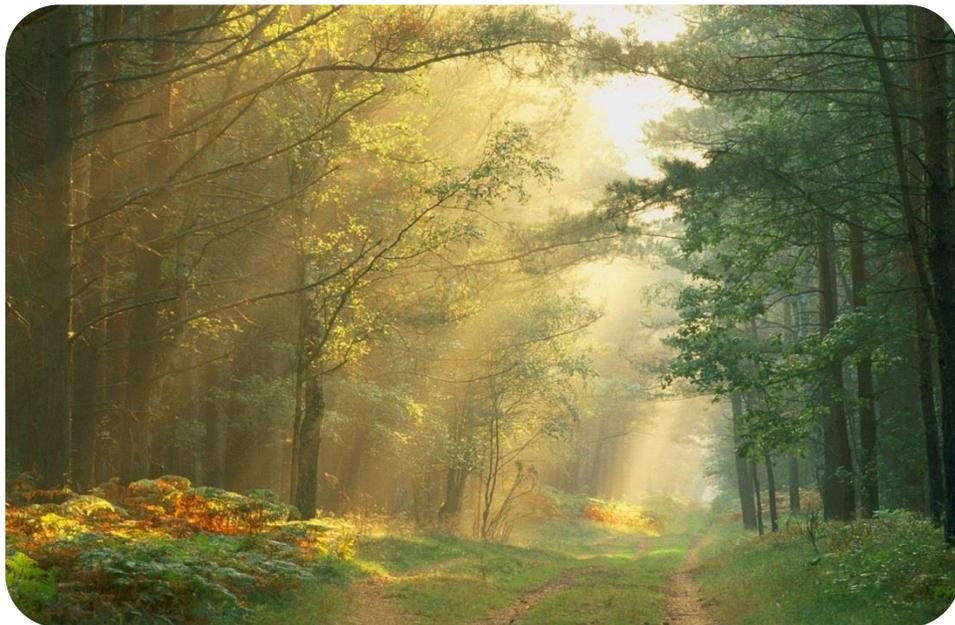


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Empowered by Grace!

*A Three-, Four-, or Five-Week
Stewardship Program*



*“You then, my child, be strengthened
by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”*

2 Timothy 2:1

Overview and Instructions

Program Themes and Goal

Empowered by Grace! is a 3-, 4- or 5-week stewardship program emphasizing whole-life Christian stewardship. During this stewardship program, members of the congregation will become better stewards of their time, talents, and treasure, by emphasizing the themes of:

- ***Empowered by Grace to Know Your Purpose*** Where are you looking to find purpose in your life? As Christians, we know the purpose that the world offers doesn't in any shape or form resemble God's purpose for our lives.
- ***Empowered by Grace to Serve*** 1 Peter 4:10 is one of the Bible's most challenging and motivating verses: "*As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.*" The verse outlines three truths. First, each one of us has received a gift. Second, we are to serve others. Finally, we are to be stewards in administering God's grace, which has been entrusted to us.
- ***Empowered by Grace to Witness*** The Bible says, "*In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven*" (Matthew 5:16). The question we have to ask is, "How clearly and how brightly are we reflecting Christ in our lives?"
- ***Empowered by Grace to Give*** Jesus shows us how to give. Jesus gave us the greatest and most perfect gift by offering himself on the Cross. Filled with gratitude and love for what Jesus has done for us, we are empowered to give.
- ***Empowered by Grace to Do Your Best*** Scripture is very clear that we are saved by grace alone through faith in Christ alone. (Ephesians 2:8-9). Additionally, that same grace that saves us also motivates and equips us to do our best in using our talents, abilities, and gifts in God's service.

Length of Program

Determine if you will offer a 3-, 4-, or 5-week stewardship emphasis. This program is designed to include only the themes you want to emphasize in the time you allot. If you choose to do fewer than five weeks, select which weekly themes you will offer. For instance, if you prefer a 3-week program, we suggest using weeks 1, 2 and 4 (Know Your Purpose, to Serve, to Give), but you can choose any combination of the five weeks/themes. Also, you can rearrange them to do them in any order you prefer. Be mindful that, if you offer fewer than five weeks, you will need to edit the reference to specific weeks on the material.

