



### **Saturday-October 31**

"One of the greatest missing teachings in the American church today is the reminder to men and women that nothing we have belongs to us."  
Gordon MacDonald

**Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute.**

### **Scripture Reading**

*"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." (Psalm 24:1)*

*"The silver is mine and the gold is mine," declares the Lord Almighty. (Haggai 2:8)*

*"But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth." (Deuteronomy 8:18)*

*"You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)*

### **Devotional**

The story is told of a man who took his son to McDonald's and bought him an order of large fries. As they were sitting together, the dad reached over to get a fry but his son pulled them back with both hands. At first the father thought, "That's okay, son. One day you'll get it." But then he thought, "Doesn't my son realize that I'm the one who gave him those fries in the first place? I am the *source* of his French fries. Doesn't he realize that I could take those fries from him any time I want? My *strength* is far greater than his. Doesn't he realize I could bury him in French fries if I wanted to--that I can *supply* all the fries we both could ever hope to eat?" As he was sitting there feeling that parental self-righteousness we all can get with our kids, suddenly, the dad had this thought hit him: "My son is acting exactly like I do with God."

God blesses us and says, "I want to sit down with you and enjoy some of those blessings I gave you." But we pull back and hold tightly to what He's given us as if it all belonged to us. God looks at us and says to Himself, "Don't they realize I'm the *source* of everything they have? Don't they realize that I have the *strength* to take it all away any time I want? Don't they realize I could bury them in blessings if I choose? Don't they realize I *supply* all their needs according to my riches in glory? Don't they realize I don't need anything they have--that I just want to help them? Why won't they listen to me?"

In the coming weeks, the central focus of our messages in the *Live To Give* series is not about having the right insurance, as much as having the right *assurance*; not about securities, but about *security*; not about trusts, but about *trust*; not about growing your principal, but *understanding God's principles*.

### **Reflection Question**

Do I really believe that everything I have comes from God? Do I see myself more as an owner or a manager?

### **Prayer**

Father, forgive me for thinking that my stuff is my stuff--that is such short-sighted thinking. I gladly acknowledge You as the source, the strength and the supply of everything I have. You own it all and I am merely your manager. Help me be open and faithful as I handle what you have entrusted to me. In Jesus' name I ask, Amen.

### **Sunday-November 1**

*"God has given us two hands--one to receive with and the other to give with. We are not cisterns made for hoarding; we are channels made for sharing."* Billy Graham

### **Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute**

### **Scripture Reading**

Mark 14:1-9

*Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. "But not during the festival," they said, "or the people may riot." While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the*

*Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly. "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."*

### **Devotional**

Giving is, first and foremost, an act of worship. "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness." (1 Chronicles 16:29)

The first time the word "worship" is used in the Bible is when Abraham climbed Mt. Moriah with the intent of offering his son Isaac on the altar. Abraham told his servants, "We will worship and then come back to you." (Genesis 22:5) Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his most precious possession to God--that was his act of worship.

A man named David Upchurch related that every Sunday morning his father would sit in his easy chair with his Bible, his checkbook, and a notepad in his lap. He'd read the Bible, meditate on all the blessings God had given, and then write out his check to the church. For him, giving was an expression of thanksgiving and a tangible act of worship.

When we see giving as an act of worship, we are prompted to give God our best offering and not just our leftovers.

### **Reflection Question**

Do I look at my giving to God as act of worship? Am I bringing my best to God?

### **Prayer**

Lord, you know that I struggle sometimes to connect giving my money to a vision of worship. I tend to see giving more as an obligation or a responsibility. Help me, God, to see my giving as a true offering--an offering that comes from gratitude, devotion, and adoration of You. You deserve my best, Father, and I resolve now to offer it to You. In the name of Your best gift, Jesus, Amen.

## Monday-November 2

*"People go through three conversions: their head, their heart and their pocketbook. Unfortunately, not all at the same time." Martin Luther*

### Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute

## Scripture Reading

Luke 3:7-14

*John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." "What should we do then?" the crowd asked. John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same." Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely--be content with your pay."*

## Devotional

In the third chapter of Luke's gospel, we read of John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness. Great crowds are going out to hear him and to be baptized by him. Three different groups ask him what they should do to bear the fruit of repentance. John gives three direct answers:

**\*vs. 11-everyone should share clothes and food with the poor.**

**\*vs. 13-tax collectors shouldn't pocket extra money.**

**\*vs. 14-soldiers should be content with their wages and not extort money.**

Each answer John gives relates to money and possessions. But no one asks him about that! They ask what they should do to demonstrate the fruit of spiritual transformation. So why does John talk about money? John the Baptist realized you can't talk about spiritual transformation and repentance without talking about how to handle money and possessions.

When Sam Houston, the famous Texas soldier and politician, came to Christ late in his life, he was preparing for his baptism in a muddy Texas creek. He took out his pocket watch. He took off his glasses. The preacher said, "You better take your wallet out, Governor Houston." Houston replied, "No, preacher, I expect it needs to be baptized too!"

### **Reflection Question**

Has your wallet been baptized? Has your checkbook been immersed in Jesus in such a way that it reveals a spiritual transformation in your heart?

### **Prayer**

Lord, I ask you to convert my wallet as surely as you have converted my soul. Allow my use of money to be a reflection of your rule and leadership of my life. Through my use of finances, may I produce fruit that shows conclusively that my heart has been changed by the power of the gospel. In the name of Jesus, I pray, Amen.

### **Tuesday-November 3**

*"Remember this--you can't serve God and Money, but you can serve God with money."* Selwyn Hughes

### **Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute**

### **Scripture Reading**

Matthew 6:19-21, 24

*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

*No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.*

### **Devotional**

Jesus unveils what Randy Alcorn calls, "The treasure principle." It's one of Jesus' most misunderstood and neglected teachings. *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not*

*destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*"(Matthew 6:19-21) Consider what Jesus is saying: **"Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth." Why not? Is it because earthly treasures are bad? No, because they won't last.**

The Bible says in Proverbs 23:5, *"Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.*" What a word picture! Next time you buy a prized possession, imagine it sprouting wings and flying off, because sooner or later it will disappear. Every item we buy is one more thing to think about, talk about, clean, insure, repair, rearrange, fret over, and replace when it goes bad.

When Jesus warns us not to store up treasures on earth, it's not just that earthly wealth *might* be lost; it's because it will *always* be lost--either it leaves us while we live or we leave it when we die. No exceptions.

### **Reflection Question**

Am I moving toward my treasure--in heaven, or am I moving away from treasure--on earth? Where is my treasure?

### **Prayer**

Father, I want to thank you for the direct and simple teaching of Jesus on treasure. I have things I treasure, but so often it's not the treasure that's going to last. Refocus me, Lord, on what lasts. I want to be moving toward my treasure, not away from it. Thanks for giving me a heavenly treasure store to look forward to. In the name of the greatest treasure, Jesus, I ask, Amen.

### **Wednesday-November 4**

The world asks, "What does a person own?" God asks, "How does a person use what he or she has been given?" Anonymous

**Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute**

## Scripture Reading

1 Timothy 6:17-19

*Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

## Devotional

Imagine that you are alive at the end of the Civil War. You're living in the South, but you are a Northerner and you plan to move back home as soon as the war is over. While in the South, you've accumulated lots of Confederate currency. Now suppose you knew for a fact that the North was going to win the war and the end was near. What would you do with all your Confederate currency?

If you're smart, there's only one answer. You immediately cash in your Confederate currency for US currency, the only money that will have value once the war is over. You would keep only enough Confederate currency to meet your short-term needs.

As a Christian, you have inside information of an eventual worldwide upheaval caused by Christ's return. This is the ultimate insider trading tip: earth's currency will become worthless when Jesus Christ returns or when you die, whichever comes first. (And either could happen at any minute.)

When investment experts known as "market timers" read signs that mean the stock market is about to take a downward turn, they recommend switching funds immediately into more dependable vehicles such as money markets, treasury bills, or certificates of deposit.

Jesus functions as the foremost "market timer." He tells us, once and for all, to switch investment vehicles. Because He is coming soon, He instructs us to transfer our treasure *from earth*--which is volatile and ready to take a permanent dive at any moment--*to heaven*--which is totally dependable, insured by God Himself.

