

MY FAITH BUILDS THE FUTURE STATEMENT:

After reading these devotions and with all the other information, put down in your own words, what your faith, your church and this appeal mean to you:



**REFLECTIONS
FOR
THE STEWARD**

A HOME DEVOTIONAL SERIES

Faith Lutheran Church
Radcliff, Kentucky

Fall 2008

FAITH BUILDS THE FUTURE

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God Encourages Me To Be Generous

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Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. II Corinthians 9:6

Sometimes things are just too simple. Really. For sure. Oh, yea! Yes.

- † “One man gives freely, yet gains even more, so another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty” (Proverbs 11:24).
- † “A generous man will himself be blessed” (Proverbs 22:9).
- † “Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine” Proverbs 3:9, 10).
- † “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse ...see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it” (Malachi 3:10).

Just as things were true for God's people many generations ago, they are true today. As God's people give, and give generously, they can do so in anticipation of being blessed by generous giving. As He blesses the generous sower, He also blesses the generous giver.

1. The above passage refers to a farmer and his planting of seed. The picture is that of a farmer sowing seed in anticipation of being blessed by that sowing. The farmer knows that what he puts into the ground will come back to him many times over. The way to be assured of the blessing of a generous, bountiful harvest is to be generous in one's sowing. Think of the many other ways this principle, investing first, is true in our lives (health, friends, relationships, etc.). Why is this so?
2. The Apostle Paul is making the point that God's bountiful blessings, which come in various forms, will always follow those who give generously. Besides wealth, what are some other forms of "God's bountiful blessings" (physical as well as spiritual)?
3. Assess your present church offerings with the phrase "sow generously".
4. How does Jesus fit into this devotion?

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, since I am your dear child, I know you have good things planned for me. Lord, I ask you to continue to bless me in my daily life. Pour out your many physical and spiritual blessings upon me. Help me to see that as I give, and give generously, I do so in anticipation that you will bless my giving in so many ways. Help me always to see the reason for giving back to you is that you gave so much to me. Thank you for this day and for giving me your Son, Jesus. In His name I pray, Amen.

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”
Hebrews 13:5

How can we learn to be happy and content? Some good solid Christian advice is to strive to live with less rather than desiring more; give away out of your abundance rather than accumulating more; relish what you have rather than resent what you're missing. For Christians who battle the old man on a daily basis, this is hard to do! Continue to see how God's love is expressed to you by what he has provided in your life. Our God in heaven has provided you with so many blessings and has asked for nothing in return. What a giver! Finally, strive to have a perspective that all material things in this life will one day finally pass away. We brought nothing into this life, and we will leave with nothing.

1. In this verse it is clear God is saying it is OK to be rich. But rich people (and most Americans can be categorized in this class) are to be free of what? Reflect as to how you personally “keep your life free”.
2. How can prosperity be a source of discontentment?
3. Our gracious Lord has a most blessed promise in this verse. These words were first shared by Moses before he passed the leadership role to Joshua upon entering the promised land. It was a comfort to the Children of Israel as they prepared to enter foreign land. How are these words a comfort for us as we enter each new day and fight to keep our lives free from the love of money?
4. Over the course of the next 1 to 4 hours, recite this promise three different times to yourself. Do it again tomorrow. Each time reflect on its truth.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, help me to be content in all things. Give me a perspective that “sees” all things have been provided me. Help me to see that you are the giver of all things and know exactly what I need. Also give me the confidence and assurance you will always be with me and never will leave me. In Jesus name, Amen.

**FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH
Radcliff, Kentucky
HOME DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET
Fall, 2008**

These are exciting times in our congregation! The Lord has blessed our efforts, and it appears He is challenging our discipleship: “How should we respond to an appeal for His work.” But before making decisions about giving, shouldn't we turn to God's Word for guidance and direction? The Steering Committee's desire during this Stewardship Appeal is for every member of Living Savior to immerse themselves into God's Word and reflect upon the motivating Gospel of Jesus. The following devotions contain some key Scriptural principles for the Christian's life, especially those regarding Christian stewardship.

This devotional study is designed for our members to use over several weeks. Ideally, congregational members will incorporate them into their home or personal devotions. The devotions are designed for either individual or family use and are intended to take 5 – 10 minutes each day. We encourage you to use them as many times during the week as you choose. They certainly are an excellent way for followers of Jesus to reflect upon the blessings received in one's life.

We hope you will be able to use these devotions over the next several weeks as our congregation moves forward with our Stewardship Appeal. It is so very important to be able to use God's Word as a basis for making decisions. This is especially true as each one of us will have opportunity to consider financially supporting our appeal. We recognize that the offerings given for the Stewardship Appeal are a thankful response to God's love for us in Christ.