Bible Study Participation

To grow as stewards, we need to be reading and studying God's Word. Every effort should be made to increase Bible study attendance. Personal invitations will be helpful. To show the importance of Bible study, church leaders should be encouraged to attend. There are studies to be taught during each week of the program. You may choose to start the studies prior to the start of the program or go beyond the program.

Commitment Sunday

Members are encouraged to make spiritual and financial commitments to the Lord through their church. Commitment forms are to be mailed out just prior to the start of the program along with a commitment

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letter and the theme essay “*Empowered by Grace!*” Commitment forms should also be distributed with the bulletins/worship folders on Commitment Sunday.

Every effort should be made to make Commitment Sunday a special and meaningful day. To show the joy and importance of making a commitment to the Lord, you may want to have balloons and/or other decorations. You could provide some special snacks. Some churches have found that inviting a special guest preacher is helpful. You may want to celebrate Commitment Sunday with a special catered luncheon or have a potluck luncheon.

Program Resources

Downloadable in your account at the *Parish Resource Center*

Resources – General

- ✝ Program Instructions and Timeline
- ✝ Program images for bulletin, newsletter, emails, slides or handouts (5, high-resolution)
- ✝ Letters from the pastor (3)
- ✝ Percentage giving chart

Resources to Launch Program

- ✝ Program Brochure “*Empowered by Grace!*” (Kick-off with commitment form)
- ✝ Kick-off Letter from the Pastor
- ✝ Commitment form
- ✝ Newsletter article
- ✝ Bulletin message (For kick-off and includes hi-res image)

Resources for EACH of the 3, 4 or 5 Weeks of the Program

- ✝ Theme essay (in both letter and tri-fold formats):
 - Empowered by Grace to Know Your Purpose*
 - Empowered by Grace to Serve*
 - Empowered by Grace to Witness*
 - Empowered by Grace to Give*
 - Empowered by Grace to Do Your Best*

- ✝ Bulletin messages
- ✝ Lay reader presentation
- ✝ Sermon
- ✝ Worship suggestions
- ✝ Bible study (includes answer book)
- ✝ Children’s Lesson

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Program Time Line

Launching the Program

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|---|---|
| Program Length | Decide and select among three, four, or all five weeks of the program. |
| Program Flyer | Distribute, as desired. |
| Bible Studies | Schedule time for the Bible studies. Either print or prepare to e-mail the Bible studies to participants. |
| Commitment forms | Print Commitment Forms (use card stock, if desired) |
| Newsletter Articles | Publish “ <i>Empowered by Grace!</i> ” newsletter article one month prior to program. |
| Lay Readers | Identify and prep three, four or five Lay Readers. |
| Letter from Pastor, Commitment Form, Program Brochure “<i>Empowered by Grace!</i>” | Mail letter, brochure and commitment form to members so they receive them shortly before the beginning of the program. |
| Bulletin Messages | Place clipart “Coming Soon! <i>Empowered by Grace!</i> ” in bulletins two to three weeks prior to program. There is a message for the week prior to the program plus one for each week of the program to be placed in the bulletin. |

The Three, Four, or Five Weeks of the Program

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|---|--|
| For each week | Publish bulletin message. Distribute theme essay (Both tri-fold or letter formats included). Present lay reader message. Use worship suggestions, as desired. Preach sermon. Teach Bible study. Teach Children’s lesson. |
| At some point during the program | Hand out or explain Percent Giving Chart. Provide reminder about Commitment Sunday. |
| Last week of the program | <i>Commitment Sunday</i> Collect Commitment forms. |

After the Program

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|---|---|
| Letter to those not returning a commitment | Send reminder letters to members who failed to return their commitment forms. |
| Letter to those who turned in a commitment | Send thank-you letters to members who returned commitment forms. |

Notes



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Following Jesus' Example

Jesus shows us how to give. Jesus gave us the greatest and most perfect gift by offering himself on the Cross. Filled with gratitude and love for what Jesus has done for us, we are empowered to give. Our giving emulates Jesus who showed us what it means to love and to give. Filled with the Holy Spirit, we become "givers" rather than "takers."