There's nothing wrong with Confederate money as long as you understand its limitations. Realizing its value is temporary should radically affect your investment strategy. To accumulate vast earthly treasures that you can't possibly hold on to for the long term is equivalent to stockpiling Confederate money even though you know it's about to become worthless.

## Reflection Question

Am I taking a long-term approach with regard to money and possessions? Am I thinking about how the money I have can impact God's work a hundred years from

now? A thousand years from now? A million years from now?

### **Prayer**

Father, I am so often short-sighted when it comes to finances. I so often am aware only of what is right in front me. God, help me to be able to look beyond the urgent and see what's important. Give me a bigger vision than today or even tomorrow. Help me to lay a foundation for the coming age. Through Jesus I ask, Amen.

### **Thursday-November 5**

"You can't take it with you when you go. Never seen a hearse with a trailer hitch."  
Lyric sung by country artist Kristian Bush

### **Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute**

### **Scripture Reading**

Psalm 49:16-17 & 1 Timothy 6:7

*Do not be overawed when a man grows rich,  
when the splendor of his house increases;  
for he will take nothing with him when he dies,  
his splendor will not descend with him.*

*For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.*

### **Devotional**

*You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead.*

Randy Alcorn tells the story of visiting two different graves on a trip to Egypt several years ago. The first grave was located down an alley in a plot of overgrown grass, in a graveyard for American missionaries. The sun-scorched tombstone read: William Borden, 1887-1913.

William Borden, a Yale graduate and heir to great wealth, rejected a life of ease in order to bring the gospel to Muslims. Refusing even to buy himself a car, Borden gave away hundreds of thousands of dollars to missions. After only four months of zealous ministry in Egypt, he contracted spinal meningitis and died at the age of 25.

The epitaph on Borden's grave describes his love and sacrifices for the Kingdom of God and for Muslim people. The inscription ends with this phrase which Randy Alcorn says he will never forget: *Apart from faith in Christ, there is no explanation for such a life.*

Alcorn and his wife went straight from William Borden's grave to the Egyptian National Museum where he saw the mind-boggling exhibit of King Tut. Tutankhamen, the Egyptian boy king, was only seventeen when he died. He was buried with solid gold chariots and thousands of golden artifacts. His gold coffin was found within gold tombs--within gold tombs--within gold tombs. The burial site was filled with tons of gold.

The Egyptians believed in an afterlife--one where they could take earthly treasures. But all the treasures intended for King Tut's eternal enjoyment stayed right where they were until Howard Carter discovered the burial chamber in 1922. They hadn't been touched for more than three thousand years.

Alcorn writes: "I was struck by the contrast between these two graves. Borden's was obscure, dusty, and hidden off the back alley of a street littered with garbage. Tutankhamen's tomb glittered with unimaginable wealth. Yet where are these two young men now? One, who lived in opulence and called himself king, is in the misery of a Christless eternity. The other, who lived a modest life on earth in service of the one true King, is enjoying his everlasting reward in the presence of his Lord."

Tut's life was tragic because of an awful truth discovered too late--he couldn't take his treasures with him. William Borden's life was triumphant. Why? Because instead of leaving his treasures behind, he sent them on ahead.

Unbelievers cannot relive their lives and get a second chance to choose Christ. Christians cannot relive their lives and have a second chance to invest more into God's Kingdom. Now is the time to worship. Now is the time to give your heart and to lay up treasure in heaven that can never be lost, stolen or diminished.

### **Reflection Question**

What am I sending on ahead of me into eternity?

### **Prayer**

Father, I don't want to waste my one and only life. I want to live this life to the full. I want my life to count for the sake Jesus Christ. May you empower me to live in such a way that when I'm gone, people will say, "Apart from faith in Christ, there is no explanation for such a life." In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

## Friday-November 6

"You have not lived until you have done something for someone who can never repay you." John Bunyan

### Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute

#### Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 2:6-10

*However, I speak a wisdom to those who are mature. But this wisdom is not from this world or from the rulers of this world, who are losing their power. I speak God's secret wisdom, which he has kept hidden. Before the world began, God planned this wisdom for our glory. None of the rulers of this world understood it. If they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written in the Scriptures:*

*"No one has ever seen this,  
and no one has ever heard about it.  
No one has ever imagined  
what God has prepared for those who love him."  
But God has shown us these things through the Spirit.*

#### Devotional

At the end of the movie *Schindler's List* there is a heart-wrenching scene in which Oskar Schindler--who bought from the Nazis the lives of many Jews--looks at his car and his gold pin and regrets that he didn't give more of his money and possessions to save even more lives. Schindler had used his opportunity far better than most, but in the end he longed for a chance to go back and make better choices.

Here's a reality check for you: Unbelievers cannot relive their lives and get a second chance to choose Christ. Hebrew 9:27, *"It is appointed unto men to die once and face judgement."*

Also, Christians cannot relive their lives and get a second chance to do more to help the needy and invest in God's kingdom. We have one brief opportunity--one life that will soon be past--to use our resources to make a difference.

Randy Alcorn puts it like this: "Five minutes after we die, we'll know exactly how we should have lived." Thankfully, God has given us His Word so we won't have to wait until we die to find out. *"No eye has ever seen, and no ear has ever heard about it. No one has ever imagined what God has prepared for those who love him. **But** God has shown us these things through the Spirit."* (1 Corinthians 2:9-10) God has given us His Spirit to empower us to live the way He wants us to live now.

#### Reflection Question

Am I living in a way that is consistent with the direction my life is heading -- toward an eternity with God?

### **Prayer**

Lord, my life is moving in only one direction--toward eternity, toward You. I don't know why I so often fail to recognize that reality. Help me, Lord, to live in such a way that I increasingly set my affections on things above and I am less entangled with earthly things below. Give me the vision to know now in part what one day I will know in full. Through Jesus I pray, Amen.

### **Saturday-November 7**

"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you can." John Wesley

### **Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute**

### **Scripture Reading**

Luke 12:13-21

*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; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. 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 my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain 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 whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."*

### **Devotional**

On one occasion when Jesus was teaching, a huge crowd had gathered about him. Someone yelled out, "*Teacher tell my brother to divide the inheritance with*

*me!" Seizing upon the man's request, Jesus turned to the crowd and said, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15)*

Jesus went on to amplify his warning on the consuming nature of greed by telling a story of a rich man whose fields produced a bumper crop. Upon seeing his unprecedented and unexpected increased prosperity, the man thought to himself, *"What shall I do?"* (Luke 12:17)

We have a tendency to allow how much money we have or how much stuff we have accumulated to define who we are. USC Professor of Sociology Robert Bellah writes: "For over a hundred years, a large part of the American people has imagined that the virtual meaning of life lies in the acquisition of ever-increasing status, income, and authority."

By the way, that's a very good question. That's a very insightful question. That's a question that God wants us to ask ourselves often when we think about how we use our money and our stuff. Nothing wrong with asking that question of ourselves when it comes to managing money. So far, so good.

But the answer the man comes up with is terribly misguided and misdirected. *"This is what I'll do: I'll 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.'"* (Luke 12:18-19) Bad answer. Wrong conclusion. Because no sooner had he said that, then something totally unexpected, totally unaccounted for happened--he died.

As Jesus explained it, *"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?'"* (Luke 12:20) As his listeners absorbed the impact of the story, Jesus drew the application, *"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."* (Luke 12:21)

Randy Alcorn points out that this apparently successful business man failed to factor in three investment fundamentals:

- ***the mortality of his present life***
- ***the eternality of his future life***
- ***the reality that today's choices were shaping his future life***

The man asked the right question: What shall I do? But somehow he arrived at the worst possible answer: I'll keep it all to myself. He saw his prosperity as something to benefit himself exclusively. It was not to be shared, not to be used for any purpose other than his own pleasure. He thought his riches were actually his riches; he thought his amazing crop was something he deserved. He thought the future was his to predict. At every turn, he took God's place and denied His authority. He was more concerned with "hoardship" than lordship.

Jesus ends this story by saying this is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.