May God use these devotions to carry out His will for you in your life. His Word should be the basis for all of our decisions. May it continue to be your source of comfort and guidance as you live lives of service for Jesus.

Faith Lutheran Church
Stewardship Appeal
Steering Committee
Fall, 2008

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Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. Romans 10:17

Stewardship is a fruit of faith. Some people have negative feelings and perceptions about stewardship because congregations attempt to pick the fruit of faith without planting and watering the tree. High pressure tactics or only talking about “money” once a year does not foster total stewardship growth. The stewardship program of a church is really dependent upon the commitment, feeding, and nourishing that goes on in other portions of the congregation’s ministry. Personal growth in the Word, along with Bible study, Lord’s Supper, and worship, is the key ingredient for God’s people to bear good solid productive fruit. A role for every church is to foster and support this growth. Yes, it is important to invest first with the planting and watering of the tree, then fruit will follow. How is your personal growth in the Word coming along?

1. React to this statement: Growing in one’s faith must be one of the primary goals of a disciple of Christ.
2. Recall several ways you have connected with the “word of Christ” over the last month. How does this relate to your faith?
3. The promises of God precedes faith and growth in that faith.
Illustration: There must be food before we can eat it. As food will not benefit us unless we eat it, so the promises of grace will not benefit us personally unless we grasp them through faith.
Describe the connection between God’s promises and faith.
4. The power of the Gospel to touch and turn hearts is not a natural power, but a divine and supernatural power. God’s Gospel is shared through the Word and sacraments. This Gospel, along with the work of the Holy Spirit, will at all times and under any conditions, whether read, heard, or remembered, have an impact which is supernatural, powerful, and effective. What comfort does this divine power give to you?

Prayer: Lord Father, I confess that I have not been faithful in the hearing and studying of your Word. I have not taken advantage of opportunities for worship, Bible study or with personal devotions. Forgive me for this neglectfulness. I ask you to instill in me a desire to eagerly and joyfully study your Word. Create opportunities for me to do this. Thank you for opening my heart today. I feel enthused and excited about the great things you have planned for me. In Jesus, name. Amen.

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.

Psalm 49:16

There are some things in this life I am sure I will never experience. It is very difficult for me to understand how some of the richest people in the world live out their lives. It has been said that Bill Gates, one the richest men in the world, would find it to be financially inefficient to reach down and pick up a \$100 bill. He could make more money in that short time period by doing something else relating to productivity and finance. I cannot imagine what the lifestyles of the CEO’s of this world are like. Personal attendants for dressing, eating and driving, huge mansions in two or three locations, Lear jets on demand, and money that seems to have no end. Simply stated, these people have the best of everything in the richest country in the world. But let’s not be in awe or captivated by this richness. For the material things found in this world all have an ending. Funeral directors understand this fact when they make the claim that not one of them has received a request to pull a U-Haul behind their hearse. Yes, things of the world are simply that, of the world. You and I have eternity.

1. How do you measure up? Are you living for the “dot” (the brief life on earth today) or for the line (our eternal life in heaven)? What are some changes in your life that need to be made now to help you better focus on the “line”? Who are some people who can assist you with these changes? See them today. Ask them for help in aligning priorities.
2. It has been said that the only thing we can take with us to heaven is our children. For those of you who are parents, this phrase has special meaning. Reassess your present parenting behaviors. Are there some changes needed? For the mature parent, prayers and encouragement for the adult son or daughter are always needed. We never stop being a Christian parent.
3. Some people believe they should give away a majority of their money **before** being taken away to heaven. In light of the above words from Scripture perhaps this isn’t too bad of an idea. Do you have some assets that you have been saving? Could your church or special ministry use these today to promote the Gospel? The Lord speaks to you!

Dear Father in heaven, I realize there are many times I have got caught up in the riches of the world. It is so easy, Lord, to do this; please forgive me. Help me to fight this materialism. Give me a heart that has priorities centered on your will and love. Move my heart to make any necessary changes in my life so that I can better serve you on this earth. In Jesus name, I pray, Amen.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. Galatians 5: 1, 6b

There are some things in our society that we just “have to” do. I am always amazed how some people wait until the last possible hour to file their income tax forms just barely meeting the deadline. Before the start of a new year I write a check to cover property taxes that amounts to a rather large number. On a monthly basis I find in our mailbox at least ten bills that must be paid all within a timely manner. Yes, it is true that our society expects, wants and even demands certain things to do. Someone could say we really don’t “have to” make some of the above mentioned payments. But, we all know there would be various consequences to such decisions. Thank God, through the perfect life of Jesus, we have freedom when it comes to our offerings and other stewardship decisions. We are not bound by any Old Testament regulation. No one can tell us exactly how much “we should pay the church”. No, we are free and there are no “have to’s”. Our reason for living and giving is Jesus.

