also called “the New Testament church.”)

Closing worship – 10 minutes

If your congregation knows the song “Sister, Let Me Be Your Servant,” #490 in the Chalice Hymnal, that would be a great song to sing.

As a closing litany, go back to the list of people and things that you brainstormed earlier. Ask the group to speak this litany together, plugging each word on the list into the following sentence:

“God who gives, you love the _____, so we love the _____. Help us care for the _____ so we can follow you.”

Finish the litany yourself by saying, “And God, we know there are others you love; help us learn about them and help them also.”

Finally, remind the group that the faith Jesus taught during his life was an active faith—a faith that said to give all your money to the poor AND FOLLOW JESUS. Send them out with this benediction, a letter from Paul to the church in Ephesus while he was in jail for his faith, a message to us in this group as sty-wards for the realm of God:

the Message interpretation of Ephesians 4:1-6: **1** In light of all this, here's what I want you to do. While I'm locked up here, a prisoner for the Master, I want you to get out there and walk - better yet, run! - on the road God called you to travel. I don't want any of you sitting around on your hands. I don't want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere. **2** And mark that you do this with humility and discipline - not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, **3** alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences. **4** You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. **5** You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness.

Give them their Gift for Giving, and their practices sheet. Encourage them to write down the list that you made into a litany for their prayer practice this week.

PRACTICES FOR WEEK FIVE: *Stywards for Jesus*

Prayer practice: Look at the list of things God calls us and the church to do. Each day,

- If you serve on your church's board and have a copy of the church's finances, spend this week praying for a way to invest your church more fully in giving what you have to that sty-ward-ship and following God.
- If you serve on a ministry committee in the church, pray to God for the committee's illumination about how to invest the church more fully in giving what you have to that sty-ward-ship and following God.
- If you are involved in an ecumenical or secular organization as your means of serving, pray to God for that group's illumination about how to invest the church more fully in giving what you have to that sty-ward-ship and following God.
- If you are not yet involved in any of those things, pray to God for your illumination about how to invest yourself more fully in giving what you have to that sty-ward-ship and following God.

Journaling: On the first day, write down this whole passage in your journal. Reflect on which words speak to you about your own faith journey.

Each day after, write down all the major nouns and verbs in each verse. (Day one would read: light, do, locked, prisoner, Master, walk, run, road, God, travel, sitting, hands, strolling, nowhere.) What are those words telling you about your faith journey as a sty-ward?

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Gift for Giving: Read the article about the Richest Man in Boston. Ask in what ways he is rich. Pay attention to his journey into giving, why he does it, and how it enriches him. At least once this week, pray for those in your life who have taught you that the greatest blessings in your faith can come from reaching out and letting go.

STORY ONE: Mother Teresa visited Australia. A new recruit to the monastery in Australia was assigned to be her guide and “gofer” during her stay. The young man was so thrilled and excited at the prospect of being so close to this woman. He dreamed of how much he would learn from her and what they would talk about. But during her visit, he became frustrated. Although he was constantly near her, he never had the opportunity to say one word to Mother Teresa. There were always other people for her to meet. Finally, her tour was over, and she was due to fly to New Guinea. In desperation, the friar had his opportunity to speak to Mother Teresa. He said to her, “If I pay my own fare to New Guinea, can I sit next to you on the plane so I can talk to you and learn from you?” Mother Teresa looked at him. “You have enough money to pay airfare to New Guinea?” she asked. “Oh, yes,” he replied eagerly. “Then give that money to the poor,” she said. “You’ll learn more from that than anything I can tell you.”

STORY TWO: There was once a young man who came to the church, poor, hungry, out of work, and in need. He was so ashamed when the collection plate was passed around and he had nothing to offer, but the members of the church embraced him and loved him and supported him, and he kept coming, volunteering to help around the building in any way he could.

Soon enough he found a job—it only paid \$100 a week, but he proudly put \$10 in the plate as soon as he got a paycheck, and \$10 each week, grateful to God for all he had received. He was such a hard worker that soon he was promoted, and then again. With each promotion he gladly put his increased tithe in the plate.

But one day he hit a real snag. He had worked so hard that he was promoted to a \$120,000 a year job with a corner office. He walked into the pastor’s office before church that Sunday, wringing his hands. When she asked what was wrong, he said, “It was one thing to give \$500 a year to the church when I first got a job, and I’ve tried to keep tithing no matter what, but I did the math, and I’d be giving \$12,000 a year! That’s a LOT of money!”

The pastor smiled gently at him and said, “Would you like me to pray with you about it?” He nodded eagerly and immediately bowed his head and folded his hands.

“Oh, God who giveth and taketh away,” the pastor intoned reverently, “we come to you this morning praying that you would give back to your son his \$100 a week job so that he could afford to tithe again!”

STORY THREE (by Episcopal priest George Hodges, in the book "When the King Came," published 1904): Most of our Lord's disciples were poor people. The rich were not much interested in the things which chiefly interested him. They were giving their attention to their business and their pleasure, making money and spending it. Moreover, they were quite satisfied with the world as it was, living comfortably in their pleasant houses, and dreading any change. There was still another reason why the rich did not join him. Not only were they intent upon this present life and satisfied with it, but many of them were selfish. Jesus taught that all persons should share their possessions with others. He said that if a man had two coats, he ought to give one to his neighbor who had none. But the people who had two coats did not like that, and those who had twenty coats were very angry about it.

It must be confessed that our Lord did not make it easy for the rich. One day a young man came, desiring to be one of his disciples, and the young man had great possessions. Everybody was surprised to see him, for it was as if a millionaire should propose to become a member of the Salvation Army... [He asked how to get into heaven, and Jesus told him to follow the ten commandments.] "All this," said the man, "have I done: what lack I yet?" And the Lord said, "Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me." You see how hard it was. Our Lord did not say that to other rich men; he said it to this rich man because it was exactly what he needed. The man had never done anything bad, but, on the other hand, he had never done anything good. He had lived a perfectly proper, but a very selfish life. His only way was to break with it all, to give it all up, and come out into a totally different manner of living. But the young man rose slowly from his knees, with a long face, and turned about and went away. He felt that that was too much.

It was at that time that our Lord said, "How hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Not because it is wrong to be rich, nor because God likes the poor better than the rich, but because the rich are so tempted to be satisfied and selfish.

Skit: The Teacher and the VIP

Narrator: “The Teacher and the V.I.P., Revised Substandard Version”
Then a Very Important Person came to the teacher and said,
Person A: “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”
Narrator: And the teacher replied,
Person B: “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”
Narrator: The VIP then asked,
Person A: “Which ones?”
Narrator: And the teacher said,
Person B: “You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and mother; also, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”
Narrator: The VIP said,
Person A: “I have kept all these; what do I still lack?”
Narrator: The teacher looked upon the VIP with love and said,
Person B: “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”
Narrator: And the VIP was about to go away with great sorrow, for this Very Important Person had great possessions. But the teacher called after the VIP and said,
Person B: Wait, I was only kidding. I didn’t mean for you to take it so literally. What I really meant was that I think you are overly attached to your possessions.”
Person A: Oh, I am so relieved! I thought you meant I should impoverish myself in order to gain eternal life.
Person B: No, of course not. That would be completely impractical. But how much do you think would be enough to show that you’re really trying to detach yourself from your wealth? How about selling half your possessions and giving that money away? It worked for Zacchaeus, you know.
Person A: Half? That’s hardly any better; I can’t live that way.
Person B: Oh, sorry. I guess this is a really touchy subject for you, isn’t it? I didn’t mean to offend you. Tell you what: let’s fall back on what the Bible says – a tithe, 10% of your income dedicated to God.
Narrator: And the VIP answered,
Person A: I see you’re trying, Teach, but you really don’t understand my situation. I’ve got bills and responsibilities and expenses; a family to support. It’s hard to make ends meet. Ten percent just isn’t realistic.
Narrator: The teacher responded,
Person B: Look, my movement really needs people like you. You obviously have good business sense and we could use people like you in decision-making. Let’s not worry about how much right now; I’m sorry we got off on the wrong foot. As far as the money thing is concerned, why don’t you just give it your prayerful consideration?
Person A: “Sure, Teach, anything you say.”
Narrator: And the teacher went away hopefully (but not very hopefully) – for the Very Important Person had great possessions.

[Hint to those who may be offended. The teacher in this story isn’t Jesus. It’s an imposter.]

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[gift for giving, week five]

The richest man in town

At 84, Tom White has achieved his life's goal. He's given away his entire fortune.

