

Daily



Devotions





***Whatever you do, in word or deed,
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him.
(Colossians 3:17)***

Each year, Immanuel Lutheran Church leads a Stewardship Campaign. We offer this Devotion Book as a gift to help you deepen your faith and gratitude towards God through reflecting on Christian Stewardship. We ask you, our members and participants, to consider, pray, and make a financial commitment for the next year's annual, general budget in 2025.

This year, we celebrate new ministries

- Part Time Associate Pastor
- The Good Word Podcast
- Worship in the Woods
- Increased Social Media Presence
- Expanded Pastoral Care and Visitation
- New Website
- Collaborative Confirmation & High School Ministry

As our lives are transformed by the love of God through Jesus Christ, you are invited to consider your own time, talent and treasure as gifts from God through which you may live gracefully and gratefully.

**THANK YOU for all the gifts of time, talent, treasure,
participation, and prayer you give to Immanuel Lutheran Church.**

Thanks to IMLU members who contributed to this devotion book.

October 6, 2024 – Georgia Cobbs

*¹⁴You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
¹⁵and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human heart. (Psalm 104:14-15)*



The Lord is amazing and full of grace! There have been so many times I have experienced the Lord's grace or saw it in others, but I wanted a solid definition. Nothing new, but I found this: "We believe we are saved by faith through grace. God's grace is usually defined as undeserved favor. Grace cannot be earned; it is something that is freely given."

God has given me life. The experience I will relay is when God could have called me home but didn't. My friend, Kate, and I were driving on the interstate outside of Grand Junction, Colorado. Well, Kate decided to pass the car in front of us. No problem, but that driver decided to pass the car in front of him but forgot to look over his shoulder! YES, the Blind Spot! He pushed us off the road, as we drove 70 MPH into the median strip, rolled 1 ½ times, landing upside down in the car! God's grace allowed Kate and me to live. All involved lived. The cars were totaled! As the tow truck that took my car away, Kate noticed it had "Jesus is Lord" on the side. She exclaimed, Georgia, your car is a Jesus car! It gave its life for you! Well, it did, and God's grace was 100% evident as we healed our sore bodies and thanked God for his grace!

Prayer: Good and Gracious God, thank you for giving all things to me by grace alone. Give me hands to receive the precious gift of life in Jesus Christ. Give me the eyes to see and the ears to hear that you are for me and with me. Give me the wisdom to trust that your forgiveness and salvation truly are free gifts. Amen.



October 7, 2024

Graceful Living

⁴But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. ⁶This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior; ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7)

To live gracefully may not describe our ability to leap without falling or run without stumbling. Living *grace-fully* is living fully in the grace of God.

Grace describes God's attitude and action toward us. Grace is undeserved love and favor. Grace is a free, giving heart. Grace describes God's willingness to keep on giving, loving, reaching, and forgiving. Grace is how God deals with us.

To live gracefully is to live and respond joyfully to God's grace. It is to live outside of oneself, to be willing to overflow with the grace of God. It is to live openly, to give, to reach out, to share, to care. To live gracefully is to live with the constant knowledge that God is acting to and for and through us.

Our stewardship theme for this year focuses on "Graceful, Grateful Living." God's grace fills us and our lives. In response, we live joyfully, sharing God's grace and giving thanks for all that God has given—especially the gift of forgiveness and life in Jesus Christ.

With Paul, every day we can say: "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10). Thank God for that gift.

For Reflection:

- What does God's grace through Jesus Christ mean to you?
- Who is someone that you think lives fully in the grace of God and why?
- Identify one way you could live more fully in God's grace today.

Prayer: Good and gracious God, pour out the Spirit of your grace in Christ upon me today, that I may living more fully in your presence in all that I am and in all that I do. Amen.