1. Name at least three Old Testament Ceremonial Laws about sacrifices (Leviticus 1 – 7) God expected His people to follow before Christ set us free with his death.
2. Some people teach that we must follow the Old Testament “have to” of the tithe. Based on the above passage in Galatians, what is your response to that “have to”? Might you consider using your freedom to do more than the tithe (10% +)?
3. Faith is not simply an intellectual situation, but a living trust in God’s grace that expresses itself in acts of love. What does this have to do with your weekly offerings to church or for a capital appeal?
4. “Have to’s” versus “grace”. Describe your feelings about the grace found in Jesus. Need help? Reread the above verse to see what really counts.

Dearest Jesus, it truly is a comfort knowing and believing you set me free from the many regulations of the Law. You have given me freedom! With a strong faith in your redemptive act, I can look past the many “have to’s” and be only motivated by a love for You. Help me daily to live my life out of thanks for what you have done for me. Let your love move me to perform acts of kindness. And finally, give me a deeper and more special understanding of the love you have shown me by your death on the cross. Lead me to make love-based decisions in my life. I ask all in your name. Amen.

We love because God first loved us.

I John 4:19

The attitudes cultivated by the Gospel are always positive. This is especially true when it comes to the discussion of stewardship. The manner in which we “put our money where our mouth is” is the tangible demonstration of what is really in our hearts. St. Paul, when he wrote to the Gentile Corinthians (II Corinthians 8:8), pointed out that their participation in the offering to the Christian Jews was a way to “test the sincerity” of their love. The hatred of these two groups, Jews and Gentiles, had stood for centuries and Paul, through the Gospel, was breaking down those barriers. He encouraged the Corinthians to give selflessly and spontaneously to the cause before them. He encouraged them to look into their hearts and find Jesus. You have Jesus in your heart and a cause before you. Thank God for the opportunities!

1. Describe the connection between love and giving an offering.
2. List five wrong reasons for giving.
3. In planning an amount to give to your church, what should be the motivation behind the gift?
4. It has been said that genuine love is never self-generated by God’s creatures. How do you remind yourself of God’s love being your main motivation to do all things?

Prayer: Dear Father, I thank you for taking the lead in loving me by sending Jesus to this world. It is both inspiring and motivating. I confess that many times I forget about your love and neglect to use it as my motivator. Help me to always focus on this true love and let it be my motivation in doing all things. Guide me today by reminding me to love others first, just as you have loved me first. I ask you to bless my day with this love. In Jesus name, Amen.

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

II Corinthians 9:7

Stewardship can be defined as all that I do, with all that I have, all the time. This definition applies to every person living on the face of the earth, Christian and non-Christian alike. But the Holy Spirit lives in you, and you know and believe in Jesus, so the definition must change. With the above definition in mind, Christian stewardship can then be *all that I do, with all that I have, after I say "I believe"*. The natural response to being loved is to love back. The natural response to being given to, is to give back. Jesus has been freely given to you. Isn't this a great and wonderful principle to follow as we give back to the Lord and others?

1. The Old Testament believers followed the Ceremonial Law and were commanded to give 10% back from the bounty that God gave to them. What words tell you that you are no longer under this law?
2. Have you ever given "reluctantly or under compulsion"? If yes, how did you feel after giving?
3. You are now are under grace and are free to choose how much to give. With freedom comes responsibility. What are some responsibilities of this freedom?
4. From the word cheerful we get the English word "hilarious". The New Testament Christian finds great joy and happiness in using every gift God has given for the benefit of others. Judge your "cheerfulness" of giving. How can you strive to become a more cheerful giver?

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, I ask you today to increase my cheerfulness. I can only truly do this one way and that is to see how much love it took for you to send Jesus into this world for me. You demonstrated the true essence of a cheerful giver. Let this example be an inspiration and be my motivation in all of my giving and doing. In your Son's name I pray, Amen.

Joseph found favor in his (Potiphar) eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.

Genesis 39:4

The word stewardship, interestingly enough, is not found in the Bible. Such words as "trustee" or "manager" or "representative" are cold, and are at best merely suggestive of the responsibility Christians have of blessings received. Stewardship is the one word that man has made up to better describe our relationship with the blessings God has bestowed upon us. Joseph was a steward in the house of Potiphar, and the confidence and esteem in which he was held is evidenced by the statement that the master "left in Joseph's care everything he had" (Gen. 39:6). Think about the confidence Potiphar had in Joseph. Everything he owned was under Joseph's care. This relationship was more than one of responsibility since it included a personal, caring and loving trust as well. No doubt there was a special friendship between these two people. And doesn't that describe the bond we have with our heavenly Father? We are stewards of God's "stuff" and have a loving and friendly relationship with Him. We simply are stewards by God's appointment. The only question is, what kind of steward?