By Bella English, Globe Staff | March 23, 2004

There's a popular bumper sticker that says: "He who dies with the most toys wins." Tom White's bumper sticker would read: "He who gives it all away wins."

It looks as if White will get his wish. At 84, the construction millionaire has given away his fortune. If he has his way, he'll be down to his last quarter when he draws his last breath.

"Give me three good reasons why I shouldn't," he says. Then he proceeds to list three reasons he should. "I can't take it with me, my kids are OK, and my wife's taken care of."

He gave away his first chunk of money after World War II, when an Army buddy needed some cash. White gave him \$200. Since then, he estimates he has given away \$75 million, pretty much all of his assets. He has supported more than 100 causes over the years, but his biggest gift by far has gone to Partners in Health, the program made famous last year with the publication of Tracy Kidder's book "Mountains Beyond Mountains." The book details the work done in Haiti and other Third World countries by Dr. Paul Farmer, a Harvard professor and infectious-disease specialist whose work on AIDS and tuberculosis for the world's poorest has been hailed as groundbreaking. White put up the initial money for the program and has steadily funneled tens of millions of dollars into it. It all began with a bread oven. A 1983 meeting in Haiti would change both men's lives, as well as the way the medical world would treat poor people with AIDS and drug-resistant tuberculosis. Then a Harvard medical student working in Haiti, Farmer was dispatched to the Port-au-Prince airport to fetch White, a successful businessman on an errand.

White was 64, 40 years older than the brash young student who viewed the capitalist with more than a grain of skepticism. "He was wearing bright checkered golf pants, red and other offensive colors, and some sort of golf shirt, and he had on a hat," Farmer says.

It was White's first trip to Haiti; he had been asked by Project Bread, one of his charities, to build a community oven in Cange, a rural slum, so women would not have to walk 10 miles each way to buy bread. "It was a no-brainer," says White, who was president of J.F. White Contracting Co., a business started by his father. "So I went over, and who did I meet but Paul? What a piece of work." White chuckles. "He'd hardly give me the time of day because he thought I was a member of the establishment."

On the long, dusty ride to Cange, Farmer, who had asked Project Bread for the oven, baited White: How do you feel about unions? Who did you support in the last presidential election? ("All sorts of inappropriate questions that a 24-year-old should not be asking a potential donor," Farmer says today.)

To Farmer's surprise, White replied that he was in favor of unions and that he had voted against Ronald Reagan. Farmer was impressed not only by White's answers but by his emotional reaction to the suffering he saw in Haiti. "That made a big difference to me," says Farmer, to whom Haiti has become a second home. "The inspiration for Partners in Health was born right then and there." In 1987 it was established, with a \$1 million donation from White, who sits on the group's advisory board.

"He said yes, and he has continued to say yes," is the way Farmer describes White's contribution to Partners in Health. "He has the gift of empathy. He's probably the greatest man I've ever met." It's high praise coming from a man who has himself been called a saint.

A quiet force

On a recent day, White is relaxing in his two-bedroom condo overlooking the Charles River in Cambridge. It is a nice place, but hardly a millionaire's digs, with its galley kitchen and combination living/dining area. He's forthright about his life, warts and all, and quick with a laugh. But his eyes flash at the mention of certain subjects, particularly Haiti. He thinks the Bush administration's policy toward former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide has been devastating to both democracy and the poor. Aristide recently fled Haiti as rebels overtook the capital.

"Bush hates Aristide because he won't be a toady," says White, who "goes looking" for Aristide whenever he's in Haiti. "I often find him at his orphanage in Port-au-Prince. He's going to do what he thinks is best for the poor people. . . . Aristide has had nothing to work with." Under Bush, the United States has helped block \$500 million in aid to the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, ravaging its economy and basic services. "People are literally starving, especially children. It's unbelievable," White says.

White has long been a quiet force in Boston. His company built Foxboro Stadium, the Charles River dam, part of the subway system, the Park Plaza Hotel, and the underground garage at Post Office Square. White was a confidante of Cardinal Cushing and served as the New England fund-raiser for John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign. He has been on the boards of the Harvard Divinity School, Boston College, the New England Patriots, and the JFK Library. And for decades he has quietly been giving away money to various causes, especially those dealing with the poor. He put up seed money to help start Nativity Preparatory School in Roxbury, which offers children from impoverished homes a prep-school education.

"I kept going to the bottom tier, which is Haiti," is the way White describes his charitable causes. Whenever his alma mater, Harvard, would call looking for money, he'd say, "For

God's sake, you've got \$15 billion over there, and I've got people over here starving to death. You tell me what I should do." Recounting this, White chuckles and adds, "I still give \$1,000 a year so my classmates will talk to me."

There's no doubt that, given the choice, he'd rather have a cement-block building in Haiti named after him than a Harvard library. Actually, he'd rather not have either. But in 1999, the board of Partners in Health decided to name a treatment center at their headquarters in Haiti the Thomas J. White Center. Across central Haiti, patients talk of going to "the Tom White" to get help.

Last year, when Farmer and White were in Haiti, patients asked to meet this Tom White who had funded the facility where they were being treated. Farmer was the translator, speaking Creole. But when it came to relaying the message from the patients' spokesman to their benefactor, Farmer could barely continue. "I had more than a lump in my throat," he says. He was in tears.

The message: "In the name of the Tom White patients, we'd like to welcome you to the Tom White pavilion." White, too, was teary-eyed, but he thanked the patients, said they were models for other places with similar problems, and told them it was their job to get well and help other patients.

"He has basically given away his wealth," Farmer says. "I've never seen it before, have you? I've read about it in the Bible."

Fighting battles

From Irish Catholic kid to major philanthropist, it was not a smooth road for White. The son of an alcoholic with a nasty temper, he says he grew up in Cambridge with poor self-esteem. White's mother, overwhelmed with six children, wasn't much help. "If you came in with a bloody nose, she'd say, 'You have to fight your own battles.'" he recalls. When young Tom brought home all A's, it still "wasn't good enough" for his parents.

"I think the suffering in my own family made me want to help others," White says. His father proved successful in real estate, fuel, and construction. But the Depression wiped him out. Though the family was comfortable -- "we had the only single-family home on Ellery Street," White says -- his father was cheap. "He would never buy us a bike, and I remember stuffing paper in my shoes," says White, who made do with hand-me-downs.

Attending Harvard on an ROTC grant, he graduated on June 6, 1942. Two days later, he was at Fort Bragg in California, volunteering as a paratrooper. He jumped into Normandy the night before D-Day, returning home with Silver and Bronze stars. In 1947, he took over his father's construction business with a couple of old coal trucks and \$20,000. He didn't know anything about building, but it turns out he did know something about making money.

Once White got a glimpse of Haiti, that was it; he decided there could be no better use for his money. "I was angry," he says. "You see the kids with red hair and distended bellies," signs of severe malnutrition. During one trip to Partners in Health's clinic in Cange, White told Farmer and his colleagues to outfit the village's shanties with cement floors and tin roofs -- and send him the bill. More than 100 huts were fixed.

"The floors were dirt, and when it rained, people would sleep in the mud," he says. He is proud of the food program at Cange -- "the kids get two meals a day." Today, Partners in Health runs a full-service hospital, AIDS and tuberculosis treatment clinics, a women's health center, and several cottage industries in Haiti. It has also launched programs in Peru, Siberia, Guatemala, Mexico, and Boston.

"They would call me and say, 'We have 10 cases of drug-resistant TB,' and at that time it cost \$25,000 a patient," White says. "They kept calling: 'We've identified 20 more,' and then 20 more." White never said no.

"Finally, about four or five years ago, it just got beyond me," he says. "I don't have money like Bill Gates. What I gave away was all I have, but it wasn't all that much." He says that he still has "a few hundred thousand bucks" in a charitable gift fund. As for Partners in Health, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has become a major donor.

Motivated to help

White's giving comes from the heart, not the ego. When Time magazine named him "best philanthropist" in 2001, he said: "You've got the wrong man." He says he loathes stories about "self-made men," particularly from politicians. "All these guys brag that they did it all themselves. It's a lot of baloney. Everyone gets breaks. Along the way, I've had a lot of breaks."

Although he is one of them, he doesn't particularly care for wealthy people. "With them, it's all about me, me, me," he says. "All they talk about is their golf scores and the big new house they're going to build." Though he used to belong to prestigious private clubs, White stopped going and no longer hobnobs with the rich. About 10 years ago, his wife told him: "You finally did it. No one has invited us anywhere this year."

