

It's about me!



It's about me! – Discover the joy of living as a faithful steward. Made in God's image, we each are called to give generously. As we focus on the lordship of Christ, it is easier to put our finances in proper perspective. Remember, as creator and owner of everything, God doesn't need our gifts. We, on the other hand, need to give.



Everence

Rejoicing always

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

– *Philippians 4:4-5*

Read

Philippians 4:4-20

Reflect

It's only human to think of our own needs first. And so Paul's gentle nudge to the church in Philippi included a word of encouragement to remember the needs of their fellow Christians, people who spoke other languages and expressed themselves through other cultures. Even though they had likely never met, Paul helped them realize their generosity would produce praise to God. Paul highlights the benefits to both the giver and recipient and reminds us that the end result is the same. Both produce praise to God.

Watchman Nee, a well-known leader in the Chinese church, emphasized that when we give our gifts to others, the gifts become dead to us; we lose any self-serving connection to those gifts. They are released to bring a harvest of righteousness, which results in praise. Paul called these kinds of gifts "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." (Philippians 4:18)

Because God gave, we give. There is no need for anxiety. Paul encourages us to give generously, to realize we have affluence, and to recognize we have additional resources beyond our own needs for the very reason that we might have something to give to those who have less. In this, we bring God praise.

Pray

Dear God, I have received so much from you, beginning with the marvelous gift of your precious son, Jesus Christ. In response, it is my joy to give back to you, but not for my own sake. Each gift I give is for the sake of the Gospel. That is what it is all about. Amen.

Act

This week ask God to show you how you might bring praise to him through a careful investment in a needy brother or sister of another culture or language.

– *John Allen Brubaker*

Do not forget the Lord

You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.

– *Deuteronomy 8:17-18*

Read

Deuteronomy 8:10-20

Reflect

The journey out of Egypt was taking longer than the children of Israel had anticipated – 40 years, in fact. Wanderings, rebellions, wars, providence, worship, guidance, commandments and more than a few funerals had marked the years.

Now at last, they stood at the border of the land God had promised. They had made it!

But before self-congratulations could take hold, Moses urged the Israelites to “remember the Lord your God.” He reminded them that all they had and all they were about to receive were blessings from God.

We North American Christians need this reminder as well. Young people pursue good-paying jobs; middle-aged couples seek a bigger house in the suburbs; and seniors look forward to a comfortable retirement. If we really listen, we can hear ourselves say: “I worked hard and I got the promotion because I earned it.” “Why don’t you come over and see the house we built?” “It was always our goal to retire early. We started saving our money when we got married.”

The fact is, whatever we have accomplished or accumulated in life comes from the hand of God. It isn’t about what we have done, but rather, it’s about what God has done through us.

Pray

Precious God, thank you for the gifts of life, and breath, and the many other blessings I receive from you each day. Help me remember all I have and all I am come from you. Whether you give or take away, I want your name to be praised through my life. Amen.

Act

Decide today to stop using phrases like, “Look at my ...” and “This is what I” Instead, use the words, “God helped me with ...” and “God enabled me to ...”

– *Gordon Lough*

Starting somewhere

A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.

– *Leviticus 27:30*

Read

Leviticus 27:30-33

Reflect

The kitchen cupboard in my childhood home held four glass Mason jars strategically placed in front of a row of cereal boxes – one for each of us boys. Every week, 10 percent of our earnings went into those jars. On Sunday, the jars were emptied into envelopes we took with us to church for the offering. As we grew older, Dad and Mom put words to our practice, teaching us that God was the owner of everything. They helped us understand that tithing was our way of acknowledging him as such. The coins we dropped into the Mason jars were the starting point of a lifetime of generosity toward God and toward others.

Today's reading from Leviticus clearly commands God-followers to give a tenth of their income to the Lord and his work. As we tithe, we are reminded of the wonderful truth that God owns it all, that everything belongs to the Lord. The discipline of committing to a tithe is also the starting point for a lifestyle of generosity. As Jesus taught, it is the best possible encourager to a generous heart.

If you have never taken the step of giving 10 percent of your earnings back to God, what is keeping you from doing so? If you have children, what are they learning from you in the area of giving?

Pray

I give thanks to you, dear Father, for all you have given me. Open my eyes, my heart, and my hands to those who are less fortunate than I am, both here in North America and around the world, and use my tithe for your glory. Amen.

Act

Set a new giving level for the coming month and take that percentage right off the top of your income.

– *Craig Sider*

No ordinary acts

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.

– *Romans 12:1*

Read

Romans 12:1-6

Reflect

As a young Christian I believed stewardship was essentially about prayer, church attendance, ministry and money. However, my work in a care center for people with Alzheimer's disease has helped me understand the value of stewarding the ordinary acts in my day. The men and women with whom I work do not remember the joys and pains of their yesterdays, but most are able to enjoy significant moments in the present.