1. Try to imagine someone taking care of your entire possessions: house, investments, cars, bill payments, recreational toys, food, etc. Reflect upon your intimate feelings of "giving these things up". Contemplate the trust and confidence this would take. Describe the relationship between Joseph and Potiphar.
2. How is God like a Potiphar and we like a Joseph?
3. Is there a better word or phrase than "steward" to describe our relationship with God's possessions? What is it?
4. "If the earth is the Lord's" list at least five loving ways to react to?
5. What kind of steward do you want to strive to be?

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, I acknowledge you are the one and true owner of all of my possessions. You have blessed me with so many things and for this I am thankful. Help me to be a good steward of these gifts. Help me not to fall into the temptation of thinking and acting like I own them. Instill in me the desire to be a responsible steward. Open my eyes more fully to accept your will for my life. I pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed.

Luke 22: 39, 41

Our Lord Jesus certainly understood the importance of conditioning oneself to practice Godly _____ (fill in the blank with a word: customs, habits, routines, schedules, patterns, inclinations, tendencies). You see, when Jesus was on this earth He set an example for His disciples for their prayer life. The night Jesus was arrested He did the "usual" thing. He prayed. Many were the nights He spent in prayer while His disciple slept, thus demonstrating that with the role of being a faithful steward comes responsibility. Jesus knew very well a closer communion with the Father was needed. And so, we too can see that as faithful and maturing stewards we strive to frequently report and consult with our Father in heaven.

1. We can see that Jesus had three practices before beginning His personal prayer life: he had a routine; isolation was important; he demonstrated humbleness. Compare these practices with your prayer life and make any necessary adjustments.
2. Have you been praying for the success and the will of God for your church's capital campaign? Here are some ideas to incorporate into your prayers: pray for your appeal leaders that they continue to work hard; pray for your pastor for proper leadership ability; ask God to bless the appeal by opening thankful hearts; petition the Lord to increase the faith of your fellow members; seek that the Lord's will be found for your church.
3. Finally, ask for guidance as you consider making a promise toward the appeal. Ask the Lord for you to open your mind to new ideas and ways to give back to Him. Pray that the Lord will bless your decision.

Prayer: Dear Father, we are so thankful for the many blessings you have given us. We especially give thanks for Jesus and how He has rescued us from sin, death and the devil. Help us to daily see that all of our blessings come from you, and we are but managers of them. We truly acknowledge that you are the giver of all things. Help us to manage them in a way that you would have us. Bless our thank-filled hearts, guide our decisions, and help us to see how we can better serve you. In Jesus name, we pray, Amen.

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.

Psalm 24:1 – 2

The Old Testament Jews recognized that God owned everything. To help remind them of this fact, at meal times they recited "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1) as a blessing before eating. What a wonderful reminder that it is God who has given us all things and we are only stewards. Does the word "all" really mean everything? As you reflect upon this question, may our gracious Father in heaven continue to open your eyes to see that everything is the Lord's. He is the creator and owner of everything in the earth, including our possessions.

1. What does God own? What do you own?
2. Evaluate the statement: "I am not giving anything away".
3. Think of the many "things" in your possession and then assess this statement: I don't really own anything. It is God who gives me the ability to produce wealth; and the wealth I manage is really his possession.
4. In light of this passage, for what are you grateful?
5. When you give to God, you are not really giving but returning a portion to Him because you want to say "thank you". What does this make you ask for?

Prayer: The Father of all good things, I pray to you and give thanks for the many blessings you have given to me. You know exactly what I need in my life and have supplied me with all that I need. Help me to daily see that everything I own is actually yours and I am but a manager. Continue to bless me as you see fit. In the name of Jesus, I ask. Amen.

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collection will have to be made.
I Corinthians 16:2

Stewardship is a habit and Paul says so much with the words “on the first day of every week”. Many people often fail to understand that Biblical stewardship is hooked to worship – a response pattern in the Scriptures. Stewardship of money cannot be separated from worship and remain Biblical very long. Much damage has resulted in the church from people who are willing “just to take the money” and not ask for the “habits” of regular corporate worship, communion, etc. There is a connection between worship and giving. Stated another way, God is the highest good in our lives and as we grow closer to Him, our love and a response for that love grows too. May you continue to seek and find God’s house on a weekly basis.

1. The Apostle Paul counseled the early Christians to develop a plan for their offerings. This plan was for “each one” of them. Restate this plan in your own words (there are more than three parts of the plan).
2. Assess why this plan, which is actually God’s, is a good one both for you and your church.
3. It can happen that Christians, for some reason or the other, will be absent from church in their home congregation and therefore “miss” the offering for the week. How can the above plan be implemented during times like this?
4. God is encouraging good financial planning for the Christian and his/her church. How does this make you thankful?