Not that she minds. Lois White has been married to Tom for 30 years; between the two of them, they have 13 children -- six of hers, seven of his. There are 37 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. She has accompanied her husband to Haiti on several occasions and is thrilled with the center there. "It's like an oasis in the middle of a desert," she says. "They have people coming from 30 to 40 miles away, walking two or three days for treatment."

Five years ago, Tom White sold the big house on Cape Cod that he bought cheap and redid himself, but he and Lois still have a small home in Osterville and an apartment in Jupiter, Fla. They don't travel the way they used to, and when they do, they stay in budget places.

"But we're not wearing hair shirts," he says. "I don't collect art and wine. If I want a beer, I have a beer. I have everything I need."

White says that people in trouble gravitate toward him. But maybe it's the other way around. His wife says he can't go into Harvard Square without emptying his wallet.

"Did he tell you about the red-wagon lady?" Lois asks, and then proceeds to tell the story. For years, Tom has given money to a homeless woman who collects bottles and cans in the square and redeems them. One day, he asked her what else he could do to help her. "What I would really like is a red wagon because then I could pick up more bottles and take them to the store," she replied. When he got home, he went to Sears and picked up a red wagon. "The next morning, he goes pulling the wagon up to Harvard Square," says Lois, chuckling at the memory. "When she saw him coming, she burst into tears."

Asked about it, White is dismissive. "I got a bigger kick out of it than she did."

A trip to McDonald's typically costs him a hundred bucks. He'll search out the janitors and hand over \$20 bills. "The woman cleaning the toilet can't speak English, she has nothing, and no one gives her anything," he explains. He also supports Sojourner House, a homeless shelter in Roxbury; Odwin Learning Center in Dorchester, which helps adults get into college; and afterschool and summer programs for poor kids in Roxbury.

Ask him why, and White, who attends Mass daily, replies: "I'm motivated a lot by what Jesus wants me to do, or what I think he wants me to do. And I think he wants me to help make the world a better place."

His family, he says, is taken care of; he gave his children stock in his company "way back, when it was so cheap." His oldest son now runs the company, and his youngest son works there. His daughter, Linda Fiske, says she and her siblings were brought up to believe that all people are equal and that "we're all in this together."

"We marvel at our father because he's so darn intelligent and so compassionate," says Fiske, 50, a preschool teacher who lives in Hingham. "He's been a tremendous role model. Some people might feel that as a child, you're entitled [to an inheritance]. But why should you be? I feel if your parents raised you, and put in so much time and energy, they don't owe you. . . . He has been so incredibly generous over the years that none of us feels deprived. None of us are the type to go out and buy yachts and take trips around the world."

As for Tom White, he says he has but one regret: "I'm sorry I don't have more money to give away." ■

WEEK SIX:

All the way *Baptized*

2 Corinthians 8:1-9

Objectives

Participants will learn the following:

- ♥ That baptism means your whole life is covered with God's grace, and your whole life needs to live out your response to that grace.

Materials

- ♥ a bowl of water for blessing

Leader Preparation

- ♥ Try to make sure everyone has the Message interpretation of the scripture for today—it really paints a clear picture of the Macedonians' generosity.
- ♥ If your group gathers for a meal each week, consider organizing a "stone soup" dinner, where each person brings a vegetable or meat (if someone can make dumplings as their contribution, fabulous!) and adds it to the water or stock you provide. During the lesson the soup can simmer, and you can share it at the end.
- ♥ Make sure to review the closing worship, since it's different than most weeks.
- ♥ Make a sheet of paper in the biggest print possible that reads "Let these waters remind you of *who* you are and *whose* you are. May God bless your vision and rededicate you to the purpose God has for you." People will be able to read off of this sheet during the closing worship.

Welcome—5 minutes

Have participants finish this sentence: “When I think of water, I think of _____.”

Worship – 10 minutes

Use the worship suggestion listed in the introduction on page 4.

Theme Talk – 10 minutes

Paul wrote to the Corinthians during a fundraising campaign—he was the celebrity endorsing the campaign for the church in Jerusalem. The Macedonian church had already started collecting for this gift to the Jerusalem church, and Paul was proud of them. He wrote to encourage the church of Corinth. In this text his love for the church in Macedonia is clear, as is the commitment, passion, and deep sense of stewardship of the church in Macedonia. Read verses 1-4 again.

They begged for the privilege of contributing. Can you imagine our church begging to give an offering? (Why or why not?)

We have talked at length about stewardship of the life God has given each of us.

We have talked about how entitlement can get in the way of our faith, and how the challenges of discipleship can bring us closer to God.

We have talked about trusting the gifts that God has placed within us and using it.

We have talked about how our life is on loan from God.

We have talked about what it means to give generously and the blessings God bestows upon us when we give both tithes and offerings.

And we have talked about how God asks us to place ourselves and our gifts in the world, not to keep our relationship with God under wraps.

When we think of all we have talked about these past six weeks - the Macedonian church's attitude about giving does not seem so ...well...unrealistic.

Paul has given a simple formula for stewardship in his letter to the church in Corinth:

“First they gave themselves to the Lord, and then by God’s will they gave themselves to us.”

Do you remember when you first gave yourself to God?

For some of us it was at the time of our baptism. The rest of this evening, kind of like your baptism or confession of faith, is a time to consider what your relationship with God means to you.

First we will talk about our baptisms, then talk about this series and its effect on our spiritual lives, then we will share in a prayer time to remember our baptism.

Discussion – 30 minutes

If you have been baptized, go around and share that event with the group.

Be sure to share time of day, who was there, what people wore, water temperature, sprinkled or dunked. What was the minister's name? What was the pastor's class like if you had one?

Your baptism was the only commitment to Christ you needed to make, although you may have re-committed yourself to Discipleship at many times.

Did you get only partially wet? If so, did you get fully baptized *spiritually*?

Pastor Dick Wing⁴ tells the story that when Roman soldiers in the earliest days of Christianity chose to be baptized, they made sure to be submerged in the baptismal waters... every part of them except for the arm that wielded the sword in battle. They knew that they were not going to change that part of their lives—that part of them was not going to be made new, and they did not want to pretend otherwise. Pastor Wing asks this question: when we are baptized today, do we make sure every part of us is baptized in the sacred waters of new life except for our pocketbook?

Take a moment to ask yourself in which way you fall short of the example of the Macedonians. In other words - what is the biggest gap between your giving of yourself completely to God and that example of giving from our text? Take a few minutes to discuss this as a group, as people are comfortable.

After each person has shared, read this quote:

Stewardship is what we do with everything we have after saying “I believe.”

-Clarence Strouton, 1949

One of the things the Macedonians seemed to understand was that God had given them enough to do God’s work, even if it didn’t seem to others that they had very much. We talked last week about how having “stuff,” and prioritizing that “stuff” above most everything else could get in the way of our connection with God and with other people. Are there ways you have experienced God’s abundance even when people said you didn’t have enough? (If there’s time, feel free to share the story of “stone soup,” where a person comes to a poor town and says they can make soup out of a stone, and with everyone contributing from what little they have, a great feast for everyone results.) Do you believe you have enough? Do you believe this church has enough?

Over the course of this six weeks, are there any ways your relationship with God has changed?

Over the course of this study, have you begun to look at the ministry and financial decisions of this church differently? If so, how?

Are there any ways in which you’ve begun to see money and God, and their intersection, differently?

For those of us who did journaling, we spent a lot of time focusing on approaching life with an attitude of gratitude, and we also reflected on how to live out our faith in our lives with our time and resources. Let’s each of us go around the room for one moment and commit ourselves to one thing we will do differently in our lives in order to open our

⁴ Pastor at First Community Church in Columbus, Ohio and former pastor at FCC Concord

resources to God's plans for them.

Blessing using water (this serves in lieu of the regular closing worship)

We would like to end this time together sharing in a new baptism - not a re-baptism, but a baptismal remembrance.

(instructions)

We've already talked about the thing in this study that inspired, challenged, angered or excited us. Now that our belief has expanded- what will we do? let's get all wet!

What are you willing to do - to actually do - with this new awareness, to bring in to your life this new awareness, some action you can take. We will share this so your sisters and brothers can help you in this new

Before we share, remember Paul's words:

"I'm not laying down any rules, but trying to find out how real your own love is."

By now each of us is probably aware there are no rules about what we should do as stewards of this life God has given, but that this actually means we carry the honor and responsibility of responding to God's gift of life.

Baptism ritual:

We will go around the room again - inviting each to share a summary of their new commitment.

There will be a bowl of water. After each summary, someone else will be invited to give a prayer for that person's vision of and commitment to change.

Place a finger in the bowl, and make the sign of the cross on their forehead, saying:

"Let these waters remind you of *who* you are and *whose* you are. May God bless your vision and rededicate you to the purpose God has for you."