### **Reflection Question**

How would I evaluate myself to see if I'm rich toward God?

### **Prayer**

Lord, I want to be rich toward you. Forgive me for just wanting to be rich. That desire is no different than the dead, rich fool's desire in the story. I don't want to be just rich--I want to be rich toward You. Thank you, Jesus, for showing me what that means. Shape my attitudes toward money and possessions so that they align with Yours. In the name of the One who was rich, yet for my sake became poor, Amen.

### **Sunday-November 8**

"I would have never been able to tithe the first million dollars I ever made if I had not tithed on my first salary, which was \$1.50 a week."

John D. Rockefeller

### **Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute**

### **Scripture Reading**

1 John 2:15-17

*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.*

### **Devotional**

Back in the heyday of radio programs, no one was a bigger star than Jack Benny. His wry sense of humor resonated with millions of listeners every week on his wildly popular radio show. The main trait of the cantankerous character Benny played was stinginess. He was a man who simply would not part with his money.

In one of his best-known skits he is accosted by a robber who thrusts his gun into his chest and says, "Your money or your life!" Benny doesn't answer him immediately and the aggravated robber repeats, "I said, your money or your life!"

Finally, Benny replies, "I'm thinking... I'm thinking!"

Funny as that sounds, it seems to be that way for a lot of people. Money is so important to them that they value it above everything else. There's no question that money has an alluring power, tempting us with all that it can purchase or accomplish. If we give in to it, we learn that it has the power to control us and make us its servant.

Jesus taught His disciples, *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."* (Matthew 6:24)

In Jesus' teaching, the term "money" has a very broad meaning. It includes actual money, but it also includes everything to which we can become attached in this material world--all the things that money can buy. These are the "things of this world" which the apostle John cautions us not to love. In his first letter he wrote, *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world."* (1 John 2:15)

One well-known pastor suggested that a reasonable paraphrase of this verse for Christians in America would be: *Love not the mall, neither the things in the mall.* Speaking of that, did you know there were only 3,000 shopping malls in 1950? Do you know how many there are today? There are more than 45,000! There are 16 1/2 square feet of mall space for every man, woman, and child in our country.

How well we know the temptations of money and the magnetic power it has in our culture; and how desperately we need to take to heart what Jesus is saying.

### **Reflection Question**

What are some practical things that you can do today to offset the powerful pull of the world on your attention? How can you be more single-minded in your devotion to Jesus?

### **Prayer**

Father, I confess that the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are all too familiar to me and too comfortable for me. Forgive me. I want to turn my eyes on Jesus. I want to focus on Him alone as the Lord and Leader of my life. Please help me do that today. In His Strong Name I ask, Amen.

## Monday-November 9

"The world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to Him." Dwight L. Moody

### Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute

## Scripture Reading

Romans 12:1-2

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God--this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

## Devotional

One of the most important principles of Christian stewardship is the Principle of Single-Minded Service. Single-minded service requires several things of Christ followers.

-It requires self-denial, the setting aside of personal agendas. *"If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* (Mark 8:34)

-It requires sacrifice. Those who choose the life of following Jesus must give up personal ambitions for the sake of Christ. *"And he (Jesus) died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."* (2 Corinthians 5:15)

-It requires perseverance. The faithful steward sticks to it. He is trustworthy when troubles, trials or temptations come. When Jesus encountered a guy who was struggling to commit, he said: *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."* (Luke 9:62)

The Principle of Single-Minded Service is probably the most neglected stewardship principle of them all. How easily we become distracted by other interests, and drawn away by other problems and concerns resulting in a divided mind and fragmented loyalties. Living this principle is not easy, but it is rewarding.

- **Be single-minded about reading and applying God's Word.**
- **Be single-minded about doing God's will.**

- **Be single-minded about being active in God's work.**

### **Reflection Question**

What would I consider to be a sacrifice for God? How would I know if I'm sacrificing or not?

### **Prayer**

Lord, I struggle with the idea of sacrifice. I put myself on the altar time and again, but I keep crawling off because I'm a living sacrifice. Maybe that's my problem, Father. I'm not dead to the wrong things and I'm not alive to the right things. Help me, Jesus, to die to anything that is not rooted in Your will for my life--Your good, pleasing and perfect will. Through Jesus I pray, Amen.

### **Tuesday-November 10**

"If you want to feel rich, just count all the things that you have that money can't buy." Anonymous

### **Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute**

### **Scripture Reading**

Ecclesiastes 5:10-15

*Whoever loves money never has enough;  
whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.  
This too is meaningless.  
As goods increase,  
so do those who consume them.  
And what benefit are they to the owners  
except to feast their eyes on them?  
The sleep of a laborer is sweet,  
whether they eat little or much,  
but as for the rich, their abundance*

*permits them no sleep.  
I have seen a grievous evil under the sun:  
wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners,  
or wealth lost through some misfortune,  
so that when they have children  
there is nothing left for them to inherit.  
Everyone comes naked from their mother's womb,  
and as everyone comes, so they depart.  
They take nothing from their toil  
that they can carry in their hands.*

### **Devotional**

The former owner of a successful business said that when he gave wage increases to employees, he observed that the people were happy with a wage increase for 6 months, at the very longest. After a significantly shorter period of time, the employees, once again, would be discontent and want more. They would start the "if only's." You know what I mean: If only I had a nicer car... If only I had a bigger house... If only I had a whiter smile... .

*Eccles. 5:10 (NLT): Those who love money will never have enough. How absurd to think that wealth brings true happiness!*

In 2003 the University of Michigan took a survey and asked people what they believed would improve their quality of life. Can you guess the answer most given? "MORE MONEY."

A recent University of Southern California study has found that greater wealth does not translate into greater happiness for most of the 1,500 people surveyed annually over three decades. USC economist Richard Easterlin said, "Many people are under the illusion that the more money we make the happier we'll be." But, according to study after study for three decades, that just isn't true.

Philip Yancey writes about a man who was in search of simplicity. He went on a retreat to a monastery, where life was very simple and very uncomplicated. There were very few creature comforts. That was the life that the monks had chosen. They wanted to be liberated from the desire for more. A monk showed him to his room and said to him, "If there's anything that you need, let us know, and we'll show you how to get along without it."

Following Jesus doesn't require us to live like monks. But following Jesus does help us face this reality: *Most of what we think we need we really don't.*

### **Reflection Question**

Do I know the difference between a *want* and a *need*? When was the last time I went without something I truly needed?

## **Prayer**

Lord, I confess I often confuse my wants with my needs. In fact, at times I don't know if I really know the difference. Give me clarity here, God. I know I *need* You. I also want a growing relationship with You. Thank you, for wanting me to know You even though You didn't need me. May my sense of contentment be found in Christ and nowhere else. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

## **Wednesday-November 11**

"The most important things in life aren't things and the best things in life are always free." Anonymous

### **Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute**

## **Scripture Reading**

Philippians 4:10-13

*I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

## **Devotional**

When we understand the circumstances Paul was enduring at the time he wrote those words, our appreciation for what he says goes even deeper. To begin with, he's in prison... and not in the Martha Stewart suite at a minimum security correctional institute. He was chained and restricted in a dank cell and, furthermore, he was sick. A chronic illness he refers to only as a "thorn in my flesh" was an ongoing issue in his life. He was abandoned. Many of his so-called Christian friends and brothers had turned against him. For reasons that are unclear, they had ceased their support and many were actually attacking him with vicious criticism.

Faced with similar woes, many people would become bitter. Some would become depressed and utterly defeated. Others would react with self-pity. Paul's response was governed by the principle of unconditional contentment. In spite of his circumstances, which were not good, he was content.

The circumstances of life will get to all of us at one time or another. And Paul said contentment was something he "learned." It did not come naturally or automatically. The word in the original language means *"learned by experience."* In other words, this is something he had to live out; he had to go through. This was not just some sort of mental gymnastics or intellectual process. This kind of learning comes about only by living.

The word "content" has a fascinating definition; it means **"contained."** Paul had learned the containment of God in every dimension of his life, channeling him and controlling him. He was living a remarkable paradox--even though he was physically bound in a Roman jail, his captors were not containing him and directing him; God was. Paul rested on the Lord's sovereignty and providence, and he learned through his experiences to look at life not as a series of disconnected accidents but a series of divine appointments.