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, once again I can easily see you are a God of order. It is so refreshing to know you have a plan for my life. This inspires me to model the offering plan you have given to me and other believers. Give me the desire and ability to follow through with this plan as I return a portion of the many blessings you have given me. May my life continue to be one of giving thanks to you for all you have done for me. Amen.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:5

The vine is frequently used in the Bible as a symbol that represents how the believer is connected to God. Vines were used as a way to demonstrate levels of spirituality. The Old Testament is God’s way of showing the new testament believers the need for a Savior, the true vine. A living union with Christ is absolutely necessary. Jesus supplies all of the nutrients needed for this life and the life hereafter. He is the source and provider for all. Jesus says so much with the following words when He describes himself as the vine, His disciples as the branches. Yes, we are grafted to the One who gives us life.

1. What is the fruit Jesus is speaking of?
2. God first reached out to us in love. How does this motivate us to give in unselfish love?
3. How do we remain in Jesus?
4. It has been said, “Nothing we do will be successful unless we are rooted in Christ”. Judge how this will be true for our church’s appeal.
5. Why is it that *why* we do something is just as important that we actually do it?

Prayer: Dearest Jesus, you first found me and gave me life, spiritual life. For this I am so thankful. Yes, I am a member of your kingdom and will one day see you face to face. In the meantime, please continue to feed me with your Word, nourish me with your peace and comfort, and supply me with the everlasting hope of salvation. Continue to bless my church’s appeal so that more may know you as the life-supporting vine in their lives. In your name, Amen.

No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

Luke 6:43 – 45

The unregenerate, those who do things because they are commanded and fear punishment or are seeking rewards, cannot truly do good works. Such people can comply with the letter of the Law and may be praised by men for their philanthropy and moral honesty, but in the eyes of God are not recognized. It is the attitude of the heart that determines the ethical value of a work. The only motive recognized by God is a selfless love, a love for and modeled after Jesus. When a person is filled with the Spirit and is liberated from the Law, he/she does everything from a free, cheerful spirit because of the gratitude for the mercies shown by God.

1. Who is the good tree? Who is the bad tree?
2. Describe the differences between these two “trees”.
3. React to this statement: What is in your heart will come out in your speech and behavior.
4. Jesus reminds us that our speech and actions reveal the true underlying beliefs, attitudes and motivations of our person. Reflect how this is true in your life.
5. Why is it so important to have “good trees” giving money for the work of our church?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I am so thankful for the faith you have given to me. This faith enables me to bear good fruit in your name. Continue to bless me with many opportunities of sharing my faith with all those whom I have contact. Help me to use my good works as a way to witness to others and demonstrate the faith I have in You. In Your name I pray, Amen.

Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

I Corinthians 4:2

By Biblical definition, a “steward” is a manager. He was put in charge of his master’s goods and given full authority to manage those goods in behalf of the master. When asked, the steward had to give account of his management. Too often stewardship is looked at in terms of desired results instead of the patient building of Biblical attitudes. God has entrusted you and your congregation to spread the good news of Jesus. Spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ is one aspect of being a good and faithful steward. May Jesus continue to be your focus today. May He continue to be shared by you and others.

1. List three people who really trust you. Explain why they have such a high trust in you.
2. In this verse is the principle that God has entrusted his believers to share Jesus with the world. How are Christians blessed by God in this regard?
3. You want the Gospel to be widely spread. List the many ways you and your congregation have been faithful stewards in doing this. How can you spread the Gospel this week? This month?
4. How will your present congregational fund appeal help to spread the Gospel?
5. In our life of serving God as a steward, we can speak of it as a duty, as a responsibility, or as a privilege. Which is the better description and why?

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, through my baptism, you have given me the Gospel of Jesus and my faith has increased since that time. Thank you for making me one of your children, **JESU**. Help me to see the many ways I can be a faithful steward of sharing the Gospel with others. Give me the initiative and opportunity to be a witness for my Savior. Take away my many fears and inhibitions. Bless me as I do your work of sharing Jesus with others. In His name I pray. Amen.

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.

Colossians 3:17

Paul, when writing to the Colossians in chapter three, explains true Christian behavior – putting on the new self by following Jesus and viewing our earthly nature as dead. We change our moral and ethical behaviors by letting Christ live within us so that he can shape us into being a true disciple. Doing “all in the name of the Lord Jesus” means bringing honor to Christ in every aspect and activity of daily living. As a Christian, you represent Christ at all times. What a wonderful privilege and opportunity you have!

1. What things are meant by “whatever you do”?
2. According to the above passage what two things should you do?
3. How can we connect the name of the Lord Jesus with every “word and deed”?
4. Explain how you give thanks to God when giving a gift of money or time to your church?
5. List some things for which you should ask God.
6. What are you personally grateful for?