Others are invited to stand around the person who is held in prayer, but one person should speak.

At the end of this ritual, take time to share words of gratitude with each other for the things they've contributed.

Close with a circle of prayer - each person can share a word to God for this time of discipleship.

If it helps to bring the group together in the shared experience of the past six weeks, read one last time the litany for closing worship, #591.

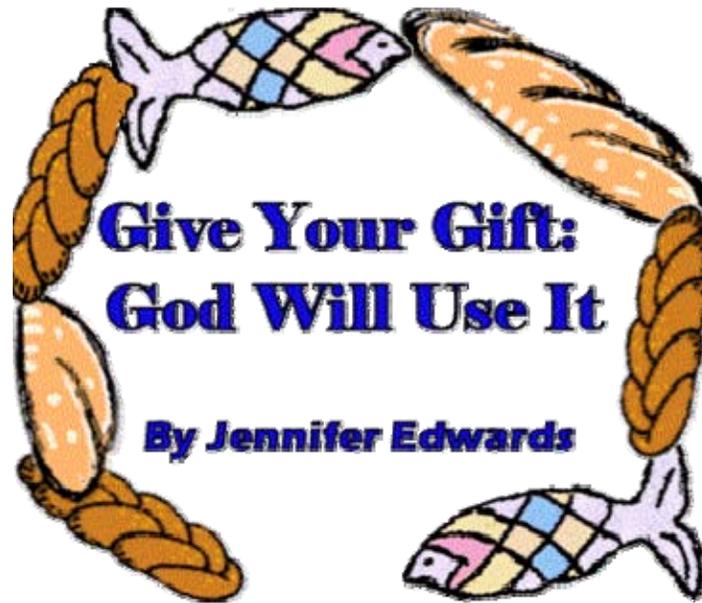
Appendix—Resources of Note

Story of the Loaves and Fishes.....page 58

Tithing Testimonies.....page 64

Bulletin Inserts.....page 69

Gifts Inventory....page 70



The Story of Five Loaves of Bread and Two Fish
(used with permission)

On a beautiful spring day, a young boy, carrying his picnic lunch, was skipping along the soft grass along a dusty road. He saw many people gathering on a hill by the lake just up ahead, so, being curious, he took his small sack lunch and decided to join them. His mind was racing with questions as he darted in and out through the crowd, trying to make his way to the front so he could see just exactly what was happening. *"What's going on? ...*



I wonder why there are so many people here... Is it a big party?" were some of the questions going through his mind.

He sucked in his breath and scrunched himself as small as possible to squeeze through the thick of the crowd. The boy nudged people to the left and right, and occasionally stumbled over someone's foot as he scrambled through the throng, but he *finally* made his way to the front where he discovered the reason for the huge gathering. A man named **Jesus** and some of his friends had arrived in a small fishing boat. The crowd of people was clamoring to get a good look at him.

Seeing the great multitude, Jesus and his friends decided to stay in the boat. Jesus stood up in the little boat and welcomed the people. He knew they had come to see him and he wasn't going to disappoint them. The people in the crowd were edging themselves closer and closer so they would be able to hear what Jesus was saying. Minutes passed and even hours, but the people didn't grow tired of listening to Jesus. They had never heard *anyone* as interesting as this man. He had so many wonderful stories to tell, and they were hanging on to his every word.



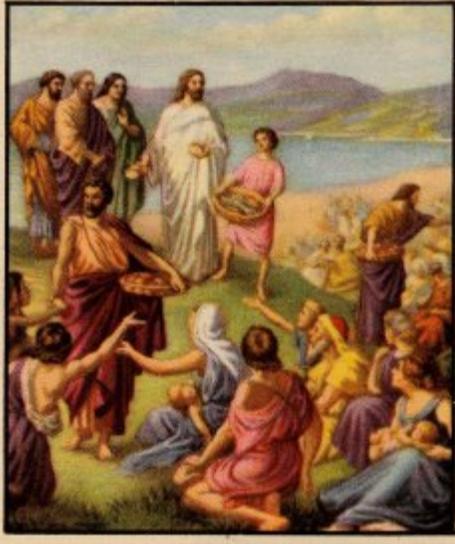
As evening drew near, one of the disciples turned to Jesus and asked, "Shouldn't we send them away now? It is getting late, and none of them have eaten anything the entire day."

Much to his surprise, Jesus answered him, "No, do not send them away. You find food to feed them."

Looking around at the crowd that had continued to grow larger and larger, and hungrier and hungrier, the disciple was a little confused and bewildered. "But, Jesus!" he exclaimed, "There is **no way** we can feed this many people! It would take about EIGHT MONTHS to get enough food to satisfy this large crowd!"

As the disciples looked around the crowd wondering how they would ever be able to follow Jesus' wishes, one of the disciples saw the small boy with his lunch. The disciple knelt down and asked kindly, "Would you be willing to share your lunch?"

The boy jumped up and down in excitement and joyfully answered, "For Jesus, I will gladly give it all!"



The disciple took the sack to Jesus, and said, "I found a little boy who was willing to give us his lunch. It is small, but here it is."

Another disciple spoke up, "There is only **five** small loaves of bread and **two** tiny fish in there! How is *that* supposed to feed *all these people*?"

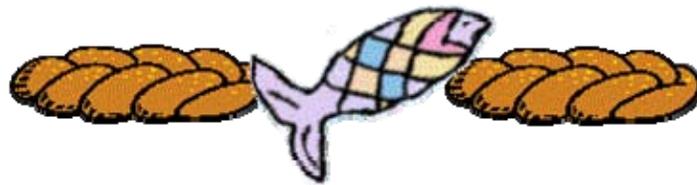
Jesus didn't take time to explain. He wanted each person to see for himself what was going to happen next. Jesus simply took the lunch; he broke the bread and fish into pieces, and he blessed it. Then he gave it to the disciples, and told them to feed the people. Even though they *knew* there wasn't going to be enough for everyone, they also knew it was better to obey Jesus than to try to argue with him.

They scattered themselves around the crowd and started passing out pieces of fish and pieces of bread. They walked and walked, stooping down to hand the food to the hungry people sitting on the hillside. They were so busy that they didn't even notice that their baskets were not getting empty. Finally when everyone had eaten enough to fill them up, and it started getting very late, the crowd started dwindling as people began to go back to their own homes.

Jesus told his disciples to pick up baskets and collect all the leftovers so that nothing would be wasted. The disciples were startled as they stared at the sight before their eyes. As they gathered the leftovers, there was a buzz of excitement. "How *amazing* it is that Jesus could take a small boy's lunch and fill *all these HUNGRY* people!" one exclaimed.

"Yeah, and I've already picked up a **WHOLE BASKET** of pieces over here!" another yelled back.

"My basket is almost full also!" said another with awe. When they finished, they took it all to Jesus and began to count. ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR, FIVE, SIX, SEVEN, EIGHT, NINE, TEN, ELEVEN, TWELVE. *TWELVE* Baskets leftover!!!! Wow! What a miracle Jesus had performed right there before their very eyes! *Two* little fish and *five* small loaves of bread had fed over *FIVE THOUSAND* people with plenty of food to spare!



Eight-year-old Kelsey enjoyed helping others. She really wanted to do something that would make a difference. She wasn't very big and she wasn't very strong; so many people didn't think there was much she could do. Some tried to discourage her and told her she had good intentions, but she should just wait until she was a little bigger.

Kelsey didn't like that idea at all. She didn't want to wait until she was bigger. It wasn't that she was impatient; she just saw so much that needed to be done and she wanted to help. She saw people to feed and yards to clean. She saw needs nobody else seemed to notice. She saw sad people that she just wanted to make happy, but all her friends, family, and even teachers said that she was too small. It wasn't like she wanted to go around the world! She just wanted to help the people she saw everyday. Oh, but the thought did occur that if she had the chance to go around the world, she wouldn't even have to stop and think! She was out of there!

At church on Sunday, she heard a missionary speaking of all the needs in a country far away. Kelsey was sad as she heard him speak because she was sure there was nothing she could do. Then she heard the missionary say something that made her bolt upright and listen

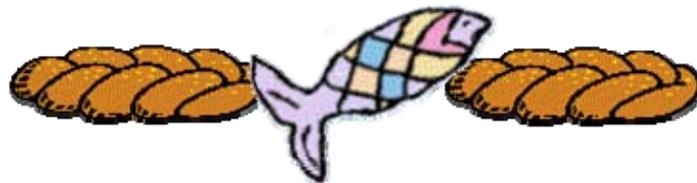
with joy. "If you give just one dollar in a month, you could feed TEN people in another country far away."