What's the secret to contentment in all circumstances?

- Contentment comes through awareness of God's presence.
- Contentment comes through alertness to God's purposes.

### **Reflection Question**

In what ways or through what experiences have I "learned contentment"?

### **Prayer**

Father, I am easily distracted and continually wanting more. More money, more attention, more friends, more stuff, more... more... more. It almost sounds like a monster chasing me. Help me to find my sufficiency in you and you alone. You are all I need. I don't want to just sing that; I want to live that. Prepare me, even today, for any lessons in contentment you want me to learn. Through Jesus I ask, Amen.

### **Thursday-November 12**

"No church ever has a money problem, only a faithfulness problem."  
Brian Kluth

**Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute**

## **Scripture Reading**

Matthew 25:14-27

*"The kingdom of heaven is like a man who was going to another place for a visit. Before he left, he called for his servants and told them to take care of his things while he was gone. He gave one servant five bags of gold, another servant two bags of gold, and a third servant one bag of gold, to each one as much as he could handle. Then he left. The servant who got five bags went quickly to invest the money and earned five more bags. In the same way, the servant who had two bags invested them and earned two more. But the servant who got one bag went out and dug a hole in the ground and hid the master's money.*

*"After a long time the master came home and asked the servants what they did with his money. The servant who was given five bags of gold brought five more bags to the master and said, 'Master, you trusted me to care for five bags of gold, so I used your five bags to earn five more.' The master answered, 'You did well. You are a good and loyal servant. Because you were loyal with small things, I will let you care for much greater things. Come and share my joy with me.'*

*"Then the servant who had been given two bags of gold came to the master and said, 'Master, you gave me two bags of gold to care for, so I used your two bags to earn two more.' The master answered, 'You did well. You are a good and loyal servant. Because you were loyal with small things, I will let you care for much greater things. Come and share my joy with me.'*

*"Then the servant who had been given one bag of gold came to the master and said, 'Master, I knew that you were a hard man. You harvest things you did not plant. You gather crops where you did not sow any seed. So I was afraid and went and hid your money in the ground. Here is your bag of gold.' The master answered, 'You are a wicked and lazy servant! You say you knew that I harvest things I did not plant and that I gather crops where I did not sow any seed. So you should have put my gold in the bank. Then, when I came home, I would have received my gold back with interest.'"*

## **Devotional**

There is a stewardship principle called the Principle of Proportionate Participation. It's an easy stewardship principle to understand and apply because this principle says *God's provision dictates the believer's proportion*. In other words, you can only give away what has been given to you. What God provides determines what we can give. If He gives a little, from that little we are to give. If He gives abundantly, from

that abundance we are to give. Whatever He provides regardless of the depth or breadth of His provision, determines the measure of our giving.

Jesus put it like this in Luke 12:48 (NLT):

*Much is required from those to whom much is given, and much more is required from those to whom much more is given.*

Don't focus on amounts; focus on faithfulness. Sometimes people beat themselves up because they can't give large amounts like they feel they should. The reason they can't, most of the time, is because they don't have large sources of funds to draw from. They have only a small amount, but they faithfully give out of those small sources. That is successful stewardship. Successful stewardship is not measured by what others are giving. Successful stewardship is measured by being faithful with what God has given you.

In the parable of the talents, the owner--representing God, gave varying amounts to each of his three servants. To one he gave five talents, to another two and to another he gave one. They were evaluated based upon what they did with what they were given, not by what the other servants were given. When the two-talent guy brought the owner four talents, having doubled his investment, the owner didn't say, "Why didn't you bring me 10 like the first guy?" He evaluated his faithfulness by what he was given, not by what the others were given.

### **Reflection Question**

When I give, do I focus more on the amount given or the faithfulness it represents? Am I more concerned about what others have or about what I am doing with what I have?

### **Prayer**

Lord, I know you are a good Master and merciful God. You don't ask me for something I don't have. You don't punish me for not doing something I'm not able to do. But You do call me to be faithful with what You have entrusted to me. Thank You for trusting me. I so want to be trustworthy. Please help me stay faithful. Through Jesus I ask, Amen.

### **Friday-November 13**

"Giving is more than a responsibility--it is a privilege; more than an act of obedience--it is evidence of our faith." William Arthur Ward

**Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute**

## Scripture Reading

Luke 16:10-12

*Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?*

## Devotional

In Luke 16, Jesus added another layer of understanding to His principle "to whom much is given, much is required" teaching. He said in Luke 16:10, *Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.*

Jesus implies that all of us are being continually tested in the way we handle little things. Parents understand this. If a child can't be trusted to spend his father's money and return the change, he probably can't be trusted with the father's credit card. But if a child can be trusted to clean her room and take out the garbage, she probably can be trusted with a dog or a bike.

This principle eliminates all of our "if only's." "If only I made more money, I'd help the poor." "If only I could win the lottery, I'd pay off the church debt." But if I'm dishonest or selfish in my use of a few dollars, do you think having more would change my character? Here's what I've learned: *having more doesn't build a person's character.* In fact, more often than not, *having more erodes a person's character.* If I'm dishonest and selfish with a few dollars, then I would be dishonest and selfish with a million dollars. God is not interested in our amounts; He's interested in our faithfulness. God is not overly concerned with how much you produce; He's very concerned with how much you can be trusted.

## Reflection Question

Do I focus more on being successful or being trustworthy? Do I believe having "more" would change my character and habits?

## Prayer

Father, I realize the world is only concerned about the bottom line. But You are more concerned about what I'm seeking first. Lead me in the direction of Your Kingdom today. Grow my trustworthiness by giving me opportunities to prove Your trust in me whether I have a little or a lot to manage. In the name of Jesus I ask, Amen.

## **Saturday-November 14**

"A checkbook is a theological document; it will tell you who and what you worship."  
Billy Graham

### **Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute**

#### **Scripture Reading**

Acts 4:32-36

*All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.*

#### **Devotional**

Pastor Vander Warner of Richmond, Virginia, told a story about a beautiful young lady in his congregation who was engaged to young man in the church. On a rainy night, she and her fiancé were making final plans for their wedding. After telling him good night, she started to drive home, but on rain-slicked streets she lost control of her car and was killed instantly.

As the police looked through her belongings for identification, they discovered her fiancé's phone number. He was summoned to the scene of the accident. With a broken heart he identified his fiancé. As he was about to leave, one policeman stopped him. "I want to ask you something about this young lady. All we found in her car was a purse with a recent bank statement. In an effort to identify her we looked through her cancelled checks. Check after check was made payable to Grove Avenue Church. What does that mean? What kind of lady was she?"

The broken-hearted young man gave the Christian testimony of his late beloved to the policeman. In the days to come, that officer visited the church and eventually professed his faith in Christ and was baptized. It was a life-changing testimony from one whose only witness was her checkbook.

#### **Reflection Question**

What if an assessment was made about your life solely on the basis of your checkbook? What would it say about the priorities of your life?

## **Prayer**

Father, I know that two things reveal more about my heart for Your Kingdom than anything else: my calendar and my financial statements. Those indicators do not lie, regardless of what I say. Lord, if someone saw either of those measurements of my time and my treasure, I pray they would see that You were a priority in my life—that they could even be a silent but powerful testimony to my devotion to You. Oh, make it so, God, make it so. Through Jesus I ask, Amen.

## **Sunday-November 15**

"If there be any truer measure of a man than by what he does, it must be by what he gives." Robert South

### **Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute**

## **Scripture Reading**

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

*This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.*

## **Devotional**

I did an experiment once that really helped drive home the point that faithful giving proves our trustworthiness. I asked three guys to join me on stage and I told the following parable:

I have to go on an extended journey out of the country. You three men are going to manage my affairs while I'm away. I'm going to send each of you \$10,000.00 every month. You may keep \$9,000.00 and spend it as you please. But I want you to give \$1,000.00 each month to my wife for her needs and the needs of my household.