Prayer: Dear Father, you have given me many tasks to do in my life. I thank you for these opportunities. Help me to show my thanksgiving to you by faithfully responding to the tasks you give me. Continue to bless my work in all that I do and say. In Jesus name, Amen.

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.

Malachi 3:10

As a little boy I remember going up north and heading right to the beach to go swimming. Early in the summer, before the sun would have time to warm the lake to a comfortable level, would be a time of testing. We would run up to the edge of the water and slowly put our toes into it to check it out. We knew there was a high probability it would be a little on the cold side. Instead of plunging right in, we wanted to be careful, cautious, and not take too high of a risk. Can you remember a time of “putting your toe” in the water to check it out? The Lord says just the opposite when he speaks of offerings. He says to his believers to “test me”. He doesn’t want just your little, itty, bitty toes. He desires your total body and being. Test me.

1. List three reasons why Christians find it so easy to sometimes give so little – “put the toes in” – to the Lord?
2. The Lord makes promises to his saints who give in a trusting way by testing Him. From the above verse, what are those promises?
3. Notice that the Lord is not specific with what type of blessings will be received. For those who trust in the Lord, there appears to be both spiritual and physical blessings that follow. List at least three of each type the Lord could bestow upon you.
4. The Lord does make promises to the faithful and trustful saints when it comes to our offerings: if we give, he will bless. How might this turn into a wrong motive to give back to the Lord?
5. Examine your stewardship of time, talent and treasures in the light of this passage. Where do you find the strength to be faithful?

Dear Father in heaven, I know you certainly are the one who is in control of all things and decides what and how much blessings one receives. At times, Lord, I have not fully trusted you and have gotten by with just “putting my toe in”. Help me to see your special promise that for those who give, blessings will follow. Give me the proper and correct motive to give – I give because Jesus gave for me. Let Him be my model and motivation to return a portion of your blessings. Thank you once again for giving me a special insight into your way of thinking. In Jesus name, I pray and ask. Amen.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. II Corinthians 2:8,9

God, through His Word, often uses contrasting comparisons to illustrate His principles of theology. In the verses that follow, Jesus is being described as going from rich to poor demonstrates this technique. Our Savior's self-chosen physical poverty of living a humble, holy life and dying a shameful sin-bearing death contrasts that of being a rich King sitting in heaven at the right hand of God the Father. Because of the choice Jesus made to come to earth, we enjoy the spiritual riches of pardon for sins, peace with God, and paradise forever. We have gone from poor to rich! This is also our reason and motivation to live for Christ and to do all things for His glory.

1. Explain the "rich" to "poor" transformation Jesus made for us.
2. The phrase "for your sakes" has some personal meaning for all believers. Reflect upon this by substituting your first name in place of "your".
3. List at least seven ways you are "rich" because of what Christ has done (4 should be spiritual, 3 physical).
4. Jesus served as a model for us in many ways. From these words to the Corinthians, what motivates you to give to your congregation's appeal?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I am so thankful that you left your throne in heaven to come to earth and be my Savior. This truly demonstrates your love for me. Continue to give me a better appreciation of that love so that I can go and love others. Jesus, I also ask you to bless my congregation's work in seeking the lost, who are poor, so that they will know the richness you offer. Direct and guide our efforts in this area so that your name is shared with all. In your rich name I pray, Amen.

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income. Corinthians 16:2

Since our God is a God of order, it should not surprise us He has an orderly and equitable way to plan for the gifts he needs for His kingdom on earth. The relationship of a husband and wife in a marriage is based on promises. If either partner fails to give or fulfill a promise, the marriage is in difficulty. We can easily see this and agree it is necessary for a smooth running and joy-filled marriage. In a similar way, God asks you to make a promise on the amount you plan to give back to Him. God makes promises and wants promised responses. In the Old Testament, tithing was commanded. However, we live in the "age of the Spirit" and therefore are not required to tithe and the tithe is not the ceiling either. What are some sound principles to follow in making gifts for God's Gospel-spreading work? Giving consistently and proportionately to the way God has blessed us are two sound principles to follow in our giving for God's work.