A big grin spread across Kelsey's face, as she understood just what she could do. "I CAN do that, and nobody can stop me!" Now her thoughts were not rebellious, just excited that she COULD finally do something and make a difference.



Every month for many years Kelsey took her offering to church to help feed hungry people in a far away country. Plus, she always prayed for the people she was feeding halfway around the world. Kelsey was so happy and almost always had a smile on her face. She learned that she didn't have to be big to help others. Helping made her feel REALLY BIG in her heart.

Do you ever feel like the little girl in the story? Do ever feel like you want to help but aren't good enough or big enough? Well, Jesus wants you to know that it doesn't matter how big or how small; He wants to use all of you in an awesome way - not just when you're big, but right now! So why don't we pray and ask God to show you what He wants you to be doing for Him right now?



THINK! Why did the crowd gather on the hillside?
Why did the disciples want to send the people home?
What was in the little boy's lunch?
What did the disciple ask the little boy to do?
Did the little boy *want* to share his lunch?
How many people shared the little lunch?

REMEMBER! You are never too young to offer your gift to God.

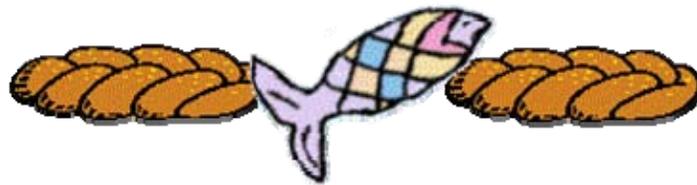
A VERSE TO LEARN "And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

LET'S PRAY

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for giving each of us something that we can give back to You. Help us to give cheerfully knowing that, no matter how small our gift may seem, You can turn it into a miracle. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

CAN YOU FIND THIS STORY IN THE BIBLE?

John 6:1-15 and Luke 9:11-17



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TITHING TESTIMONIES

A Resource for Session #2

(Share these around your group and ask people to choose one that speaks especially to them).

Tithing Testimony From Susan Mix, life long Disciple living outside Reno

I grew up in a family in which tithing was a place where you Started your giving not a goal you reached for. According to my father, everyone always had 10%. He and my mother married in the middle of the Depression and pledged \$1 a week to the church having no idea where that \$1 would come from. And yet somehow, it was always there. When I started getting a 'real' allowance as a teen, it was \$5 a week and I pledged a \$1 a week to the church. Daddy was Very pleased even while chuckling about my understanding of fractions. As I will be 64 in a couple of weeks, I guess you could say I have been tithing all my life. It was as innate to me as breathing. There were no hardships we gave at least a tithe of our income. When special offerings came around, we found enough to give to them as well. Monetary blessings have always been there even in the hard times. God loves and blesses us and we respond to that by loving and blessing in return - and one way to do that is with our tithe.

Tithing Testimony From Judy Bever, pastor at Fruitridge Christian Church, Sacramento

I'm sure my story is not unusual at all. There was no sudden flash of insight - no visitation from on high! Raised as a PK, I was always aware that one of the budget items was the tithe given to the church. I grew to understand that this was simply a way of giving back to God in response to all that God had given to us. I was also educated about the Biblical background of the "tithe" - our 10%.

As an adult, I struggled with all this. There never seemed to be enough money to pay our basic bills much less given a tithe to our church. It was a gradual decision born more out of a challenge to myself than anything else. But one month I just decided to write the tithe check first and pledged to myself to do this for at least six months (My "out" was the fact that nobody else knew about this decision so if I renegeed it was just between God and me and I knew God would forgive!)

The rest of the story is, of course, very familiar as well. When I wrote the tithe check first, there always seemed to be enough money to pay the rest of the bills. It's a miracle I have never questioned, but still rely on to this day!

Tithing Testimony From Ellie McDougal, member First Christian Church, Concord

A word about tithing:

I have always planned on giving a set amount each month to my church, but it wasn't always a tithing amount. After a discussion with my minister (and son) I decided that I wanted to truly tithe. I determined the amount, BUT I didn't give it at the first of the month. It was kinda like...let's make sure that I have enough to make it through the month. After his series on tithing, I realized that my attitude of giving needed to be adjusted and I decided that my check to the church would be the First and not the last check that I wrote each month. It has been a wonderful decision for me (and miraculously I have made it through every month). I see it now as a Spiritual Practice and not something that I check off of my to-do list.

Tithing Testimony From Scott Linhoff, member of First Christian Church, Selma

I started tithing in 1997. Dawn was already tithing so that was the easy part. I've (we've) been tithing for ten years now. We've experienced and seen nothing but great things come from tithing. First of all, God says we should do it. Enough said! When we first started doing this ten years ago we made a commitment during our fall stewardship campaign and pledged a certain amount. The church really depended on that pledge. We were paying a ridiculous low amount of rent but the house was way too small and very old. So, we moved into another house but the rent doubled. Lots of other things happened financially to us so we started waiting until all of our bills were paid and then we would write the check for our tithe. By that time there was little or nothing left for the church. That really hurt because we were on the Board, Admin. team, Fellowship team and did many other things. We were considered leaders in the church but I wasn't feeling like one. We were also in a financial choke hold. So, from then on we decided that the first check we would write every month would be our tithing check and let God do the rest of the providing. From there everything has really been awesome. All of our bills got paid without being late. Shortly after that Dawn and I each got much more rewarding and better paying jobs. We were even able to buy our first and even second house. Even with taking on mortgage payments and having two wonderful boys we were still writing that tithing check first and letting God provide the rest. We have even been able to take a step of faith forward every year since then and grow one percent. Believe me when I say this, we really enjoy writing that check and will fight (playfully of course) over who gets to write it. The blessings have been way to many to count and the hardships I don't hardly even remember. Things still happen that can set us back but we know that by being faithful in our tithing to God and the church we love so much we'll be just fine. Amen!

Tithing Testimony From Del Zeiger, member of Woodland Christian Church

I don't know if it's considered tithing or not but usually at the end of the year our giving to The Lord's work is usually a bit over 10%. That doesn't mean that 10% goes to our Church. Some goes, as it has for many years, to The Salvation Army, and as one of the founding board members of The Yolo Wayfarer Center-Christian Mission, Pam and make contributions there on a regular basis. We used to always give 5% to our church and aprox. another 5% to The Salvation Army, Wayfarer Center, and others. When I retired we tried to keep our church pledge the same amount but it is now closer to 7% even though it hasn't really increased, (our income just got a bit smaller and our other donations are also a bit less.)

The Lord has blessed us in so many ways.. I've shared these with you and with others on a regular basis. (Family, kids, experiences with people, much joy, and happiness, a fun filled life...we are comfortable, well fed, warm. etc,etc.) I really don't see giving as any more of a spiritual experience than anything else we do It's another part of our lives.

We also strongly believe in giving in secret and hope if you share any of this that you don't use our names.

I believe that the creator of the universe really doesn't need our money. what he does want and need is for us to share all that we have with others. We fall short sometimes but we keep trying.

Tithing Testimony From Elsie Buchwald, member at Lafayette Christian Church

Some seventy years ago ... there was a child
Whose parents ... one day ... decided that she
And her little brother
Should be given ... a weekly allowance!
And the allowance ... was
One dime.
And every Saturday
She ... and her little brother
Bought .. "Cracker Jacks"
Two boxes ... apiece!

As they savored each nugget ...
Of the sticky, sweet, caramel-flavored popcorn
They discussed
Whether or not
They should trade ... (with each other) ... the
small toys
Found hidden within each box.

On Sunday
The little girl
Asked her mother ... for an offering
To take to Sunday School.
And her mother said ...
"Your gift to Jesus
"Should come from your allowance.
"Otherwise ... the gift
"Is not from you."

"How much should I give?"
The little girl inquired.
"The Bible says a tithe"
Suggested her mother.
"That means, one penny
"For each 10 cents you receive."

Thus began ...
The great debate of conscience
Between JESUS ...
And a SECOND box of Cracker Jacks!
Jesus won.
And so did the little girl.

To enhance her ... ONE BOX
Of gooey popcorn ...
She discovered ... the less expensive ...
jawbreakers
And other ... one-cent goodies.

But she kept having ... pennies left over!
So, she hid those
In the toe ... of an old, mate less sock.
Little did she realize
That ... the pennies would accumulate
And enable her to afford
More important things later.

In adolescence
The little girl decided
To postpone tithing.
After all ... she reasoned
"Wouldn't it be easier
To give \$10 ... if you had \$100 ... and
Who would miss \$100 ...
If you had a \$1000.

