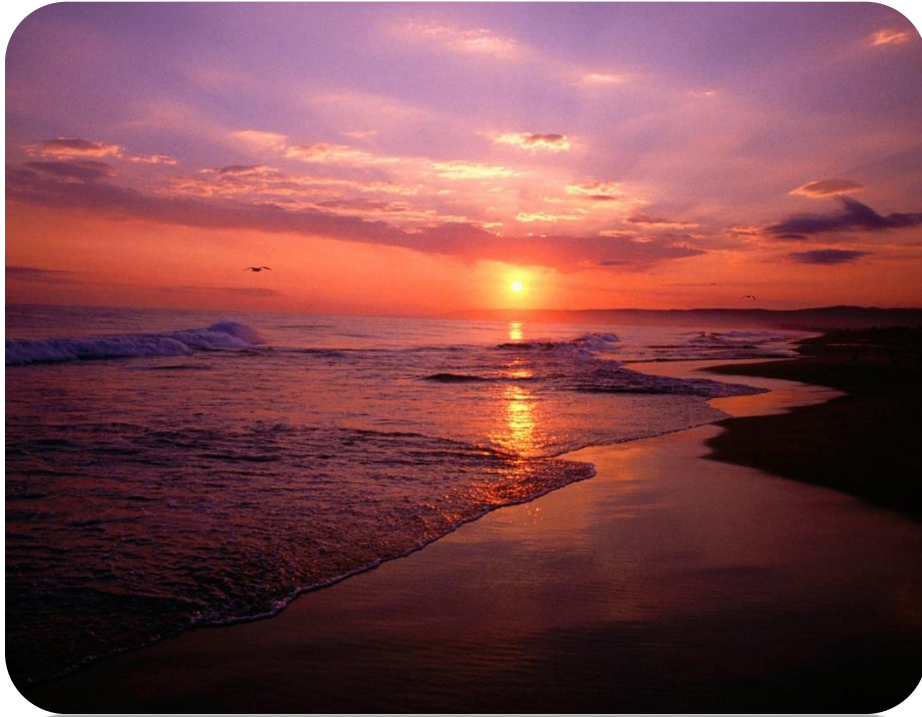


parish

Graced by the Fruits of Our Labor

A Three-Week Stewardship Program



**“Serve wholeheartedly as if you were
serving the Lord, not men.”**

Ephesians 6:7

Overview and Instructions

Program Description

God's grace not only saves us, but also motivates and equips us to give our all in using our talents, abilities and gifts in service to God. Our commitment to give wholeheartedly to God's Kingdom follows our salvation by grace. Because of God's grace, we can serve, give, and generously do the work of the Lord. By ourselves, we are powerless. *"But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it"* (Ephesians 4:7) ... grace to live lives worthy of the Lord that we might bear fruit for him (Colossians 1:10).

The three weekly themes in this stewardship program are:

"The Grace of Giving God our Best"

"Using Our Spiritual Gifts"

"Growing a Grateful and Generous Heart"

Weekly Bible Studies

This program includes Bible studies for each of the three weeks as a complement to the sermon messages. God's people need to be reading and studying the Word. An instructor's answer guide is also included.

Devotional Meditations Booklet

To help your people grow in their relationship with their Lord and in their efforts as they serve God wholeheartedly, you are encouraged to hand out the devotional book that accompanies this program. The devotional book can be easily printed in booklet format and contains 21 daily devotions. It is recommended that you distribute the daily devotions prior to the program or on the first Sunday of the program.

Testimonials/Lay reader presentations

There are three written 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.

Commitment Sunday

Members should be encouraged to make commitments to the Lord of their time, talents and treasure. Commitment forms can be distributed prior to the program, or 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 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.

Extra 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.

Banners (Optional)

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

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Follow-up Letters

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

We pray that the *Graced by the Fruits of Our Labor* program resources, sermons and Bible studies, along with the devotional meditation booklet, will help your members grow in their involvement, service, and generosity and be showered by God's grace.