As promised, I sent each of the men \$10,000.00 monthly. After several weeks, I asked my wife if she was receiving the financial support I had arranged for her. Her reply was, "Well, the first one is sending \$1,000.00 each month, just as you instructed him. The second one is sending me \$2,000.00 a month. I don't know why, but he is. But the third man sent \$800.00 the first month, \$300.00 the second month, and nothing the last two months."

Now, as her husband who loves her with all my heart, what do you think I'm going to do? I am the one providing the money to these men. I've told them they can keep \$9,000.00 for themselves. All I wanted them to do was give a mere 10% so there could be food in my house.

To the first man, who was being faithful in following my instructions, I am going to continue sending the \$10,000.00. But to the third guy--the one who wasn't satisfied with the 90% I graciously provided--I am going to stop sending the \$10,000.00 a month and send it to the second man who was generous. He is doing not only what I told him, but is going above and beyond. Why? *Because I can trust the second man.* He has demonstrated that he cares about what I care about and who I care about. He is a good manager.

I concluded my experiment by saying, "Now let me bring this home. Jesus has gone away for a season of time. He has said to each of us, 'I want you to take care of my bride (the Church) while I'm away and I'll send you the resources to do it. Be trustworthy with what I send you.'"

### **Reflection Question**

What would you have done with each of the men in the above parable? Would you have increased or decreased the amount each of them received from you based on how well they followed your instructions? Does that seem reasonable?

### **Prayer**

Father, I want you to know that You can trust me. I know I haven't always been as trustworthy as I need to be and I ask You to forgive me. Thank you for always giving me additional opportunities to prove my trust. Whatever You provide for me, Lord, I will faithfully handle in a way that honors You and reflects Your provision. In Jesus' faithful name I pray, Amen.

## Monday-November 16

"All you have shall someday be given: Therefore give now, that the season of giving may be yours and not your inheritors." Kahlil Gibran

### Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute

#### Scripture Reading

1 Timothy 6:17-19

*Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

#### Devotional

Most of the material stuff we leave behind won't last much longer than we did. Our money will be spent, probably by people we don't like and in ways that we wouldn't approve of. Someone has said, "The executive who works from 7am to 7pm every day will be both wildly successful and fondly remembered by his wife's next husband."

When we're gone, our homes and property will deteriorate or be sold. Our personal belongings will become items in an antique store. I heard about an antique store called "Dead People's Stuff." That's funny, but it's also an honest description of what all our possessions will be someday.

There is a book titled Death Warmed Over and it is a combination cookbook and sociological study of funeral meals and rituals. The author starts the book with a story of a terminally ill man dying at home in bed. He could smell the aroma of chocolate chip cookies--his favorite--baking in the oven. He wanted one more cookie before he died. He dragged his frail body out of bed and crawled into the kitchen. As he reached out his thin, trembling arm to grasp one final cookie, he felt the sting of a spatula smack his hand. "Put that back," his wife said. "They're for the funeral."

Somebody else is going to eat our cookies.

If we build our lives on convictions rooted in the Scripture, character shaped by Christ, and a community unified by a common faith, then we will "*lay up treasure for themselves [ourselves] as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they [we] may take hold of the life that is truly life.*"

### **Reflection Question**

Have you thought of what's going to happen to your stuff when you die? Do you have a plan (a will or trust) for disbursing it wisely?

### **Prayer**

Lord, I'm thinking of the old saying that goes:

do your giving  
while you're living,  
then you're knowing  
where it's going

Help me be more informed and intentional about how to use my stuff now in ways that will allow me to take hold of that which is really life. I know this isn't about buying my way into heaven; that could never be done. But I do want to lay up treasure. You told me I could. Please teach me how and allow me to use my money and my stuff for that purpose. Through Jesus I ask, Amen.

### **Tuesday-November 17**

"Christian stewardship begins with God at the center. When stewardship revolves around any other center, it is misconceived." Dan R. Dick

### **Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute**

### **Scripture Reading**

1 Chronicles 29:10-14

*David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly, saying,*

*"Praise be to you, Lord,  
the God of our father Israel,  
from everlasting to everlasting.*

*Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power  
and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,  
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.*

*Yours, LORD, is the kingdom;  
you are exalted as head over all.*

*Wealth and honor come from you;  
you are the ruler of all things.*

*In your hands are strength and power  
to exalt and give strength to all.*

*Now, our God, we give you thanks,*

*and praise your glorious name.  
"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand."*

### **Devotional**

Richard Moore wrote, "If the church is concerned about helping its people combat all the forces which threaten their relationship with God, then it must of necessity be concerned with the way money is earned and spent. The temptation to be self-centered is real and powerful for all of us--and perhaps at no point is this temptation more dramatic than at the point of our stewardship of money. The degree to which the battle against selfishness is being won in our lives can be seen clearly in the way we use money. If the basic question about ourselves and God is whether God controls or I control my life--then the use of our resources certainly highlights that struggle."

***Stewardship is more than the wise management of our things; it is a persistent refusal to let our things manage us.***

Another statement from Richard Moore, "The stewardship emphasis of a church is at least for two reasons. One of them is obviously to make it possible for the congregation to effectively serve its Lord--and that costs money. But another of equal or greater importance is to call its people to an understanding of the meaning of the shared life. The willingness to give of oneself cheerfully for the benefit of others is a clear sign the disease of self-centeredness is being cured. And cured it must be if we are to be followers of Christ. A person needs to learn the fine art of giving--for his own health, as well as for the benefit of others. Giving is healthy."

### **Reflection Question**

If someone were to determine my spiritual health by what I give, what would be my diagnosis? Would I be pronounced as healthy or "dis-eased" with regard to my stewardship?

### **Prayer**

Lord, You once healed some lepers and then told them to go show themselves to the priests to be inspected and officially pronounced "clean." I don't know who or how I can show that I'm cured from the disease of materialism, but I want to be. There's just no life there. Let me show by my open heart, my open arms, and my open hands that I surrender everything I have to You, and for Your Kingdom purposes. Through Jesus I pray, Amen.

## Wednesday-November 18

"No one has ever become poor by giving." Anne Frank

### Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute

#### Scripture Reading

Luke 10:25-37

*On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

*In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'*

*"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"*

*The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."*

#### Devotional

On a commuter flight from Portland, Maine to Boston in 1987, the pilot heard an unusual noise near the rear of the plane. Henry Dempsey turned the controls over to the co-pilot and went back to check it out. As he reached the tail section the plane hit an air pocket, and Dempsey was tossed against the rear door. The original noise came from the rear door because it had been improperly latched prior at take off, and the impact of Dempsey's weight caused the door to open, instantly sucking him out of the tiny jet.

The co-pilot saw the red light that indicated an open door. He radioed the nearest

airport requesting permission for an emergency landing. He reported that the pilot had fallen out of the plane and wanted a helicopter to search the area. After the plane had landed, the ground crew found Dempsey holding on to the outdoor ladder of the aircraft. Somehow he caught the ladder and held on for 10 minutes as the plane flew 200 mph at an altitude of 4,000 feet and then when landing he managed to keep his head from hitting the runway, which was only 13 inches away. According to news reports, it took airport personnel several minutes to pry Dempsey's fingers free from the ladder.

I've known some people who have held onto their money with that kind of white-knuckle intensity, haven't you?

Jesus told a parable about a lone traveler who was mugged, robbed, and left for dead on the road to Jericho. Two religious leaders passed him by, but a Samaritan from a despised ethnic group stopped, nursed his wounds, put him on a donkey, carried him to a nearby inn, and offered to pay for all of his medical expenses.

That story reveals the three basic attitudes people have about money:

- The robbers' attitudes -- *"what's yours is mine and I'm going to take it."*
- The religious leaders' attitudes -- *"what's mine is mine and I'm going to keep it."*
- The Samaritan's attitude -- *"what's mine is yours and I'm willing to share it."*

Jesus said, "Have the attitude toward people and possessions that the Samaritan had. Go and treat people accordingly."

### **Reflection Question**

Which of the three attitudes more closely resembles my attitude toward money and possessions--the robbers', the religious leaders' or the Samaritan's? Which attitude was I raised with?