In her twenties
The little girl found herself ... really struggling
financially;
But she was too proud ... to write home for a loan.
She had made a job change ...
A move to a new town ...
Owed payments on a used car ...
Had creditors ...
And ... to make matters worse ...
Her checkbook got fouled up.
She didn't know
How many outstanding checks she had ...
Nor for what amounts.
She couldn't write a check ... for fear it would
bounce.
She couldn't open an account... in her new
community ...
Until she got her first pay check.
She was actually down to soda crackers and
water.

If God would just help her
Out of this mess ...
She vowed
She would tithe ... the rest of her life!

That little girl ... is now ... in her mid-seventies
And it's amazing ... how many ways
God has helped that little girl
Stretch what was left over!
She continues to have ... everything she NEEDS. .
. and more.

From Jennifer Earle, member of First Christian Church, Selma

I have been tithing for almost 30 years. Alan Langstraat gave a stewardship thought one Sunday morning telling about how important tithing was for him and his family. That thought challenged me and I decided to do it. I have been tithing and giving offerings ever since. It wasn't always easy. As a single parent there were times that my children and I wondered how we would make it through the month, but we always managed. When "extra" money arrived as in an insurance refund, I tithed from that money too. Now it is a joyous habit.

From Vi Spencer, retired Disciples pastor; member of Disciples of Christ-Visalia

Why I Give...

I pledge to the support of the church because I believe in its work and importance. I not only conduct worship services, but I worship. I have been called not only to a position of leadership, but to be a member of the church. I not only preach, I open my ears to hear the word of God for me in whatever church I am in. As a Christian, I know that I cannot survive and flourish as a spiritual Lone Ranger. I need my brothers and sisters and a place to worship. I have the sense that together we can do exciting and significant things in our churches--greater things than any of us can do individually. And I also know that those responsible for the financial affairs of our churches need to know what to expect. They need to know just how committed we are to having a church for all.

I give to the church because the church needs and deserves my gifts. I give because it is good for me to give. I discovered some time ago that the more generous I am, the more open I become to the blessings of God in my life. The more freely I give, the more sensitive, the more receptive I become. The more I love others by giving, the more I am tuned into the love God has for me.

From Jan Moffett, member of United Christian Church, Fresno

What I Have Learned From God About Tithing

- 1) Tithing is not only a responsibility, but a privilege
- 2) You can't out-give God when you step out in faith.
- 3) Tithing takes faith. It is like joy...it doesn't just "happen" but requires a move or action on our part
- 4) Children learn by example.
- 5) The fifth thing I've learned from God about tithing is that quite frankly the biblical view of finances works

From Dick Ober, retired Disciples pastor ; member at Table of Grace Christian Church, Elk Grove

When I was in first grade, my parents started giving me an allowance of 50 cents a week. I was told I was to put 10¢ in the Sunday School offering, 10¢ in a savings account (which later helped put me through Chapman College) and I could spend the rest any way I wanted to. That wasn't bad, since in the 1940's you could get a coke for 5¢, comic book for 10¢, and go to the Saturday morning movies for 10¢.

It was possibly in third grade that we had a lesson on tithing in Sunday School. The teacher asked if any of us put a portion of our allowances in the offering. He was quite impressed that I was actually giving 20%. So was I. (I was still getting 50¢ a week.)

When I was old enough to start getting jobs, giving 10% of my income to the church just seemed like the natural thing to do. When I got married, Mary Lou was in agreement about our giving. Even in our leanest times, we have never had a thought about reducing our giving below a tithe. Somehow 90% of our income has always been enough to provide the necessities. Have blessings resulted from tithing? Yes, a level of joy in giving that we might otherwise have missed.

Why do we tithe? We really don't consider it to be anything special or extraordinary. It's just what we do.

When I think theologically about stewardship, I begin with the verse, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." The question then shifts from "How much of what I have will I give to God?" to "How much of God's stuff will I use for myself?" Tithing helps me remember who really owns everything.

From Susan Driscoll, member at First Christian Church, Eureka

I've been tithing faithfully since being out on my own. I've missed a few Sundays due to not having any money. But I always try to make that up some how. What led me to tithing was my Grami and my mom. What convinced me was Don Carter. I remember has a teenager he would talk about his childhood. His mother would tithe everything they could, and knew that what they needed would be provided for. And it always was. I trusted in that and took it to heart. I started small but have worked my way up. And even if I don't put in the same amount every week I always put in what I have, including my faith that we'll be taken care of, and we are. No, we can't go out to dinner or get ice cream, but we have food, and clothes, and things to do as a family at home.

In August we traded in my little SUV for a "family" van. It's a used van, but fits all 6 of us plus one if needed. 3 weeks later the transmission went out. The estimates were \$2500-\$3500. There was no way to even get a loan for that. We can't do anything else with our credit because we want to buy a house in Feb. So we prayed. I knew that my faith in God wouldn't let me down. At this time KLOVE was doing a pledge drive. I figured why not?? So I pledge what I could a month to them. Asked for their prayers regarding my van and put more faith in God. I also exhausted all possible avenues with the dealership, mechanics, and lawyers. In the end, our car was fixed by the miracles of our congregation.

TRANSFORMING *Gifts*

Join us for six weeks on the AMAZING gifts God has placed in our lives and what to do with them. We will study what the scriptures have to say about what we have, why we have it, and what God wants us to do with it. The good news is, THERE'S NO FORMULA!



For six weeks, we'll study things like Cheap Grace, Stywards for Jesus, Scarce Faith, Learning Love and Living Trust.

Also—are you ALL THE WAY baptized? Come to the study and find out!

WHERE :

WHEN :

WHAT TO BRING :

If you liked *And Still We Rise*, come to this study and see how else God may be ready to transform your life and your congregation. If you didn't study *And Still We Rise*, there's no better place to start in the transformation process than *Transforming Gifts*. Don't miss this chance to connect with God on a powerful level!

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Spirit Given Gifts



A Questionnaire for discerning Spirit given gifts

Prepared by Rev. David Ewart, www.davidewart.ca

Revised 2006.

Name: _____

Many miracles and wonders were being done through the apostles, and everyone was filled with awe. All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another.

They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed.

Day after day they met as a group in the Temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts, praising God, and enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.

Acts 2:43-47 (TEV)

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For more information, comments, or questions, email sgg@davidewart.ca

Spirit Given Gifts

Contents

The following materials are included with the Spirit Given Gifts Questionnaire booklet:

1. Instructions for Completing Questionnaire	page 2
2. Spirit Given Gifts Questionnaire	page 3
3. Instructions for Scoring	page 8
4. Scoring Sheet	page 9
5. Interpretation	page 10
6. Application	page 12

Instructions for Completing the Questionnaire

This questionnaire is intended to help you identify your Spirit given gifts.

Spirit given gifts are special abilities that God gives to every Christian to be used cooperatively for the strengthening of the Body of Christ so that it might better fulfill God's purposes.

The Bible is clear that God gives all Christians some Spirit given gifts, but no Christian receives all the gifts. So as you go through the questionnaire you will find that most of the questions don't apply to you. This is to be expected and is not a fault. Most people will feel that only 5 to 15 of the 110 questions apply to them.

The best way to complete the questionnaire is to read each question and decide which of the four options applies to you:

- 0 – This statement does not apply to me; I almost never agree with it; it is almost never true of me.
- 5 – This statement sometimes applies to me; I sometimes agree with it; it is sometimes true of me.
- 10 – This statement often applies to me; I often agree with it; it is often true of me.
- 20 – This statement does apply to me; I almost always agree with it; it is almost always true of me.

Then circle the appropriate response.

If none of the four responses is exactly right, choose the one that comes closest. Do not circle an in-between answer.

Many of the questions focus on church activities. If you are new to the church, you might find yourself thinking, "This statement does apply to me, but in a different context." Please choose whatever response is best for you even if you are thinking of a different context.

Many of the questions also ask about your enjoyment or satisfaction. Many of us have well developed skills that we use frequently, but these may not really be our Spirit given gifts. When we use our gifts, we may be tired, but we will also have a sense of satisfaction and contentment; whereas with skills, we are often left just tired. So if you find yourself thinking, "This statement does apply to me, but doing this leaves me feeling tired and burned out," then rate that as a 0 or 5.

Some questions ask about what others have told you about your gifts. Confirmation from others is an important aspect of discerning one's gifts; but you may be inwardly aware that others are seeing your skills, not your gifts. And so, as above, if you find yourself thinking, "This statement does apply to me, but doing this leaves me feeling tired and burned out," then rate that as a 0 or 5.

