

# parish

## *Experiencing the Joy of Generosity!* *A Three-Week Stewardship Program*



*“Give and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.” Luke 6:38*

### *Overview and Instructions*

## **Program Description**

*Experiencing the Joy of Generosity* is a complete 3-week stewardship program. We believe this program will be a blessing to those who already are experiencing the joy of being generous with the gifts God has given to them, and that this effort will help many more experience the joy that comes from giving faithfully and generously. We recommend that it be accompanied by monthly communication and inspiration about stewardship throughout the year, such as a bulletin or newsletter insert. This will provide a consistent, meaningful backdrop to conveying the theme of stewardship.

## **Program Theme and Goal**

Have you ever wondered why you are left with such a joyful feeling when you are able to help a person in need or give a gift to your church? The answer to that question may be rooted in us as Christians who are being recreated in the image of God. To be made in God's image means we are made to be like God ... whose nature is to give. Giving helps us feel fulfilled as we reflect God's nature. Although the image of God was lost by sin, as those converted by faith in Jesus, we "*have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator*" (Colossians 3:10).

Our pursuit for fulfillment and joy culminates in the discovery that we receive those things when, by God's grace, we respond with eagerness to God's directive to give. Like David, we exclaim, "*But who [are we] ...that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we give you*" (1 Chronicles 29: 14).

## **Program Notes**

### ***Testimonials/Lay reader presentations***

There are three lay-reader presentations provided. Personal testimonials are more effective, but, if no willing member is found to share his/her stewardship story with the congregation, these talks may be used. The talks may be given at the start of the service or during the time of the offering.

### ***Daily Devotions***

It is recommended that you distribute the daily devotions either in their entirety prior to the program, or the devotions for the first week on the Sunday prior to the start of the emphasis, and the other two sets on the following two Sundays (one set each Sunday).

### ***Commitment Sunday***

Members should be encouraged to make financial commitments to the Lord. Commitment forms can be distributed with the bulletins on Commitment Sunday, which is the third Sunday of the program. A letter to accompany them is provided. Members should be asked to bring their commitments forward to the altar. Every effort should be made to make Commitment Sunday a special and meaningful day. To the 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. Some churches celebrate their commitments by having a lunch on Sunday.

The commitment forms need to be available on Commitment Sunday. If you send the pastor's letter to your members, you are encouraged to enclose a commitment form with the letter. This will act as a reminder for members to think and pray about their commitments. If they fail to bring their commitment form with them, it won't matter because there will be another form for them on Commitment Sunday.

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## ***Banners***

The program resources include text and images to create your own full-size banner to promote the program, if desired.

## ***Follow-up Letters***

You are encouraged to send reminder letters to members who failed to return their commitment forms and send thank-you letters to members who returned their commitment forms after the final week of the program.

# **Program Resources**

**Downloadable from 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
- † Daily devotions (All three weeks, including both a “use-as-is” and editable cover.)

## **Resources to Launch Program**

- † Program Flyer (Both use-as-is and editable versions)
- † Kick-off Letter from the Pastor
- † Commitment form
- † Newsletter article
- † Bulletin messages (For kick-off and follow-up.)

## **Resources for EACH of the 3 Weeks of the Program**

- † Theme essay (in both letter and tri-fold formats):
  - The Joy of Receiving God’s Blessings***
  - The Joy of Managing God’s Blessings***
  - The Joy of Sharing God’s Blessings***
- † Bulletin messages (including for the week after the program)
- † Lay reader presentation
- † Sermon (including “Tips for the Pastor”)
- † Daily devotions (By week, including both a “use-as-is” and editable cover.)
- † Worship suggestions
- † Children’s Lesson