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 (4)
- ✝ Percentage giving chart
- ✝ Daily devotions (21 for all three weeks.)

Resources to Launch Program

- ✝ Kick-off Letters from the Pastor (2)
- ✝ Commitment form (Two formats to choose from)
- ✝ Newsletter articles (2)
- ✝ Theme essay (Both letter and tri-fold formats)
- ✝ Bulletin message
- ✝ Thank you letters to follow up after the program (2)

Resources for EACH of the 3 Weeks of the Program

- ✝ Bible studies (Answer guide included)
 - Giving God our Best*
 - Using Our Spiritual Gifts*
 - Growing a Grateful and Generous Heart*
- ✝ Bulletin messages
- ✝ Lay reader presentation
- ✝ Sermon
- ✝ Worship suggestions
- ✝ Children's message (1 provided ... optional).

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Program Time Line

Launching the Program

Daily Devotions	Prepare the Daily Devotions (printed or emailed). The Daily Devotions are provided in booklet format and are set up for easy duplex printing.
Bible Studies	Prepare the Bible Studies and distribute (printed or emailed).
Commitment forms	Finalize (<i>Edit red text areas</i>) and Print Commitment Forms (<i>Use card stock, if desired</i>)
Newsletter Article	Publish “ <i>Winning the Prize</i> ” newsletter article one month prior to program.
Lay Readers	Identify and prep three Lay Speakers. <i>Personal testimony is best, but use included pre-recorded lay reader messages as back up.</i>
Letter from Pastor and Devotional Booklet	Mail letter, theme essay and Devotional Booklet to members so they receive them a few weeks before the beginning of the program.
Letter from Pastor and Commitment Card	Mail letter and Commitment Card to members so they receive them a week before the beginning of the program. (<i>Edit Commitment Form for year and church name. Both tri-fold or letter formats of theme essay included.</i>)

Note ... it is most effective to send two letters prior to the program, but more expensive. The two letters can be combined if desired.

Bulletin Messages	Place the bulletin blurb in the bulletin two to three weeks prior to program. <i>There is a short “blurb” message for the period prior to the program and one for each of the first two weeks week of the program. There are also three full-size bulletin messages for each of the three weeks of the program. Use one per week, as desired.</i>
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The Three Weeks of the Program

For each week	<p>Publish bulletin message.</p> <p>Provide extra devotions, as needed. Members should be encouraged to read the devotions prior to next week’s sermon.</p> <p>Present lay reader message.</p> <p>Use worship suggestions, as desired.</p> <p>Preach sermon.</p> <p>Teach Children’s message (optional). <i>One message is provided and can be used on any of the three Sundays.</i></p>
At some point during the program	<p>Hand out or explain Percent Giving Chart.</p> <p>Provide reminder about Commitment Sunday.</p>
Last week of the program	<p><i>Commitment Sunday</i></p> <p>Collect commitment forms.</p>

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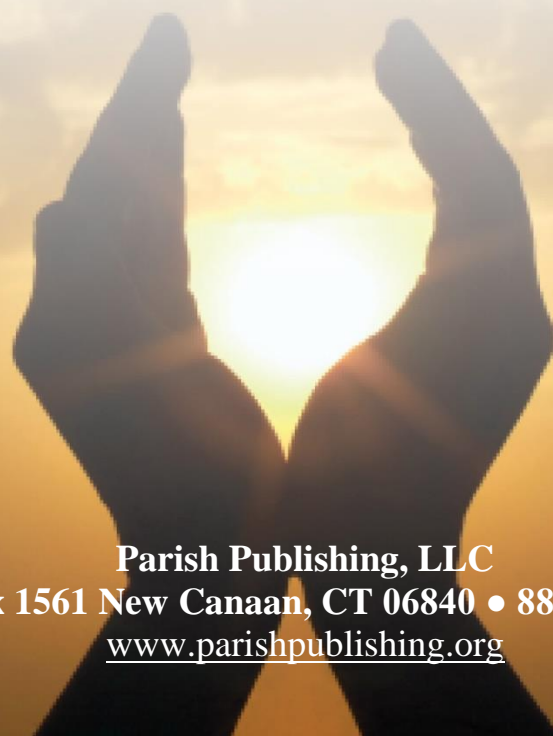
After the Program

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.