1. The Apostle Paul directed the early Christians to bring an offering to the Lord each week. Who was included in this circle of giving?
2. The words "in keeping with his income" clearly demonstrates that God desires "proportionate giving" from all believers (salaried, hourly, commissioned, fixed income, student, etc.). Compare last year's offering with how much you make from employment or investments. What percentage is your offering? 10%? 5%? 3%? How do you feel about this?
3. The New Testament Christian is not bound by any percent to give, however many strive to tithe (10%). Begin formulating a plan on how you might be able to increase your weekly offering **or** surpass the tithe standard.
4. Some wise student of the Word once said, "Congregational members should not give to budgets or any other external goal designed to elicit contributions." Considering the words "keeping with his income" how would you respond to this statement?
5. Reflect upon this statement: God accepts my gifts because of what Christ did for me and not on the basis of a mandatory amount. What comfort is found in this fact?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, all that I do is in response to what you have done for me. My offerings are just another way to say "thank you" for all you have done. Help me to always see and give with this in mind. Also, help me find joy in supporting my congregation and the related organizations which proclaim God's Word. Accept all of my gifts because of what you have done for me. In your name I pray. Amen.

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.
I Timothy 6:6, 7

The Apostle Paul certainly had a firm confidence in God and knew He was at work and in control. This gave Paul great joy. Joy is a natural outgrowth for the secure and seasoned Christian and is a pre-requisite for contentment. At times the Christian can be crippled by the words of criticism and attacks by others. The struggles and challenges of this life can certainly be joy stealers as they take away happiness. The devil certainly would want us to believe that true contentment can only be found through the joys of this life. Paul knew otherwise and in his letter to Timothy encouraged him to put his trust and hope in the message of the gospel of God's grace, Jesus Christ. Paul remained strong, positive, and sure despite the many attacks and struggles in his life. How could he be so strong? No question about that answer. The man was content because Christ was the target and there was nothing else in his cross hairs.

1. The Apostle Paul states that the Christian who has food and clothing will be content. Why would the believer be so content with so little?
2. What does it mean to possess "godliness" (think of your relationship with Jesus)? How does this affect your attitude and behavior as you go about your day?
3. When we leave this world to be with Jesus, Paul is clearly saying nothing will go with us. Reflect upon your plan of what will happen with your accumulated assets (possessions, money, stocks, annuities, etc.). How will your plan benefit the kingdom of Jesus?
4. Christians find contentment not with earthly possessions but with the Gospel message of freedoms and promises. Express why you are thankful for being a Christian.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for blessing me with so many material possessions. You have certainly been good to me. I would ask you to help me be content with my many blessings. Let me have a focus on the Gospel message of Jesus where I find true contentment. Continue to increase the love I have for Jesus so that my contentment in this world continues to be satisfied. Thank you for the comfort and security you have given me. Amen.

So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised.
II Corinthians 9:5

I don't believe in pledging", says the half-committed Christian. "Pledging isn't Biblical", says the non-committed church member. St. Paul talked to the Corinthians about their pledge, their commitment, when he talked to them about the promise they made. Note, however, that the word he used to describe their commitment was not a pledge, but a promise. A pledge talks about money and is a legal term that may introduce all kinds of unhealthy associations. A promise, on the other hand, talks about a response to God's promises, and is a Gospel word. True Christian stewardship, therefore, embraces both grace and a promise. The Apostle Paul sent Titus and two companions to the Corinthian congregation to complete arrangements in advance for the promised grace offering. This passage impresses upon us that promises are Biblical and may better reflect true Gospel giving.

1. There are two main thoughts with the above verse. The first is "generous gift" which can be translated as "blessing". Paul is apparently describing the offering in terms of what it will be for the recipients, the believers in Jerusalem. Explain how your weekly thank offerings to the church are a blessing for three different groups of believers in or outside of the congregation.
2. This "generous gift" the Corinthians planned can also be called a "grace-gift". This emphasizes a key attitude that lies *behind* a believer's offering: a response to the grace, the undeserved love, of Christ. Assess your past attitude with gifts given to the church.
3. The second main thought in this passage is the word "promised". A promise is really a "faith-word" in response to God's promises. Describe how response-promises have been used in your baptismal, confirmation, or marriage vows?
4. A financial pledge to a congregation, therefore, is really a promise based on God's promises to provide us with food, clothing, shelter, health, home, work, etc. Assess this statement with your church's expectation to pledge for the appeal: "Lord, if you continue to bless me as you are doing now, this is the way I want to respond".

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, thank you for helping me to better see how I can be an enhanced steward of the resources entrusted to me. I know at times I have been unfaithful with my promises. You, on the other hand, have been faithful all the time. Thank you for being perfect. Amen.

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.
I Timothy 6:9, 10

Money of and by itself is not bad. It is a tool given to the Christian to use for God's glory. It can be said that money is a gift that God has entrusted to His believers to be used for the benefit of His kingdom. It is interesting to note that the Christian life of discipleship always begins with the heart and asks the most basic of questions: What is the purpose? Why am I doing this? Where is the attitude? The same is true when we use money in our lives. May your single purpose be always to love Jesus, and only Jesus. Nothing else. Period.