In the same way, I have come to see my spiritual life as a string of significant moments. I now understand that the stewardship of life is in every single loving decision I make as a wife and mother. It is swinging a grandson high above the earth, and it's driving a frail elderly parent through the countryside. On Tuesday, I worship by feeding Mary, and on Thursday, a smile for my lonely neighbor is part of my spiritual offering.

Seemingly ordinary tasks become extraordinary offerings. Stewardship of life recognizes that none of my moments are really mine. They all belong to the one who first created me and later redeemed me for his pleasure and purpose. I live the moments, but my Heavenly Father owns them. My "everyday, ordinary life" is a string of significant moments offered as worship to my Lord.

Pray

Heavenly Father, here is my everyday, ordinary life – my sleeping, my eating, my going-to-work-and-walking-around life. I place it all before you, even as I struggle to see the sacred in the ordinary. Receive my offering today. Amen.

Act

In your journal, list three challenging tasks you face in your life right now. Opposite each task write your answer to the following question: "How would Jesus do this task and live this opportunity if he were here right now?"

– *Charlotte Sider*

A cheerful giver

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

– *1 Corinthians 9:7*

Read

II Corinthians 9:6-15

Reflect

My granddaughter Raegan loves to present me with gifts. She gives me candy, her socks, and just about anything she can get her hands on. She saves her lunch from school just to give it to me! She doesn't worry about whether or not I will like her gift or whether what she has to offer is good enough to give to me. She just gives.

It is as though something in her provokes her to give, and she is confident that whatever she gives me will be received and appreciated. "Here, Grammie, I have something for you," Raegan says, with a beautiful smile on her face.

I respond with words of praise and gratitude, and, of course, a great, big hug. I know Raegan's gifts come from her heart, and just to see the happiness on her face is worth a million dollars. We both are so blessed – giver and receiver.

We often desire to show God how much we love him, and one way to do that is through our giving. And like Raegan, we can know that whatever we give – money, time, or talent – our gifts will be loved and appreciated.

Pray

Lord, we confess we have not always given as we should, and at times we are afraid what we do have to offer is too insignificant or too small. Help us, O Lord, to trust you enough to know that you accept what we bring because you love us unconditionally. Just as you accepted the widow's mite and the little boy's lunch, accept our offering, Lord, as we give to you out of the love we have for you. Amen.

Act

This next week as you give, present your offerings as unto God. Trust him to help you prosper so you may be able to give continually and increasingly as you reflect on his love for you.

– *Cedra Washington*

It's about me!

"I judge all things only by the gain they shall attain for me in eternity."
– John Wesley (1703-91), preacher

Coming together

15 minutes

1. What did you take from the message this past Sunday morning?
2. How does our culture push us to focus on the next big acquisition in life?
3. What benefit would there be in saying "no" to something for the simple experience of saying "no" to a desire and investing the difference in kingdom work and advancement?
4. How do our hectic lifestyles and time commitments hinder our investments in the kingdom?

Learning together

40 minutes

Read Scripture and discuss

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry.'" But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:13-21)

"Jesus warned against greed for possessions. Greed keeps track of every tool lent, every dime shared, every overtime minute worked, every check to charity grudgingly written. Jesus encourages generosity; a rare trait today. As God opens heaven to you, clutch less of what you own and share more of what you have been given." (Life Application Commentary)

1. How would you describe the man who came to Jesus in this passage?
2. How can wanting what is rightfully ours be greed?
3. What lesson do you think the man took from the story Jesus told?
4. In the story Jesus told, the rich man is cast in a negative light. Why is this?
5. What was God's judgment on this rich man's life? Why did God react this way to him?
6. In what ways are our attitudes toward possessions indicative of our heart condition and our tenderness toward God and people?

"Jesus said to his disciples: I tell you not to worry about your life! Don't worry about having something to eat or wear. Life is more than food or clothing." (Luke 12:22)

Sharing together

10 minutes

How does your attachment to possessions and experiences lead to increased worry and concern over the things of this world?

If you think you are overly concerned about temporal matters, what can you do to change this pattern in your life?

Praying together

10 minutes

Spend time sharing with each other what you have learned and gleaned from this four-week study of stewardship.

How has your understanding of stewardship changed? What is the next step for you?

Take a few moments and pray together. Give thanks to God in sentence prayers for what has been learned.

Follow this up with a time of prayer related to next steps. Ask God for the courage and strength to make appropriate decisions in lifestyle and giving so that what has been learned is put into practice.

Record the praises and concerns mentioned within your small group. This will help you to remember the other people in your group throughout the week during your devotion times.

Name	Praise or concern



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