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Grace and Generosity

God's grace not only saves us, but also motivates and equips us to give our all in using our talents, abilities and gifts in service to God. Our commitment to give wholeheartedly to God's Kingdom follows our salvation by grace. Because of God's grace, we can serve, give, and generously do the work of the Lord. By ourselves, we are powerless. *"But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it"* (Ephesians 4:7) ... grace to live lives worthy of the Lord that we might bear fruit for him (Colossians 1:10).



Giving God our Best

To be Christian implies that we act as Christians. Being a Christian is not a part-time position. Scripture is clear that God expects and deserves our best. *"Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor is not in vain"* (1 Corinthians 15:58b). *God wants us to "... please him in every way bearing fruit in the knowledge of God"* (Colossians 1:10). God wants us to give wholeheartedly so we can be productive people in the Kingdom. When we commit our lives and resources to his service, we will hear him say, *"Well done, good and faithful servant!"* (Matthew 25:23).

As Christians, we are called into ministry. Through faith, we become more than just spectators. We are God's representatives who are called to serve. Just as Jesus ministered to the people of his time, we are to do the same today. *"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."* (John 13:15) Our ministries take place in our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our churches, and in our places of work. Jesus said, *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you"* (Matthew 28:19-20). Reaching out to the lost is at the very heart of our ministry. We have in Christ the saving truth of the Gospel that all people need to hear.

The standard set for us in God's Word is high:

- ✠ God tells us to be conformed to the image of his Son (Romans 8:29).
- ✠ He tells us to love as he loves (John 13:34), to forgive as he forgives (Ephesians 4:32), to walk as he walked (1 John 2:6).
- ✠ He tells us to be pure in heart (Matthew 5:8), to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44), to be holy in all manner of conversation (1 Peter 1:15).
- ✠ He tells us to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17), to be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord (Romans 12:11), to give cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- ✠ He tells us to abound always in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58), to feed his sheep (John 21:17), to do everything in the name of Jesus (Colossians 3:17).

We cannot live up to these standards in our own strength. We are not sinless, but, through God's power, we still strive to sin less and live lives worthy of him. *"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen"* (Ephesians 3:20).

Good Works Are Important

Good works are an important part of our lives as Christian stewards because, *"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do"* (Ephesians 2:10). As we ask the Lord to enable us to submit to his will, he will put before us those good works he has prepared for us to do.

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Lay Reader Presentation – Second Sunday

Using Our Spiritual Gifts

This is the second Sunday of our emphasis: *Graced by the Fruits of Our Labor*. This morning's emphasis is on using our spiritual gifts. God has given us each a spiritual gift (or gifts), and that gift is important to the Body of Christ. God has given us gifts so we can use them to his glory in his church. When we do not use what God has given us, the whole body suffers.

Just as God blesses us with varying physical attributes, it is he who determines what spiritual gift(s) we receive. In 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 the Apostle Paul wrote:

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

The Apostle Paul set down three points in this passage. First, he pointed out to his readers that it is the Holy Spirit who gives the gifts and develops them in the believer. Second, each believer is given at least one gift. Paul wrote, “God works . . . in **all** [people],” and, again, “to **one** there is given . . .” and finally, “to **each one** . . .” Third, Paul emphasized that the reason for these gifts is “for the common good.” As stewards, gifted by the Holy Spirit, we are to work together to accomplish God's plan. If we choose not to use God's spiritual gift(s), we are spurning God's gift, robbing the Body of Christ, and forcing other members of the Body to carry our loads.