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October 8, 2024 – Pastor Rebekah Cochrane

Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17)



In the early days of parenthood, I used to feel guilty every time I'd sneak out for a run. I felt like I was supposed to be at home all the time. Caring for the baby, caring for my wife, washing bottles and clothes and diapers – there was always something else to do and parenthood is a round-the-clock job. When I did make it outside, I never stopped to take in the view or enjoy the silence of the trail... I was always thinking about getting back home.

Things are starting to feel different now. On one summer morning run the air was so delicious and the hillside so beautiful that I couldn't help but stop, stretch my arms out, fill my lungs, and plant my palms in the dirt. The need to give thanks to the earth and the One who created it surpassed my sense of urgency to get on to the next thing. In the moving of my legs, the shuffle of my feet on the trail, my hands coated with dirt I had a moment of understanding. It wasn't just the productive stuff or the checks on my to-do list that mattered. I can't do it all. But I can do all things to the glory of God.

When I take time for myself, I give thanks to God. When I feel good about working hard, I give thanks to God. When the dirty dishes pile up, I give thanks to God. When I crash on the couch, I give thanks to God. When I sneak out for a run, I give thanks to God. Because God works through these everyday things, changing me and the world around me one moment of gratitude at a time.

Inhale: All I do

Exhale: Is a living prayer



October 8, 2024 – Pastor Molly

Grateful Living

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for God's steadfast love endures forever. (Psalm 136:1)

Giving thanks is easy—nothing to it. It seems natural to say thanks to God: “Thank you, God, for fine days and the good, green earth, the abundance of the harvest, the plenty of your garden.”

But how often do I say: “Thanks for staying with me today. Thanks for being love to me despite myself. Thanks for caring for me, even when I am uncaring. Thank you for being my friend, though you know me well. Thank you for forgiving me when I do. what I said I would not to do and failed in what I had promised. Thank you for opening the world for me, for lifting the gloom, for putting light in the future, for shutting the past away behind the steel door of memory-less forgiveness.”

Our stewardship theme for this year focuses on “Graceful, Grateful Living.” We recognize that God has showered us with gifts of grace that literally fill our lives. In response we live, joyfully sharing God’s gifts and giving thanks for all that God has given—especially the gift of forgiveness and life in Jesus Christ.

With a clear focus on God’s grace in our hearts, we can respond as Paul encourages: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

For reflection:

Is it easy for you to say thanks to God in all circumstances? For what have you thanked God in the midst of hard times?

Prayer: Good and Gracious God, help me to see your grace amid my troubles and fears. When I can’t, shower me with your mercy and give me eyes to see. Amen.

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October 9, 2024 - John Brock



*“For we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.”
(Acts 4:20)*

Twenty-three years ago, 9/11/01, I boarded a morning flight out of Boston. On reaching my destination, I attempted to begin my day. Hundreds who had left from the same airport never landed. Thousands died while starting their daily lives.

In an hour, I was able to communicate with loved ones to let them know that, though frazzled like everyone else, I was OK.

In a few days, I drove 500 miles across an international border to get home. A stranger traveled partway with me on her long trip to Atlanta.

Some have said that God was with me. I agree, but maybe not in the big way of leading me from peril, as is often implied in such thoughts.

Despite the fears of that day, the embrace of goodness, which is God, was with me. That goodness emerged in small ways as people helped. It flowed in the gratitude of others as I was able to help them.

Fears from that day remain. They affect daily interactions. They turn conversations into arguments. Communities that protect, respond, and care accept the daily obligation to alleviate those fears, and sometimes fall short.

In the shock of 9/11, I knew of those communities yet could not feel their presence. Instead, hope and faith grew through individuals' help, kindness, and presence.

As the fears of 9/11 fade, new worries emerge. Through hope, faith, and the support of each other, may all fears lose their power.

Prayer:

Loving God of Creation, open our eyes and hearts to the small things from which your presence flows and which draw us together.