Born into sin, we are by nature selfish people. As toddlers, one of the first words we learned was "no," followed closely by "mine!" This selfish attitude carries forward into our adult years. Obviously a selfish attitude is not conducive to giving. However, when God transforms our hearts, selfishness is no longer an obstacle to our giving. By the working of the Holy Spirit through his Word, God redirects our hearts and minds from focusing on ourselves to focusing on him. With our hearts right with God, we can

acknowledge him as the owner of all things and trust in Jesus' care and protection, opening our hearts to give.

Giving our First and Best

Giving is an act of worship which expresses our praise and gratitude to God for his precious gifts to us, especially the gift of salvation through his Son, Jesus. Empowered by grace, we understand that who we are and what we have are gifts from God, and we demonstrate our thanks by returning willingly and generously a portion of our blessings to him. God is pleased when we give cheerfully from loving and trusting hearts (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Even though God should receive the first and best from his people, we read in the first chapter of Malachi that the Israelites went through only the outward motions of giving as they offered their sick and dying animals. They showed disrespect to God by giving what they didn't want. *"When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil?"* (Malachi 1:8). In essence, gifts reflect how much God is revered and appreciated. Through their giving, the Israelites demonstrated their lack of trust, respect, and gratitude for God.



Sadly, we, too, often show disrespect to God through our giving. If we give away only unwanted items in the house or loose change that we pull out of our pockets at the end of the day, our gifts are not from the heart. If we give grudgingly, God is not pleased, nor is he pleased when we give what is left over after we pay our bills. If we give for tax reasons or for recognition, God is not being honored. Since God is more concerned about the motive of giving than the gift itself, he desires gifts that come from loving and giving hearts.

Blessings for Giving Faithfully

When our hope is in Jesus rather than in material security, we are empowered to be generous. Trusting in him to provide for all our needs ... physical and spiritual ... we are freed to give, rather than to hoard those blessings. As we express our love for God through our giving, God blesses us with fuller lives. Through serving the needy, we are enriched. True fulfillment comes when we live a generous lifestyle ... manifested by a willingness to share our time, talents, and money. The recipients of our gifts are blessed in what they receive,

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*Letter from Pastor to those who
have not turned in a commitment form*

Dear Member,

Greetings in the name of our risen, Lord and Savior, Jesus!

“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because . . . of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints” (Colossians 1:3-4). Through the faithful stewardship of the Body of Christ here at [Church Name], we are able to proclaim the Gospel here and in the mission field, both in word and in deed.

During our recent stewardship program, “Empowered by Grace,” we have focused on God’s generosity to us and our need, as God’s people, to show love and gratitude to him. He is the Creator and Provider of all we are and have; He is the source of all love and mercy. Through the gift of his Son, who suffered, died, and won the victory over sin, death, and the devil, he has provided for us the sure hope of eternity with him. Through his Holy Spirit, he calls us and gathers us into his Church and daily does his work of sanctification in us.

How can we respond to this great love of our Father and use all his gifts to us for his glory? God is totally committed to us. Are you willing to make a commitment to him? Your commitment card has not yet been received. Perhaps you’re still praying about it; maybe you’ve forgotten it; maybe it’s been lost. We are enclosing another card and ask that you complete it and return it to the church office at your earliest convenience. In order to carry on the ministry that Christ has commissioned to us (Matthew 28:19-20), we need your support.

Thank you and may God continue to pour out his blessings on you as you live the lifestyle of a faithful steward.

In Christ,

Pastor _____

Empowered by Grace!

Sermon - Third Sunday

“Letting God’s Light Shine”

The text for the third week of our stewardship emphasis “**Empowered by Grace**” is found in Matthew 5:13-16. Our theme for this week is “*Empowered by Grace to Witness.*”

May God’s mercy and his grace and his peace be multiplied to each one of you through our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus at the hearing of his Word. Amen.