### **Prayer**

Lord, I don't want to be a robber. I don't want to rob from You or anyone else; keep me from being a self-absorbed religious observer. Point me away from an internally focused religious identity and let me see Your bigger picture. Help me to live more like my Samaritan friend, who freely received and freely gave, because it's all Yours anyway. I ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

## Thursday-November 19

"We should travel light and live simply. Our enemy is not possessions, but excess."  
John Stott

**Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute.**

### Scripture Reading

2 Corinthians 9:6-11

*Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written:*

*"They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;  
their righteousness endures forever."*

*Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

### Devotional

God prospers me not to raise my standard of living but to raise my standard of giving.

That's what Paul meant when he wrote in 2 Corinthians 9:10-11 *"Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way..."*

So that what? We'll have more to spend on ourselves? Buy ourselves more stuff? Live in wealth showing the world how much God blesses those who please Him? No, *"...so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."*

God comes right out and tells us why He gives some of us more money than we need. And it's not so we can find more ways to spend it on ourselves. It's not so we can indulge our insatiable appetites and spoil our children. It's not so we can insulate ourselves from needing to rely on God's provision. **It's so we can give-- generously.**

Paul said that the God who supplies seed to the sower will increase our store of seed. Why? So we can stockpile our seed in our modern day barns or consume it all

for ourselves? No. So we can scatter it abroad and spread it out that it might bear fruit.

- ***Abundance isn't God's provision for me to live in luxury. Abundance is God's provision for me to help others live!***
- ***God entrusts me with His money not to build my kingdom on earth, but to allow His kingdom to come to earth!***

### **Reflection Question**

Do I see God's abundant provision in my life as His provision for me to live in luxury? Or do I see His abundance as a means to help others live? Whose kingdom am I building?

### **Prayer**

Father, I have prayed many times before, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." I want to mean that. I really want Your kingdom coming and advancing to be the focus of my life. This has implications for what I do with what I have. Thank you for teaching me that abundance isn't an excuse to indulge myself and build my kingdom; it is an opportunity to invest myself in the only kingdom that will last. In the name of Jesus I pray, Amen.

### **Friday-November 20**

"The world's shortest will: 'Being of sound mind and body, I spent it all.'" Unknown

**Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute.**

### **Scripture Reading**

James 4:13-17

*Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.*

## Devotional

In light of the last few years' bumpy economy, people often ask the question, "Should I give now, or should I wait until the market comes back in a year or two?"

Let me respond with a couple of questions:

- How soon do you want to experience God's blessing?
- Do you want to be sure the money goes to God's Kingdom, or are you willing to risk that it won't?

When we stand before God, I don't think He's going to say, "You blew it when you gave Me all that money just before the stock market peaked." I don't believe it's ever wrong to give now. If we don't give now we run the following risks:

**-The economy may change--again--and we'll have even less to give.** James says we don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. Countless investors, advisers and brokers have been absolutely sure about getting great returns on money that disappears overnight.

**-Our hearts may change and we may not follow through with giving.** I think that's why Zaccheus said to Jesus, "*Here and now I give my possessions...*" (Luke 19:8). If you procrastinate, the same heart that's prompting you to give today may later persuade you not to. Why? Because as a result of postponing giving, your heart's deceitful nature and selfish interest can twist your motives and sidetrack your intentions.

**-Our lives may end before we've given what we intended.** You may think, "No problem there. I'm putting the church and its ministries in my will." By all means, do responsible estate planning and remember the Kingdom in your will. But may I ask, "How much faith does it take to part with your money when you die? You don't have any choice, do you?" Death isn't your best opportunity to give; it's your last opportunity to give. God rewards acts of faith done while we're still living.

## Reflection Question

Am I postponing any important stewardship choices that I should be making now? Do I see my death as my best opportunity to give or my last opportunity to give?

## Prayer

Lord, please help me quit this "when-then" thinking that I so easily get sucked in by. Break me from the habit of saying, "When this happens, then I'll... ." Remind me that life is happening right now! This present moment is all that I have. To arrogantly presume upon a future that is so uncertain is foolish and I repent of that pattern of life. Thank you for this day, this time, and this opportunity to live faithfully in Jesus. I pray this through Him, Amen.

## **Saturday-November 21**

"Generosity is to materialism what kryptonite is to Superman."  
Lloyd Shadrach

**Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute.**

### **Scripture Reading**

Psalm 34

*I will extol the Lord at all times;  
his praise will always be on my lips.  
I will glory in the Lord;  
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.  
Glorify the Lord with me;  
let us exalt his name together.  
I sought the Lord, and he answered me;  
he delivered me from all my fears.  
Those who look to him are radiant;  
their faces are never covered with shame.  
This poor man called, and the Lord heard him;  
he saved him out of all his troubles.  
The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him,  
and he delivers them.  
Taste and see that the Lord is good;  
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.  
Fear the Lord, you his holy people,  
for those who fear him lack nothing.*

### **Devotional & Prayer**

Today's devotion is both a devotion and a prayer. It was written by Max Lucado back in 2008 when the most recent economic collapse was at its height. They are still relevant words to read and offer up to the Lord:

Our friends lost their house, Lord  
A co-worker lost her job  
The couple next door lost their retirement  
It seems that everyone is losing their footing

This scares us. This bailout with billions of dollars.  
These rumblings of depression.  
These headlines: ominous, thunderous -  
"Going Broke!" "Going Down!" "Going Under!"

All this finger pointing, and market freezing, and credit squeezing--

People are asking "What's next?" So, Father, we ask You, "What *is* next?"

We're listening. And we're admitting: Heavenly Father, You were right.

You told us this would happen.

You shot straight about loving stuff and worshipping money.

Greed will break your heart, You warned.

Money will love you and leave you.

Don't put your hope in riches that are so uncertain.

You were right. Money is a fickle lover and we just got dumped.

We were wrong to spend what we didn't have.

Wrong to neglect prayer and ignore the poor.

Wrong to think we ever earned a dime. You're really the one who owns and gives it all. So now, Lord, we acknowledge You as the giver, the maker, the creator, and the sustainer, and only You can get us out of this mess and we are wondering if You will.

We know You *can*. We know You *will*. Because You always have.

You led slaves out of slavery,

You built temples out of ruins,

You turned stormy waves into a glassy pond and You turned water into sweet wine.

This seems impossible for us. But what is impossible for us is always possible for You.

So Lord, we've heard enough counsel from financial experts; we come to You now on behalf of our country. We ask for Your help.

And, Father, I pray especially for those who come with concerns and fears and loneliness and hurts. We ask, Father, that we can lay these concerns at the foot of the cross and let You do Your work. Through Christ we pray, Amen.

A prayer by [Max Lucado](#) - October 4, 2008

## **Sunday-November 22**

"Empty pockets never held anyone back. It's only empty hearts that do it." Norman Vincent Peale

**Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute.**

## Scripture Reading

Luke 14:16-23

"A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

## Devotional

Jesus told the parable of some people who were invited to a great banquet by a king; one by one they made excuses not to go to the banquet--"I just bought some property"--"I have a new team of oxen to break in"--"I just got married."

The Gospel invites us to a life of generous and grateful giving but we are constantly making excuses.

-Children say, "I'm too young. I only have dimes and quarters."

-Teenagers say, "I'm broke. I don't have a real job. I need spending money. I'll give when I'm older."

-People in their 20's say, "I'm tapped out. I just got a decent job, bought a car, and moved into my own apartment. I'm paying off college loans. The church can wait until I get on my feet."

-People in their 30's say, "I'm too sophisticated. I'm making investments for my future. I give to the city museum, my alma mater, and the local homeless shelter rather than a church."

-People in their 40's say, "I'm maxed out. My kids are in college. My parents may need a nursing home soon. My job is unstable."

-People in their 50's and 60's say, "I'm worried. Retirement is just around the corner. I want to help with my grandchildren's education. Maybe I'll give a little to the church, but I'm not making any promises."

-People in their 70's and 80's say, "I'm limited. My retirement income is not as much as I hoped. Besides there's so much to do, like trips I always wanted to take. Let the younger people support the church."

It's very easy to go through life talking ourselves out of giving. When we do that, we completely miss out on some of the most significant life-changing truths that God wants to teach us. People who learn to consistently give recognize God's ownership, acknowledge their stewardship, experience supernatural supply, share

in ministry participation, receive unexpected blessings, encourage believers, express love, and lay up treasure in heaven.