October 10, 2024 – Pastor Molly Sasser-Goehner

Giving to the Church

These days, there are plenty of good places to give your charitable dollars. In 1995, there were about 600,000 non-profit organizations in the U.S. and 370,000 churches. Today, there are over 1.8 million non-profits, and about the same number of churches. In 1985, 53% of all charitable donations were given to churches. Today, it's 29%. With so many other great options, why give to your church?

The church is just about the only place that will tell you that you are valued and worthy not because of your successes or failures, wealth or poverty, age or education. You are valued and loved unconditionally simply because you are God's Beloved Child, made in God's image, and God has given your life dignity by becoming human and by raising your life from death. You belong to God and that makes you important and valued. Full Stop. The End.

Recently, a church member hadn't attended worship in several months. They had had an extremely difficult year with many losses (relationships, jobs, pets). Though they weren't coming to worship, they received all our communications and watched on-line. They said they drew comfort and hope just knowing that their church community continued to meet for worship and prayer and that they were a part of that. When they did attend church, they were deeply moved when receiving Holy Communion and the promise of forgiveness, the formation of community and the deep presence and peace of God they experienced from the pastor and all the people gathered.

Sometimes, we get into a routine. Church is just what we ought to do, and suddenly, we wonder, what's the point? Why go? I'm not inspired anymore. The point is that though you may not be comforted and transformed at every worship service, it's very likely that God is doing something through someone sitting next you. I give to church so that someone can have a moment of resurrection and peace that can only happen when they hear the good news of God's unconditional love and grace through Jesus Christ. These promises truly transform hearts, minds and souls.

Thank you for your financial gifts to Immanuel Lutheran Church to share the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding.

Prayer: Good and Gracious God, send your Spirit of help and hope to those in our church community who are struggling with relationships and jobs, who have lost pets or loved ones. Assure them of your presence and peace. Amen.

October 11, 2024 – Mick Hanson



The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully ⁷Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:6-7)

As I write this devotion for stewardship at Immanuel, many willing hands have just finished creating a separate dishwasher room along with a major remodel of the kitchen. All was completed within the budget of the E.A.R. campaign. This experience of fellowship with several new and long-time members of the church gave me a new appreciation for the opportunity to give with a glad heart.

It also verified that we, at Immanuel, have chosen to live out our faith, sowing boldly. Why boldly? New flooring of the entire second level was not included in the budget, but after discussions with our pastors and council, the decision was made to “do it right”! We are now about to reap bountifully from this remodeled space and thank the congregation for the continued support as we move forward.

God’s grace and goodness have followed Sharon and me all of our life, but this past experience allowed me to see it firsthand at Immanuel. There were so many people who cheerfully gave in time, talents, and monetarily to create this new space. God loves a cheerful giver, and we are blessed to see this “lived out” within our church family.

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, may you continue to inspire and move this congregation forward using this new space to further our efforts to “Share the love of Christ with all”.

Yours in Christ: Mick Hanson



October 12, 2024

Cheerful Sacrifices

By Pastor Donovan Sabog – New Hope, O’ahu

Offer sacrifices in the right spirit and trust the Lord. (Psalm 4:5)

Have you ever begrudgingly done something good? When I was a young toddler, my mother forced me to apologize to someone. I remember my response. “I’m sorry!” I said sarcastically, rolling my eyes for unhappy emphasis. “Donovan, like you mean it!” “I’m sorry,” I said again, this time genuinely—not in fear of the Lord, but rather, in fear of my mother.

Sometimes, we do the right things with the wrong heart. We say the right words, but we don’t mean them. We do good deeds, but for our personal benefit. In this Psalm, the heart matters. Intentions matter. The spirit with which you do things matters. There is a “right” spirit with which we offer sacrifices to God. This implies that there is also a “wrong” spirit with which we can make sacrifices too.

As Christians, giving is a major part of our faith. We practice giving of our tithes, our time, our resources, and our heart. Giving requires sacrifice. After giving, we are left with less—less time, less money, less resources. Yet, with God, we somehow always end up with a greater reward.