Spiritual gifts are different from natural talents. All of us have talents or things we do well. Some of us are multitalented, but we don't have to be Christians to be talented. God gives both spiritual gifts and talents to us, but God uses spiritual gifts in special ways to edify his church. A spiritual gift, used properly, helps us give wholeheartedly in our service to the Lord.

Graced by the Fruits of Our Labor

Newsletter Article

To be used a month prior to the program

Winning the Prize

We like winning! How did you feel the last time that you won at playing cards or a board game? Winning gives us great joy. Whether the winning prize is money, ribbons, trophies, or just an “atta-boy” or “atta-girl,” we work harder, and we give it our maximum effort to earn the prize.

In the 9th chapter of 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul refers to the contest of running. To be the fastest runner, runners go through disciplined training to make themselves faster so they can cross the finish line first and win the prize.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 reads, “*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.*” The Apostle Paul refers to a much more important event than runners running a race to win a prize that won’t last. He refers to a race that involves life and death. The special prize that Paul refers to in these verses is the prize of eternal life. The prize is a life with Jesus forever!

Although Paul contrasted the two different prizes, he does refer to the similarities in the effort needed to run both races. Runners train diligently for their races through “strict training.” The Christian disciplines himself, making his body his “slave,” all “*for the sake of the Gospel, that [he] may share in its blessings*” (1 Corinthians 9:23). As Christians, we know we can be faithful in what we do because God is within us, and he strengthens us. God calls us to give wholeheartedly in our service to him through serving others, and, to help us do that, we will begin, in a few weeks, a three-week series of sermons and Bible studies titled: ***Graced by the Fruits of Our Labor.***

As God’s people, we need to keep our focus on the all-important prize and, with God’s help, not to allow successes in this life interfere with the goal of receiving the most wonderful prize which is eternal life with him.

Graced by the Fruits of Our Labor

Sermon – Third Sunday

“Growing a Grateful and Generous Heart”

The Word of the Lord for the third and last Sunday of our stewardship program, *Graced by the Fruits of Our Labor* is from Mark 8:34-37:

“Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the Gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”

This morning I want to talk with you about the joy of growing a grateful and generous heart. The heart of the Christian message is that God is above all a giving God. “*God is love,*” states 1 John 4:16. God’s love is freely given to each one of us and to the world at large. Again God’s Word tells us, “*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16). It is God’s very nature to love and to show that love by giving. As recipients of his love, we are learning to love others. As recipients of all God’s gifts to us, especially the gift of salvation through his Son, we are growing grateful and generous hearts. As we experience the transforming power of God’s love, we become giving persons.

Why is it so difficult, then, for us to grow grateful and generous hearts? Why do we fear so much to become giving persons? Why do we hold back in our giving?

Much has been written from sociological, psychological, and theological perspectives concerning why people give and do not give. We give for a variety of reasons, such as religious commitment, guilt, personal recognition, tax benefits, need, obligation, gratitude, pressure, and out of love. Some of these reasons for giving are more commendable than others.

We hold back from giving for another variety of reasons. What are some of the reasons that we hold back in our giving? First of all, and fundamentally, we hold back in our giving for fear that we will not be able to survive without what we are being asked to give away. For this same reason, some people do not even want to give up their bad habits, their sins, or their burdens.

That’s why so many problems which are brought to counselors are related, in one way or another, to giving. People are frustrated and confused because they feel they cannot give up neurotic guilt, fear, a poor self-image, illusions, rigidity, inflexibility, hate, envy, anger, dependence on tobacco, alcohol, drugs, or food. People choose not to give up their failures, but to hold onto these and let these continue to rule their lives. They cling to these things as if these were priceless treasures that they could not do without. Perhaps we all have met people who nurse their grudges, hatreds, and resentments, and strongly