1. Do these verses condemn the rich? Explain why or why not.
2. Are the actions of earning money, accumulating possessions and working hard at our jobs violations of God's will? Explain.
3. Paul refers to harmful desires and the love of money as a root for all kinds of evil. If you picture "desires" and "evil love" as roots of a tree, then:
 - a. What feeds the root and grows the tree?
 - b. How does this root grow and take over peoples' hearts?
 - c. What fruit does the tree produce?
 - d. How can this "evil root" cause Christians to wander from the proper spirit?
4. What advice can you give Christians who have accumulated much wealth. Please include the words "contentment" and "Jesus" with your response.

Prayer: Dear Father, you have given me money to be used as a tool to benefit your kingdom here on earth. Give me a heart that better focuses on this proper use of my money. Turn my evil desires and love into God-pleasing desires and love for Jesus. Bless my day and help me to give glory to you in all I do and say. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

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.

Matthew 6: 31 – 32

Planning for tomorrow is time well spent. Worrying about tomorrow is time wasted. Often times there is a fine line between planning and worrying. Worriers let their thoughts and actions interfere with their relationship with God. It is interesting to note that Jesus fully understood the human weakness of worry, which is really a lack of trust. His advice for us it to focus upon His kingdom and righteousness and all the other "stuff" will take care of itself. He will provide for all of our needs. Careful planning is thinking ahead about goals, steps, and schedules, always trusting in God's guidance. Don't let worries about tomorrow affect your relationship with God today.

1. There are ill effects of worry. It can damage your health, consume your innermost thoughts, disrupt your productivity, negatively affect the way you treat others, and reduce your ability to trust in God. How many ill effects of worry do you experience?
2. Describe the relationship between your worries in question 1 with the "What shall..." questions in the verse above?
3. Worry often immobilizes humans to in-action. How do the above words of Jesus give you confidence to take action?
4. The above words clearly remind us that our Father in heaven knows our need and will provide for us. Reflect upon two different times in your life when your Father fulfilled this promise.
5. Worriers are consumed by fear and find it difficult to trust God. List the joys you find in trusting God. Write these down on a piece of paper and post them so they can be viewed each morning for the next week.

Prayer: Dear Father, I know you know my needs. I know you provide for all of my spiritual and earthly needs. At times I forget about your loving kindness and mercy. Forgive me for not fully trusting in you. Help me to better see your love in action in my life. Guide my day and continue to provide me with those things that are necessary for my spiritual good. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. James 2:14, 17

One of Martin Luther's thrusts of the Reformation was that a man is justified (declared righteous before God) by faith alone. Only faith in Jesus Christ will save. Yes, we are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. Genuine faith will produce good works. Our loving actions toward others are not a substitute for, but rather a verification of, our faith in Christ. True faith transforms our conduct as well as our thoughts. True faith saves. True faith produces good works.

1. Of what kind of person is James speaking?
2. Describe the lack of understanding a person like this has.
3. What does the lack of any good deeds prove?
4. Why are good works necessary?
5. For the sanctified Christian two things are necessary for any work to qualify as a "good work" before God: it must conform to God's Law; it must proceed from the proper motive. Reread this definition and evaluate your good works of stewardship (time, talents and treasure).
6. How are good works and giving to your church's appeal related?

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, I know you have planned good works for me to do in my life. Today, help me to go out and live my faith to your glory by performing good works. This "faith in action" is a way of demonstrating my love for Jesus in a tangible way. I ask you to bless my day and continue to create opportunities for me to display my love for you. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

But they gave themselves first of all to the Lord.

II Corinthians 8:5

The early church in Macedonia certainly had the correct priority for Christian living and giving. We are told that "they gave themselves first to the Lord" (II Corinthians 8:5), a true principle for all Christian giving. The Macedonians are an amazing example of the dynamic difference that God's grace makes in the lives and attitudes of His people. This example serves us well in today's times of prosperity. It gives us guidance as we consider supporting our congregation's appeal. The reason we give should always flow out of thanks for what God has done for us. That is imitating his good and gracious mercy. May God bless your giving!

1. The "they" are the Macedonians, congregations at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. These congregations were poor and actually had given more than what Paul expected. The reason for this generosity was their attitude of who is number one. Reflect upon this.
2. List some things that compete to be number one in your life.
3. Think of three specific things you can do that will help you to place the Lord first in your heart.
4. Commit this passage to memory and recite it five different times today, each time reflecting on the things you specified in number 3 above.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, You are number one in my life. At times I permit other people and things to get in my way and become my center of attention. I often rely upon them, and for these times I ask for your forgiveness. Help me to focus on you and only you. May you be my inspiration and guide all the days of my life. As I give myself and share my possessions, may my motivation always be in response for what you have done for me. Thank you for the peace and comfort you offer. In your name I pray, Amen.