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# Program Time Line

## *Launching the Program*

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|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Program Flyer</b>                          | Distribute or display, as desired. ( <i>Use as-is, or edit flyer for church name, year and date.</i> ) If desired, create a large banner from available text and image resources to promote the program.  |
| <b>Daily Devotions</b>                        | Prepare the Daily Devotions and distribute (printed or emailed). An editable cover is provided. We suggest including all three devotion booklets with a cover. Each weekly booklet is four pages for easy duplex (front/back) printing. ( <i>Complete booklet provided.</i> ) |
| <b>Commitment forms</b>                       | Print Commitment Forms ( <i>Use card stock, if desired</i> )  |
| <b>Newsletter Article</b>                     | Publish “ <i>Experiencing the Joy of Generosity!</i> ” newsletter article one month prior to program.   |
| <b>Lay Readers</b>                            | Identify and prep three Lay Readers.  |
| <b>Letter from Pastor and Commitment Form</b> | Mail letter and Commitment Form to members so they receive them shortly before the beginning of the program. ( <i>Edit Commitment Form for year and church name.</i> )  |
| <b>Bulletin Messages</b>                      | Place “ <i>Experiencing the Joy of Generosity!</i> ” with artwork in bulletins two to three weeks prior to program. There is a message for the period prior to the program plus one for each week of the program to be placed in the bulletin.                                |

## *The Three Weeks of the Program*

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|---|--|
| <b>For each week</b>                              | <p>Publish bulletin message.</p> <p>Distribute theme essay (<i>Both tri-fold or letter formats included</i>).</p> <p>Present lay reader message.</p> <p>Use worship suggestions, as desired.</p> <p>Preach sermon.</p> <p>Teach Children’s lesson.</p> |
| <b>At some point during the program</b>           | <p>Hand out or explain Percent Giving Chart.</p> <p>Provide reminder about Commitment Sunday.</p>  |
| <b>Last week of the program</b>                   | <p><i>Commitment Sunday</i></p> <p>Collect Commitment forms.</p>   |
| <b>After the Program</b>                          |  |
| <b>Letter to those not returning a commitment</b> | Send reminder letters to members who failed to return their commitment forms.  |
| <b>Letter to those who turned in a commitment</b> | Send thank-you letters to members who returned commitment forms.   |
| <b>Bulletin Message</b>                           | Publish follow-up bulletin message.  |

# Notes



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## *Experiencing the Joy of Generosity!*

### **The Joy of Receiving God's Blessings** *Daily Devotions*

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

#### **Weekday Devotions:**

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

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#### *Monday*

#### **Appreciating What We Have**

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

Epicurus, a Greek philosopher in the third century BC said, "If you want to make a man happy, add not to his riches but take away from his desires." When we desire less, we are more content with what we do have. Coveting puts us in a state of discontentment with an insatiable appetite for more, making contentment impossible. Those who are content enjoy what they have rather than complain about what they don't have. They are joyful for what they have received from God knowing that all of life is a gift.

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

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

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for your generosity to me. Help me to receive with a thankful heart. **Amen.**

Before his departure, he entrusted three servants (you and me) with various amounts of money, which in Jesus' time were called talents. The master knew his servants differed in ability, so to the one who was most gifted he gave five talents, to another, two, and to the last, just one.



The master's observations and assessments of his servants' abilities were correct, because the servant who was given five talents and the one given two talents went out without hesitation to invest their talents faithfully and deliberately. The servant who received five talents gained five more and the one who received two earned two more. The master applauded their individual efforts, commitment, and faithfulness with these words to each of them: *"Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your*

*master."* The servant who received one talent hid it in the ground. The master's response wasn't so kind. He admonished him saying, *"You wicked and slothful servant!"*

By telling this parable, Jesus lets us know that he is concerned about the management of our money. He wants and expects us to use and multiply the resources he entrusts to us. The following are some truths we can learn from this parable:

- Everything we have comes from God.
- Our financial lives are important to God.
- Wise management of money pleases the Lord.
- Poor management displeases him.
- God does have high expectations of us as we use, manage, and invest his resources.

Some day we will be held accountable. What will God say about the way we managed our money? When we have managed faithfully the resources God has entrusted to us, we will find joy and fulfillment, and God will be pleased.

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## *The Joy of Managing God's Blessings*



## *Experiencing the Joy of Generosity!*

*Lay Reader Presentation - Third Sunday*

### **Joyful Giving**

This is the third and final week of our three-week *theme Experiencing the Joy of Generosity*. Today we are focusing on the “The Joy of Sharing God’s Blessings.” We hope you will read the handout “The Joy of Sharing God’s Blessings.”