There is a humorous story of a mother who was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin, five, and Ryan, three. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson. If Jesus were sitting here, he would say, “Let My brother have the first pancake. I can wait.” Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, “Ryan, you be Jesus.”

Sharing doesn’t always come easy, and we don’t always let Jesus’ light shine too brightly. As hard as it can be to share something as insignificant as a pancake, to share our faith seems sometimes almost impossible. It’s easier and tempting just to say, “Let someone else be like Jesus.”

Yet, God has placed you and me strategically in the lives of certain people to witness to them and to make an eternal difference for him. God has designed us to share our faith and to let his light shine brightly. You and I have something to share that is needed by others, and that is our relationship with Christ. We are empowered by grace to witness for Jesus when God’s light is reflected through us.

How, then, can we be more motivated to share that light? How can we become more effective in sharing our faith and reflecting God’s love? How can our lives impact the life of someone else for Christ? Let’s talk about three things that impact our letting God’s light shine.

The first point is that people without God matter to God:

What do we really believe is true about the people around us? By God’s grace, we understand that without Christ people are lost. Jesus clearly tells us: “*No one comes to the Father except through Me*” (John 14:6). This fundamental belief that we have to own, and has to own us, is that people without Christ are lost! Apart from a living relationship with Jesus Christ, people cannot be made right with God and receive eternal life. That’s all the Bible gives us. It doesn’t answer the question for those who have never heard the message of the Gospel. Instead, God says, “I’ll take care of them and judge them justly, but this is what I will tell you: *And there is Salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12).

With New Age thinking and pluralism, Jesus has become less relevant. “People, as long as they’re good enough, or good people, well, they’re going to be saved. Everyone is someday going to go to heaven. God isn’t going to send anyone to hell. God’s just not like that.”

Bible Study

“Empowered by Grace to Know Your Purpose”

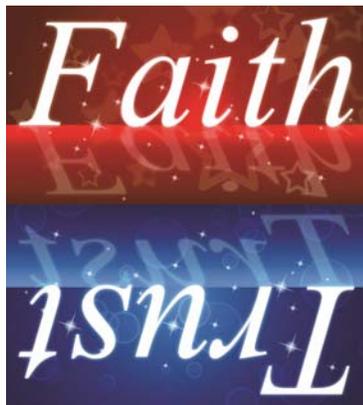
Prayer: Dear good and gracious heavenly Father, we pray for your blessings on this study as we examine the purpose you have for each of our lives. Empower us, Lord, to be faithful to our calling. Teach us to fix our eyes on you so that we will not be deterred in our serving and witnessing. Mold us into the people that you want us to be. In your name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

King David wrote, “The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me” (Psalm 138:8). Just as God had a purpose for David, so he has for each of us as well. Have you given much thought to what purpose God may have for your life? By grace, we understand that we were created for God’s purpose, not ours. “...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). Through the working of the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to acknowledge that God is in control and that we are made for his pleasure. Through his power, we are transformed into people who stop focusing completely on ourselves and become his stewards. Our mind-set changes from what we want to do to what God wants us to do.

In order to understand God’s plan, we need to turn to his Word. As we read and study God’s Word, his purposes for our lives are revealed to us, and, through Word and Sacrament, we no longer conform to the pattern of the world but are transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). God’s purposes become our purposes. We abandon our agendas and accept God’s agenda for our lives.

Unfortunately, many people live with no real purpose and many others live with no purpose other than to please themselves. Thomas Carlyle wrote, “The man without a purpose is like a ship without a rudder ... a waif, a nothing, a no man.” We need purpose in order to have meaning for our lives. If we don’t have meaning, life does not have value or hope. In Christ, we have purpose, meaning, and hope.



We thank God that he has given us faith and wisdom to understand that he is both our source of life and our purpose for living. We realize that we exist only because God wants us to exist. “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (Revelation 4:11). Our purpose is to live for “the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:12-13). We are blessed to have been given the privilege of being stewards of a wonderful and gracious God who has created us and called us to serve him.