Many of the questions assume working with others. If, for example, a question applies to you when working with children but not adults, indicate that as a 10 or 20, and keep that in mind as you explore your gifts.

It should be possible to complete the questionnaire in 20 to 30 minutes, so avoid spending too much time on any question. The results will be discussed with you and may be changed by you in light of further reflection. The questionnaire is intended as a starting point not as your final answer.

Spirit Given Gifts Questionnaire

Please indicate the extent to which the following statements apply to you.

Disagree / Not True	Sometimes Agree/True	Often Agree / Often True	Agree / True
------------------------	-------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------

1	I enjoy working in the background to support others who are leading and organizing.	0	5	10	20
2	I enjoy repairing or maintaining buildings and equipment; gardening etc..	0	5	10	20
3	I enjoy expressing my devotion to God through artistic means: writing, music, painting, drama, etc.	0	5	10	20
4	I instinctively "know where a person is coming from," whether their motives are genuine or not.	0	5	10	20
5	I always see the good in people that others do not see at first.	0	5	10	20
6	I can easily say in my own words how my faith makes a difference in my everyday life.	0	5	10	20
7	I always trust that God is active in our lives even when I can't see it.	0	5	10	20
8	I regularly give more than the Biblical amount of 10% of my income for God's work.	0	5	10	20
9	I am drawn to those who are not well – in heart, mind, soul and/or body.	0	5	10	20
10	I enjoy meeting new people and helping them feel at home.	0	5	10	20
11	I get upset by the many injustices I see in the way people are treated.	0	5	10	20
12	I love learning new things.	0	5	10	20
13	I enjoy bringing people together to work constructively for a common goal.	0	5	10	20
14	I enjoy the kind of relationships where we can talk openly about our spiritual life.	0	5	10	20
15	I find it fulfilling to do practical things that help relieve other people's suffering.	0	5	10	20
16	I am drawn to meeting with others who don't share my background; those from a different country or generation or social class, etc.	0	5	10	20
17	When planning for a project, I am able to see in advance all the steps that must be completed for it to be successful.	0	5	10	20
18	My day begins and ends with prayer.	0	5	10	20
19	I like doing practical, unskilled, odd jobs that need to be done.	0	5	10	20
20	I enjoy helping others learn.	0	5	10	20
21	I am often the first one to see possibilities for new programs or projects.	0	5	10	20
22	When a situation is complex or conflicted, I can often suggest a new perspective that leads to a resolution.	0	5	10	20

Spirit Given Gifts Questionnaire

Please indicate the extent to which the following statements apply to you.

Disagree /
Not True

Sometimes
Agree/True

Often Agree
/ Often True

Agree /
True

23	I would rather help a leader than being a leader myself.	0	5	10	20
24	I am willing to help with repairs and maintenance.	0	5	10	20
25	I have creative talents that I like to use.	0	5	10	20
26	I am good at seeing when Christian values and truths are being expressed.	0	5	10	20
27	I often tell others that if they will trust God, they can overcome any difficulties they face.	0	5	10	20
28	I am comfortable sharing my faith with others, and have helped others find new faith in Christ.	0	5	10	20
29	I trust that God will bring things to fruition no matter how impossible the situation.	0	5	10	20
30	I am so thankful for God's many blessings that I give happily to support God's work.	0	5	10	20
31	I have helped heal others through my prayers, touch, or other means.	0	5	10	20
32	I like meeting new people and introducing them to others.	0	5	10	20
33	I believe we need to work for social justice for all, not just meet individual needs.	0	5	10	20
34	I am interested in studying lots of different subjects.	0	5	10	20
35	Once a goal has been set, I can inspire a group to work together to achieve it.	0	5	10	20
36	Although I don't have all the answers, I can offer real support to others over the long-term.	0	5	10	20
37	When I see people hurting or in need, I will personally do something to help.	0	5	10	20
38	I have experienced - or would like to experience - how my faith can be shared in a different culture.	0	5	10	20
39	Once the idea has been set for a project or event, I enjoy making all the necessary arrangements for it.	0	5	10	20
40	I am, or would like to be, part of prayer group.	0	5	10	20
41	I like to help tidy up, count the offering, stuff envelopes, help with coffee, etc.	0	5	10	20
42	I enjoy leading adult study groups or working with children or youth groups.	0	5	10	20
43	I have dreams for the future of our church.	0	5	10	20
44	I am drawn to Christ's life and teachings, and can apply them to present circumstances.	0	5	10	20

Spirit Given Gifts Questionnaire

Please indicate the extent to which the following statements apply to you.

Disagree /
Not True

Sometimes
Agree/True

Often Agree
/ Often True

Agree /
True

45	I am able to do detail work so leaders can focus on their main job.	0	5	10	20
46	I have craft, trade, technical or professional skills that I like to use.	0	5	10	20
47	Others have told me that something I created or performed really inspired them.	0	5	10	20
48	Contradictions between what people say or do and true Christian values stand out for me.	0	5	10	20
49	I have been able to help people find new directions for their lives.	0	5	10	20
50	I may not have all the answers, but I can help others trust in God's abiding love.	0	5	10	20
51	I live by the motto: "God blesses God's work done in God's way."	0	5	10	20
52	Even when money is tight, I give generously.	0	5	10	20
53	I have a strong sense of God's presence when I am with those who are not well.	0	5	10	20
54	I like helping our church to be warm and welcoming to all.	0	5	10	20
55	The church needs to speak out - and act - on social issues.	0	5	10	20
56	I can gather information from many sources and see the connections among them.	0	5	10	20
57	I am good at helping groups work out their differences and commit to a common goal.	0	5	10	20
58	I can often tell when someone's faith is in trouble and can help them find a fresh start.	0	5	10	20
59	I enjoy meeting and getting to know people who are disabled, poor, shut-in, ill, etc.	0	5	10	20
60	I enjoy experiencing and learning from other cultures: food, customs, language, etc.	0	5	10	20
61	I enjoy working with others to plan who will do what by when so that the job we are working on gets done effectively and happily.	0	5	10	20
62	I keep a prayer list, and pray regularly for others.	0	5	10	20
63	I enjoy doing small but necessary jobs.	0	5	10	20
64	Others have told me that their faith really grew from being part of a Sunday School, youth, or adult group I led.	0	5	10	20
65	I can see how the teachings of Jesus give direction to the church now.	0	5	10	20
66	Others have told me, I have helped them solve a complex problem by shedding new light on their situation.	0	5	10	20

Spirit Given Gifts Questionnaire

Please indicate the extent to which the following statements apply to you.

Disagree /
Not True

Sometimes
Agree/True

Often Agree
/ Often True

Agree /
True

67	I prefer to work behind the scenes, helping those who are out in front.	0	5	10	20
68	It bothers me when I see that buildings, equipment, technologies, etc. are in disrepair.	0	5	10	20
69	It is important to me that church is pleasing to the eye, ear and imagination.	0	5	10	20
70	I seem to have a built-in "truth detector" that shows me whether someone is genuine or not.	0	5	10	20
71	I often praise others.	0	5	10	20
72	I want to help others find the same joy that I have found through my faith in Christ.	0	5	10	20
73	I have experienced God's faithfulness in surprising and powerful ways.	0	5	10	20
74	I give freely and without thought of reward.	0	5	10	20
75	Others have told me that I have brought them healing through Spirit-given means.	0	5	10	20
76	Making connections with strangers is something I really enjoy.	0	5	10	20
77	I am committed to working with others for a just and sustainable society.	0	5	10	20
78	I enjoy doing background research and organizing it in a helpful way.	0	5	10	20
79	Others have told me, when I am the leader they know they will enjoy working on a project.	0	5	10	20
80	I have gone through a lot of challenges myself, and have helped others find a way.	0	5	10	20
81	I couldn't be a disciple of Christ without helping the disadvantaged.	0	5	10	20
82	I enjoy uncovering the assumptions of my own upbringing, and being with people different than me.	0	5	10	20
83	I can take responsibility for arranging the activities, people, and resources needed to accomplish a goal.	0	5	10	20
84	I have often seen how God has responded to my prayer requests.	0	5	10	20
85	I like to help by coming early - or staying late - to help with refreshments, etc.	0	5	10	20
86	Others have told me that I can clearly present information or ideas to groups.	0	5	10	20
87	I am always looking at the "big picture," and can put it into concrete, practical terms.	0	5	10	20
88	It is easy for me to make practical applications of the truths found in the Bible.	0	5	10	20

Spirit Given Gifts Questionnaire

Please indicate the extent to which the following statements apply to you.