### **Reflection Question**

What opportunities to give am I trying to talk my way out of right now? What would I miss out on if I choose not to give now?

### **Prayer**

Father, I praise You and thank You that when the time had fully come, You gave Your Son, Jesus, to pay for the sins of the world. You didn't hold back. You didn't keep waiting for a more perfect moment. You freely poured out Your love on humanity and You showed us that we can give without loving, but we can't love without giving. Thank You, Father, and praise You, Jesus. In Your name I pray, Amen.

### **Monday-November 23**

"Even if I give the whole of my worth to Him, He will find a way to give back to me much more than I gave." Charles Haddon Spurgeon

**Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute.**

### **Scripture Reading**

John 6:5-13

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

## Devotional

I once read about a tough motorcycle gang member who was converted to Christ and his heart was radically changed. He was changed on the inside, but his appearance was still a little scary looking on the outside. The Sunday following his conversion, he found a good church to go to and, naturally, he stood out because he wore his leather gang jacket and he had a long pony-tail, multiple piercings all over his face, and tattoos all up and down his arms. As he was worshipping God, the preacher was pleading with people to volunteer to work in the nursery. So, the preacher asked, "If there is anybody willing to work in the nursery, please stand." Nobody stood. A second time, "Is there anybody willing to work in the nursery?" Nobody stood. The preacher said, "Please, we need somebody to work in the nursery." The newly saved biker was touched and he stood up and said, "I'll do it." Immediately, twenty young mothers stood up and said, "No, we'll do it."

You will never know how God can use your gift unless you are willing to give it... and little becomes much when you place it in Jesus' hands. There's a book, [The hands of Jesus](#), in which the author talked about His hands being carpenter's hands, healing hands, caring hands, and, finally, crucified hands that save.

A basketball in my hands is worth \$60. A basketball in the hands of LeBron James is worth about \$33 million. It depends on whose hands it's in.

A tennis racket in my hands is worthless. In Roger Federer's hands is worth millions and fame. It depends on whose hands it's in.

A slingshot in my hands is a kid's toy and a danger to everybody around me. A slingshot in David's hands is a mighty weapon to fell a giant. It depends on whose hands it's in.

A stick in my hands may keep away an angry dog. A stick in Moses' hands will part the Red sea. It depends on whose hands it's in.

Two fish and five loaves of bread in my hands is a couple of fish sandwiches. In Jesus' hands five loaves and two fish will feed thousands. It depends on whose hands they're in.

Nails in my hands might help to produce a birdhouse. But two nails *in* Jesus' hands produced salvation for the entire world.

## Reflection Question

What is that in your hands? Why don't you give it to God?

## Prayer

Lord, sometimes I feel that I have little to offer You--little money, little time, little

abilities. But You are a God who multiplies whatever we give You. Today, I fully and joyfully release what's in my hands to You. I ask You to bless, increase, and extend my "little" and make it "much" for Your glory. In Jesus' name I ask, Amen.

## **Tuesday-November 24**

"The worship offering [is] a pure gift to God in thankfulness for what we have already received. It should therefore be an exciting and major part of the [worship] service." Lynn A. Miller

**Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute.**

### **Scripture Reading**

Psalm 96

*Sing to the Lord a new song;  
sing to the Lord, all the earth.  
Sing to the Lord, praise his name;  
proclaim his salvation day after day.  
Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.  
For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;  
he is to be feared above all gods.  
For all the gods of the nations are idols,  
but the Lord made the heavens.  
Splendor and majesty are before him;  
strength and glory are in his sanctuary.  
Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations,  
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.  
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;  
bring an offering and come into his courts.  
Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness;  
tremble before him, all the earth.  
Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns."  
The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;  
he will judge the peoples with equity.  
Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;  
let the sea resound, and all that is in it.  
Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;  
let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.  
Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes,  
he comes to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world in righteousness*

*and the peoples in his faithfulness.*

### **Devotional**

The Psalmist writes in Psalm 96:8--"*Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.*"

The most genuine worship, the most tangible thanksgiving occurs when you bring a sacrificial offering.

The Mona Lisa hung in a Paris museum from 1899-1912, and then it was stolen and not recovered for two years. Here's what's amazing: During the two years it was missing, more people went to the museum and stared at the space on the wall where it had been hanging than in the previous twelve years when it was there. The reason? We don't appreciate what we have until it is gone.

We have God's goodness with us today.

We have Salvation in Christ present with us today.

We have the church of Jesus Christ with us today.

We have the fellowship of God's people with us today.

Most of us have our health, our family, our material blessings with us today.

Let us take this opportunity, today and everyday, "to give thanks to the Lord for He is good, His love endures forever."

### **Reflection Question**

Have you ever considered that the financial gifts you make to the Lord are like a "thank you" note to God? Does that image help or hinder your idea of giving? Why?

### **Prayer**

Lord, I know this is a season when a lot of people talk about giving thanks. But Lord, help me remember the last part of this holiday is *giving*. This is *Thanksgiving*. Teach me that my giving to you is a very tangible way that I can say "thank you." In the name of the One to whom I owe everything, Jesus, Amen.

## **Wednesday-November 25**

"Not what we say about our blessings, but how we use them is the true measure of our thanksgiving." W.T. Purkiser

**Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute.**

### **Scripture Reading**

Colossians 3:12-17

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

### **Devotional**

When real estate developer Peter Cummings first assumed his position as chairman of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in 1998, he began writing personal thank-you notes to any donor who contributed \$500 or more to the orchestra. He couldn't bear the thought of a symphony patron receiving a form letter with their name accidentally misspelled, or one of his friends being generically thanked above his stamped signature.

Among the many notes that went out under Cummings' hand was one addressed to Mary Webber Parker, daughter of one of Detroit's leading families from an earlier generation and heiress to the Hudson's department store fortune. She had moved away from Detroit nearly a lifetime ago, settled in California, was widowed, and residing in an upscale nursing home outside of Hartford, Connecticut. And for some reason, she had decided to send a one-time check of \$50,000 to her hometown symphony.

Peter's note to Mary was as usual: prompt, gracious, and unexpected. It must have thrilled the heart of this elderly widow (who had been back to Detroit only twice in twenty years) to hear of the orchestra's revitalization, made possible in part by her generous contribution.

Two weeks later, she wrote pledging another \$50,000. Within days, Peter had written her again, expressing his delighted gratitude and offering to visit with her

sometime. He would be nearby when he took his daughter to register for college in Hartford the coming fall. He assured her he would make no appeal for further funds; just a kind, personal visit to say *thank you*.

Months passed. Then, in a letter dated June 13, Mary Webber Parker accepted Peter's request to come visit her in the fall. And if he wouldn't mind, she would like to give, not \$50,000, but *\$500,000* to the Detroit symphony. Not once--but once a year for five years; a staggering total of two and a half million dollars! Not out of duty. Not out of coercion. Not because she didn't have plenty of other suitors who would have bent over backwards to lure her as a benefactor. She did it because someone was thankful.

Giving and gratitude always go together; one cannot be separated from the other.

### **Reflection Question**

Tomorrow as you celebrate Thanksgiving, how will you give thanks and to whom? With words? With an elaborate meal? With a prayer? Are there any other ways you can *give* thanks?

### **Prayer**

Lord, I come simply to say thank you today. It seems so inadequate, but I don't know what else to say. And maybe that's the point. There is only so much we can *say* to express thanks. There comes a time when we need to *give* as evidence of our gratitude. Whatever that looks like today, let my thanks be more about true giving than just saying. Through Jesus I pray, Amen.

### **Thursday-November 26**

"The law of harvest is to reap more than you sow. Sow an act, and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character. Sow a character and you reap a destiny." James Allen

**Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute.**

### **Scripture Reading**

Mark 4:26-29

*And He [Jesus] was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and*

*grows--how, he himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."*

### **Devotional**

Andy Stanley writes, "What rational farmer would say, 'I'm afraid to sow my seed because then I won't have the seed anymore? What will happen if I need this seed?' Any farmer knows that if he wants a crop, he's got to sow his seed. It doesn't benefit him to stuff his pockets full of seed. Neither does it do any good to pray, 'Oh God, please give me a crop. I'm afraid to sow any seed, but I'm trusting you to give a harvest.'"