When we understand our role and purpose as God’s stewards, we begin to see that our time, abilities, and money are tools to accomplish God’s purposes for our lives. Acknowledging our blessings as gifts from God, we want to show our gratitude for

these gifts by using them in ways that accomplish his purposes and extend his kingdom. Therefore, we are eager to help others, to serve in church, to witness, and to give. As we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, we become more selective with the activities and the ways we spend our time, talents, and resources. As we grow in our understanding of Biblical stewardship, we become more intentional and focused on using our lives and resources in ways that help us live as faithful stewards.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why is it important for you to understand God's purposes for you in order for you to be a faithful steward?
2. What two different mind-sets are presented in Romans 8:5-8? What do they cause to happen?
3. Can you be successful by the standards of the world and still fulfill the purposes for which God created you? How/how not?
4. What did Jesus say you will do if you love him (John 14:15)?
5. Knowing that our primary purpose is to glorify God, what are some things that you can do that will remind you throughout the day to glorify him?
6. You give praise and glory to God in public worship. How do you glorify him privately?
7. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. What is the ministry of reconciliation?
8. Read Luke 9:57-62. What were the excuses the people gave for not being disciples? What are other common excuses? What excuses do you make?
9. God wants all people to share the Gospel with others, so how does Jesus help you run the race of testifying to the Gospel (Hebrews 12:2-3)?
10. How is it different to be a servant than to act as a servant?
11. What purpose does God have for your money? What effect does greed have on your being a channel of his blessings to others?

***Prayer:** Dear heavenly Father, thank you for our physical and spiritual lives. Thank you for this life and the life to come with you. Help us to live lives of faith and help us to be about fulfilling the purposes that you have for each of us. Place in us a desire to use all things to your glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

Empowered by Grace!

Lay Reader Presentation - Third Sunday

Christ’s Ambassadors

This is the third week of our series “**Empowered by Grace.**” The focus for today is “*Empowered by Grace to Witness.*”

As stewards of God’s grace, we have been called and chosen to be his mouth, feet, and hands to help seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Paul tells us, “*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us*” (2 Corinthians 5:20). Knowing that God “*desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Timothy 2:4), we have a great privilege and responsibility as Christ’s ambassadors. “*Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy*” (1 Corinthians 4:2). With the Holy Spirit working in and through us, we can faithfully and boldly proclaim the Gospel to those around us. Paul tells us that we should share our faith so that we “*pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ*” (Philemon 6).

God has strategically placed us in the lives of certain people to make an eternal difference for him. God calls us to share our faith and to let his light shine brightly. You and I have something to share that is needed by others, and that is the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ. We live as “Christ’s Ambassadors” as God’s light is reflected through us.

Do you know someone who is struggling in his faith or has no relationship at all with Jesus? One of the most valuable things you can do is to strengthen your relationship with Christ and strengthen your relationship with that person. Ask God to give you a heart of compassion for that person and to help you be a reflection of Jesus that can turn him toward Jesus.

Of all the things we could invest ourselves in, of all the things we could exchange our time or energy for, there is nothing more valuable

Empowered by Grace!
Worship Suggestions - Fourth Sunday
“Empowered by Grace to Give”

Hymns:

Opening Hymn: “The Lord, My God, Be Praised”

Sermon Hymn: “What Is the World to Me?”

Closing Hymn: “We Praise You, O God”

Readings:

Old Testament: Ecclesiastes 5:10-20

Epistle: Ephesians 5:1-14

Gospel: Matthew 6:19-24

Litany:

Leader: God, You created the heavens and the earth.

People: Every animal in the forest is yours as well as the cattle on a thousand hills.

Leader: Lord, from your hand come boundless riches.

People: For all our blessings, you are to be praised.

Leader: Lord, help us to show proper gratitude for who you are and what you do for us.

People: Help us, dear heavenly Father, to return to you generous portions of our time, talents, and money.

Leader: Help us, as your stewards, to truly understand that we are simply managers, not owners, of what you entrust to us.

People: Lord, grant us hearts that give joyfully.

Leader: Lord, change us from selfish and greedy people to people who give cheerfully.

People: Empower us, Lord, to give the firstfruits of our incomes faithfully and generously.