Disagree / Not True	Sometimes Agree/True	Often Agree / Often True	Agree / True
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89	I enjoy doing practical tasks so leaders can be freed up to better accomplish their ministries.	0	5	10	20
90	I enjoy using my skills with software, accounting, gardening, crafts, carpentry, etc.	0	5	10	20
91	I like finding novel, creative, and imaginative ways to express and explore my faith.	0	5	10	20
92	I know what Jesus means by, "I am the truth, the way and the life."	0	5	10	20
93	I can help people discover how God has helped in the past and can be trusted to help now.	0	5	10	20
94	I like being with people; talking with them about life, and sharing my faith.	0	5	10	20
95	I rely on God no matter what.	0	5	10	20
96	If I knew it would help them, I could tell others about my experience of giving generously.	0	5	10	20
97	I have an intuitive sense when something is bothering someone.	0	5	10	20
98	Others often tell me I am very easy to be with; they have enjoyed meeting me.	0	5	10	20
99	To truly help those in need, I work to change what is causing the problem.	0	5	10	20
100	I am interested in researching different ideas about God and how we know what to believe.	0	5	10	20
101	I can help groups stay focused on their purpose.	0	5	10	20
102	Faith is an adventure, and I enjoy sharing the journey with others, helping them to grow.	0	5	10	20
103	I am moved to help those in need in direct, practical ways.	0	5	10	20
104	I would like to share the Christian faith with those from different backgrounds and cultures.	0	5	10	20
105	I am good at details and enjoy working with others to plan things out in advance.	0	5	10	20
106	I pray daily for God to bless our church leaders, projects and programs.	0	5	10	20
107	Others have told me they can count on me to help with practical jobs that need to be done.	0	5	10	20
108	I love leading groups when others have one of those "Aha!" moments.	0	5	10	20
109	Others have told me they appreciate the way I have helped clarify our purpose.	0	5	10	20
110	I enjoy sorting through complex issues, discovering new insights that lead to fresh solutions.	0	5	10	20

Scoring

The questionnaire is designed so that the scoring sheet can be laid beside each page of the questionnaire and the scores transferred row-by-row onto the scoring sheet. For example, the questions at the top of each page (1, 23, 45, 67 and 89) give the score for the gift of Assisting; the second question on each page gives the score for Crafting, and so on.

Questions that are not marked clearly or have not been scored, that is, the 0, 5, 10 or 20 is not clearly indicated, should be omitted. If two or more questions related to a gift have been omitted, then the result needs to be discussed further to clarify how this gift is experienced – or not.¹

The top 4 or 5 total scores indicate the best gifts to begin exploring. If more than 5 gifts are all tied for the highest total score, then more discussion is needed to help clarify actual gifts. The discussion below of differences among related gifts may help.

¹ I would appreciate receiving feedback on all aspects of the questionnaire: the clarity and appropriateness of the questions, scoring procedures, helpfulness in identifying each of the gifts, etc. Please email sgg@davidewart.ca.

Scoring Sheet

Enter the scores from each question into the table below, and then total each row to find your score for each gift.

From Page 1	From Page 2	From Page 3	From Page 4	From Page 5	Total	Gift Name
1	23	45	67	89		Assisting
2	24	46	68	90		Crafting
3	25	47	69	91		Creativity
4	26	48	70	92		Discernment
5	27	49	71	93		Encouragement
6	28	50	72	94		Evangelism
7	29	51	73	95		Faith
8	30	52	74	96		Giving
9	31	53	75	97		Healing
10	32	54	76	98		Hospitality
11	33	55	77	99		Justice
12	34	56	78	100		Knowledge
13	35	57	79	101		Leadership
14	36	58	80	102		Mentoring
15	37	59	81	103		Mercy
16	38	60	82	104		Multiculturalism
17	39	61	83	105		Organization
18	40	62	84	106		Prayer
19	41	63	85	107		Service
20	42	64	86	108		Teaching
21	43	65	87	109		Vision
22	44	66	88	110		Wisdom

Interpretation

The questionnaire is only the beginning point for identifying one's gifts. Here are some tips for further exploration:

- Read each of the descriptions for the top scoring gifts identified by the questionnaire.
- Be sure to prayerfully read the Scripture references for each gift as this will provide an opportunity for an inner, Spirit given confirmation or correction.
- Some gifts are closely related but distinct. It may be that the questionnaire has indicated one gift but further reflection and prayer on the related group of gifts will reveal a different one.

Clarity about the differences between gifts is critical. It is not uncommon for those with the gift of Organization to not have the gift of Leadership, or vice versa, and yet both are needed for a project to succeed. Knowing what gifts one does not have will help you to know who you must find to work with in order to accomplish your goals.

Related groups of gifts are:

Practical, Personal, Hands-on, Behind-the-Scenes Gifts

- **Assisting** – is focussed on assisting one or more **individuals** who are leaders, organizers, teachers, etc.
- **Crafting** – is focussed on using **skills** such as gardening, property maintenance, professional, technical or trade.
- **Creativity** – is focussed on all forms of **artistic** creativity and expression.
- **Mercy** – is focussed on personally helping those in **need**.
- **Service** – is focussed on helping **groups** or projects around the church.

Nurturing, Caring, People Oriented Gifts

- **Encouragement** – is focussed on **short-term**, as needed, moral encouragement of others.
- **Faith** – is focussed on having **personal trust** in God, which may or may not lead to helping and supporting others in direct ways.
- **Hospitality** – is focussed on being comfortable meeting **new people** and providing a warm welcome and inviting space.
- **Mentoring** – is focussed on **longer-term** support for faith development.
- **Multiculturalism** – is focussed on being comfortable in a **difficult culture**.

Leadership Gifts

- **Knowledge** – is focussed on the ability to gather and organize **information** and ideas. This may be done for others to use.
- **Leadership** – is focussed on **inspiring** others to work for a common purpose.

- **Organization** – is focussed on the ability to **coordinate** all the details for a program or project to be successfully accomplished.
- **Teaching** – is focussed on the ability to help others **learn** and understand.
- **Vision** – is focussed on clarifying the **goals**, outcomes or purposes for a group, program or project.
- **Wisdom** – is focussed on the ability to provide **insightful** yet practical solutions to complex, conflicted or puzzling situations.

Personal Faith Gifts

- **Discernment** – is focussed on an above average ability to sense personal **motives** and hidden agendas.
- **Evangelism** – is focussed on being comfortable talking with others about one's **faith**.
- **Faith** – is focussed on having an above average **trust** in God in all circumstances.
- **Giving** – is focussed on an above average **generosity** with one's money.
- **Healing** – is focussed on improving or restoring **health**. It may or may not involve prayer, but is focussed exclusively on healing.
- **Justice** – is focussed on an above average ability to see **underlying causes** and connections for social, economic, political and environmental relationships.
- **Prayer** – is focussed on an above average **time** spent in prayer. It may include prayers for healing, but will not be focussed exclusively on healing.

Application

Once you have identified your gifts, the next steps are to identify where and how you can best use your gifts. This is best done in conversation with your Minister or Spirit Given Gifts Counsellor. You could begin by reflecting on some of these points:

- **Age & Stage of Life** – At what age and stage of life am I at? Should I seek an opportunity to learn, deepen and grow? Am I ready to be given major responsibility without close supervision? Could I offer wisdom and nurture to others? What are my personal needs? What are my family responsibilities? How much time and energy do I have available?
- **Past Experience** – As I reflect on my past experience, what has worked; what has given me energy and excitement; what feels unfinished?
- **Personality** – Am I outgoing? Do I prefer to work with one or two others? Am I comfortable with strangers or prefer people I know? With what age groups do I connect? Am I comfortable with people from different backgrounds than my own? What level of stress, noise, and energy can I cope with? Can I keep commitments without supervision?
- **Personal Maturity** – What level of self-awareness do I have about my emotions and needs? How do I handle my own, and other people's, anxiety? Can I stay connected and continue to problem solve in the midst of heated conflict?
- **Faith Maturity** – What is the level of my personal relationship with God, and of my daily discipleship?
- **Cooperation & Evaluation** – Can I accept evaluation of my gifts and how I am using them? Can I work constructively with others? Can I admit my limitations? Can I work for goals that others may have set?

Questionnaires are always only beginning points for further exploration and discussion. After the questionnaire is completed and scored, the relevant Scripture passages should be read as well as the descriptions of other gifts to find those that best fit your sense of how God has indeed gifted you. You also might check the results with those who know you well. What have they seen in you?

Conclusion

I pray this material has helped you identify your Spirit Given Gift(s) and find your place in God's work.