Today's Scripture reading is powerful news for anyone who's afraid to give because of financial insecurity. It suggests that the wisest move we could make financially is to begin sowing our financial seed into Kingdom endeavors. When we do, God gets involved in our finances. And that's the most financially secure place we could be. Paul tells us that anyone who is willing to sow handfuls of seed can expect an appropriate crop in return. It's a principle: When we give to God, it enables God to return to us more than we've given, to entrust more to us in this life. Which, in turn, enables us to give more. And round and round it goes.

Let me put a question on the table that goes straight to the heart of a lot of our financial fears. ***If God was involved in your finances, would you feel more secure or less secure?***

How you answer that will determine whether you will sow sparingly or generously.

### **Reflection Question**

Read that question above again. How would answer that? What are you going to do about it?

### **Prayer**

Father, You are the Lord of the harvest. Over and over again in the Scriptures, You inspired writers to talk about the law of sowing and reaping. It only makes sense that it would apply to my financial giving as well. Help me to apply this natural principle for super-natural purposes. I gladly release my seed into Your Kingdom knowing that You will grow whatever I sow. Through Jesus I pray, Amen.

## Friday-November 27

"The most important aspect of tithing and stewardship is not the raising of money for the church, but the development of devoted Christians."

Fred M. Wood

**Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute.**

### Scripture Reading

Matthew 6:25-34

*"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you--you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."*

### Devotional

Bob Benson tells a story of being asked to speak at his son's graduation. He went out and bought a new suit and vest. After he spoke, one of his son's friends said to him, "Great talk, Mr. Benson, but you might want to check your vest. I don't think it's buttoned right." Bob Benson looked down and sure enough the first button wasn't fastened. The second button was where the first button should be, and his whole vest was cockeyed!

Life can be like that. If you get the top button right, the rest falls into place. You get the top button wrong, it's easy to look silly. That's why Jesus said, *"Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*

Most of us know what our priorities ought to be: God first, family second, job third, recreation fourth. But in this materialistic world, it's so easy to get our priorities inverted. We get caught up in the hurry and worry for more possessions, more status, more toys and recreation and life quickly gets out of balance. Someone

once said that three words describe our modern lifestyle: *hurry, worry and bury.*

Dallas Willard wrote in his book Renovation of the Heart: "Our soul is like a stream of water, which gives strength, direction, and harmony to every other area of our life. When that stream is as it should be, we are constantly refreshed and exuberant in all we do, because our soul itself is then profusely rooted in the vastness of God and his kingdom, including nature; and all else within us is enlivened and directed by that stream. Therefore we are in harmony with God, reality, and the rest of human nature and nature at large."

### **Reflection Question**

Has your life ever been enriched by being in a hurry? Can you think of one time when hurrying or worrying made any meaningful contribution to your life? Why do we do it so much then?

### **Prayer**

Father, help me slow down, even if just for this moment, to be with You. One thing I know, Lord, You are not in a hurry. You lead me beside quiet waters. You restore my soul. May these images come to mind quickly and often this day. Would You allow Jesus' words of seeking You first to settle over my soul and lead me in paths that are both right and refreshing. I ask this through Jesus, Amen.

### **Saturday-November 28**

"God has given us two hands--one to receive with and the other to give with. We are not cisterns made for hoarding; we are channels made for sharing." Billy Graham

**Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute.**

### **Scripture Reading**

2 Corinthians 8:10-15

*And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in*

*turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little."*

### **Devotional**

On October 29, 1921, tiny Centre College in Danville, Kentucky beat Harvard in football 6-0. You need to understand, at that time Harvard was a national power in football. They had been undefeated for five years. To this day, many consider Centre's defeat of Harvard as the greatest upset in the history of college football. When Centre's coach was interviewed by reporters and asked how it happened, he excitedly said, "We had 11 players in on every play." When every member of a team sacrifices their egos and gives maximum effort it's amazing what can happen.

The same is true in the church. When every member of the church bands together, incredible good can be accomplished. It takes the vast majority getting on the same page.

Herman Ostry bought a piece of land with a barn near a creek in Bruno, Nebraska. A flood put 29 inches of water into the barn, and he wanted to move it to higher ground. One of his sons estimated the barn weighed 19,000 lbs (9 ½ tons) and figured it would take 344 people with each person lifting 55 lbs to move barn. They made a grid of steel tubing with handles attached to the barn so each could lift.

The town of Bruno, Nebraska planned this move as a part of their centennial celebration July 29-31, 1988. Local television cameras and 4,000 people from eleven states watched. The project took 20 minutes as 344 people moved the barn 50 yards. This shows the power of teamwork. What one could not do alone, many working together did.

Just like the folks in Bruno, Nebraska, God can do amazing things when we all "lift" together. If 344 people can give an old barn a lift, then imagine what the Lord can do through hundreds of people here at Journey who are aligned with our vision of developing a growing community of people on a life-changing journey with Jesus.

If every person who is on this life-changing journey with Jesus and calls Journey their church home would grab a handle and financially "lift," we would see ministries getting resourced and needs being met and people growing in their faith and God being glorified like never before.

### **Reflection Question**

Am I doing my part to "lift" at Journey? Am I all in at Journey or am I holding back?

What's keeping me from grabbing hold of the mission of Journey and lifting?

### **Prayer**

Lord, I confess I don't always put my heart into Your work. I find myself holding back or giving reluctantly. I don't want to be a gritted-teeth giver. I want to be a joyful, grateful-I-can-give giver. I see others who do that. I want to do that too. Help me, Lord, to do what I can to lift the name of Jesus high through my Journey family so that others can find hope and healing through You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

### **Sunday-November 29**

"I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc. is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditures excludes them." C.S. Lewis

**Be still and silent before the Lord for 1 minute.**

### **Scripture Reading**

Matthew 16:13-18

*When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*

### **Devotional**

Do you know what was going to be on the land where Journey Church buildings are now, before Lakeview Christian bought it? A combination drug rehab/correctional facility.

I bet the nearby neighborhood associations are glad that didn't happen! Aren't you

glad our property isn't another used car lot? Or a mattress store? Or a check cashing business? Or an industrial park? Think of all the people you would have never known if the Journey building didn't get built 13 years ago. Would you be here now if this building didn't get built? I doubt that I would be.

We've baptized well over 2000 people in the last 13 years--over a thousand in the last five alone. How many people have had their lives changed, their eternities changed because of how God has used this place? How many children will be taught, how many families will be reached because of your promise to the Promise?

When you give, you are making it possible for the church to minister to your family more effectively in the future. But it goes beyond our own children. There are people in this community you've never met who may come to know the Lord because of what you give to the ministry of Journey.

I read about a 6-year-old boy with just one arm who visited a children's ministry group for the first time. The teacher was concerned that none of her regular students make fun of the boy or make him feel awkward because of his disability. She was so proud of that first grade class which seemed to include him and make him feel welcome. But the teacher forgot and at the end of her class she said, "Now children, let's do that exercise I taught you, 'Here's the church, here's the steeple, open the door and see all the people.' Then it hit her. This little boy had only one hand. Before she could find a way to cover her tracks and not embarrass the boy with one arm, a little girl sitting next to him reached out her hand and said, "Here, Davey, let's build the church together." They did.

We're all disabled spiritually. We're all inadequate. Nobody's perfect. We can't build the church on our own. But we can offer what we have and join hands to build the church together. And we can trust that the words of Jesus are true, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."

### **Reflection Question**

What do you see or think of when you give to the Lord through Journey? People? Children? A specific ministry? Someone you've never met? The Lord Himself?

### **Prayer**

Lord, I am thankful for my life-changing journey with You. I want my life to reflect that in every way. I know there are people just like me who need the same things I need and those needs can only be met in You. Thank you for letting me be a part of a church that seeks to love You, love people and serve the world. Thank you for loving me and making me part of Your unconquerable people. I love this journey with You! Through the name of the Messiah, the Son of the living God, I pray, Amen.