One day a second-grade boy came to school without his lunch. He did not think about it until his classmates started washing their hands and getting out their lunch boxes. He was a shy little kid, and he did not want to say anything because he was embarrassed, but his stomach was really growling. Against his will, his lip started to quiver and his eyes filled with tears. Soon his teacher noticed and then all the students did, and he was forced to tell them his problem. No sooner were the words out of his mouth than his classmates were looking into their lunches. One student had two sandwiches and gave the hungry boy one. Another child had an apple and an orange and gave his friend his choice of fruit. Another had too many cookies (Could that ever be?!) and shared them. In short, the hungry boy had a feast, all because of the generosity of others who had more than they needed. This is just as God has planned it. One person is in need and others give so that the need is met. The Bible says that “*your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness*” (2 Corinthians 8:14).

God wants our giving to be joyful and fulfilling. Through our giving, we worship and honor our Lord. Giving expresses our gratitude for God’s love and grace given to us through his Son, Jesus, who has conquered sin, death, and the devil through His death and resurrection. Giving can fill the hunger pains of a little boy. It can also help the homeless and helpless, and it can support the ministry of our church. Through faith, we can share the abundance God has given us. As we do, we will find “joy in sharing God’s blessings.”



# Experiencing the Joy of Generosity!

## Sermon – First Week

### “The Joy of Receiving God’s Blessings”

*Text:* 1 Corinthians 4:7

*“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer” (Psalm 19:14).*

The text for the sermon today comes from the Epistle reading in 1 Corinthians, specifically verse 7, which reads: *“For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”* So far the text.

Before we unpack this text today, let me take a moment or two and discuss what we will be hearing here at church over the next three weeks. This is our annual Stewardship emphasis called *Experiencing the Joy of Generosity*.

The weeks are broken up into three separate aspects of stewardship. This week I will be covering the **Joy of Receiving God’s Blessings**; next week will consider the **Joy of Managing God’s Blessings**; and then on week three we will learn more about the “Joy of Sharing God’s Blessings.”

Joy, Joy, Joy. There is lots of joy coming in the next three weeks of sermons. Therefore, let’s make sure that we take a minute to understand fully what that joy is. Many will consider joy and happiness as the same or at least very similar. At the surface this may seem correct, but if we compare joy and happiness, we learn of some significant differences.

#### **Meaning**

Happiness is an emotion in which one experiences feelings ranging from contentment and satisfaction to bliss and intense pleasure.

Joy is stronger, but less common than happiness. Witnessing or achieving selflessness to the point of personal sacrifice frequently triggers joy. It is feeling spiritually connected to God or to people.

#### **Causes**

Happiness comes from earthly experiences, and material objects.

Joy comes from spiritual experiences, caring for others, gratitude, and thankfulness

#### **Effect**

Happiness shows itself in the person through an outward expression of elation.

Joy shows itself in the person through an inward peace and contentment.

#### **Time Period**

Happiness is temporary, based on outward circumstances.

# Experiencing the Joy of Generosity!

## Worship Suggestions - Second Sunday

“The Joy of Managing God’s Blessings”

### Readings:

Old Testament: 2 Chronicles 1:7-12  
 Epistle Reading: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15  
 Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

### Hymns:

“Christ Be My Leader”  
 “Fruitful Trees, the Spirit’s Sowing”  
 “Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us”

### Litany from Acts 2 and 6

Pastor: *“And [the new believers] devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers”*

People: **Lord, let us joyfully manage our time that we may make meeting together in worship and Christian fellowship our priority.**

Pastor: *“And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need... praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”*

People: **Lord, let us joyfully manage our goods and possessions that we might share our abundance with others that “they may see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).**

Pastor: *“[The early believers] chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” and other Godly men to oversee the distribution of food to those who were in need.*

People: **Lord, let us joyfully serve wherever you place us, managing the talents and gifts you give us for your glory and the good of others.**

All: **Dear Father, by your Spirit through your Holy Word and Sacraments, lead us to “experience the joy of generosity” as we use our gifts in our daily lives. In the name of Jesus, who “came not to be served but to serve” (Matthew 20:28) we pray. Amen.**