As you give to the Lord, do so with the right spirit—with a heart fully willing and hands fully open. Trust God to provide for your every need and give generously of your life, so that you might discover the full abundance of God.

Prayer:

Gracious God, Thank You for your generosity to me. Help me to trust that you fully supply all my needs, so that I may give willingly and gladly give You my heart, my soul, and my life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

October 13, 2024 – Ray Smith

*The risen Jesus called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”
“No,” they answered. He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the
boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul
the net in because of the large number of fish. (John 16:5-6)*



I really do not think all the fish were hiding on the one side of their boat that day, while disciples fished on the other. I believe that Jesus was trying to make a point. Shortly after his resurrection the disciples had just gone back to their tried-and-true habitats. Evidently the importance of His resurrection still hadn’t sunk in: Were they thinking “We’ve seen that Jesus is OK, so it is time to go fishing?” They went back to their old ways and accomplished nothing.

To make His point Jesus tells them to turn and do something different. In this case it is a little thing (try the other side of the boat), with big consequences (they caught fish). With that miracle Peter realized it was Jesus on the shore. Jesus then fed them and told Peter to do something new and different: “Feed my Sheep”. That is, stop fishing and tend God’s people.

Repeatedly in the Bible the people of God are told to turn from their human-orientated ways and do a new thing, a God-oriented way. How often do we leave Church on Sunday and not recognize Jesus at the next turn because we have gone back to our regular human-oriented ways? I know I am guilty of that on a regular basis.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Please help me to see you every day and turn me from human ways to your way. Help me to be grateful for all you have done for me and understand that everything comes from you as a gift of Grace. Amen.

October 14, 2024

Graceful Earth

Adapted from Randy Asbury “Managing God’s Gifts”

“The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it!” (Psalm 24:1).



God gifted us and all humanity the world - God’s physical creation in all its down-to-earth, material beauty, usefulness, and goodness. The creation itself is God’s graciousness and generosity made tangible.

In the beginning, God created everything—the heavens, the earth, light, dark, sea, sky, land, vegetation, fish, birds, all the animals and critters, and us, human beings. Since God created us and all that exists, everything belongs to God. God chose to partner with humans to till and keep, subdue and have dominion over all that God made. This is called Stewardship.

The words “subdue” and “dominion” from the Genesis story, do not mean dominate and conquer. Rather, in God’s good order and gracious, loving plan, this means nothing more than to receive, guard, keep, use responsibly, manage well, take care of—that is, practice good stewardship. God wants us and all people, all over the globe, to work and keep God’s world of physical, material things in health and wholeness.

Jesus himself, respected and honored the created order of God the Father. Jesus himself practices good stewardship, good management, of God’s material world. He uses the gifts of creation to feed and satisfy crowds of thousands. We are graceful and grateful stewards of God’s gift of the world when we receive it with wonder and thanksgiving, and then, carefully use it for our benefit and the benefit of people around us.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for the earth that produces all that I need to live – food and clothing, work and income, friends and neighbors, peace and health, education and government. Help me to keep and care for the material things of the world so that the life of all living things may flourish. Amen.

October 15, 2024 – Sonja Wolsky, Christian Education Director

God's Hand in Creation and Our Lives

In Psalm 104:12-13, we are reminded of God's care and provision:

"By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work."



When I read these verses, I am reassured that God is in control. If He can take care of the entire world—the birds, the streams, the mountains—how much more will He care for you and me? His creation reflects His attention to every detail. Here in Montana, we are blessed to witness His beautiful artwork daily in the mountains, rivers, and skies.

After losing my mom, there were moments when my grief felt overwhelming, raw, and deep. During those times, taking a walk and soaking in the beauty of the mountains, listening to the birds, and watching the flowing rivers brought comfort to my soul. It was a reminder that the same God who crafted these breathtaking views was with me in my grief, sustaining me.

Even when life becomes stressful—whether it's work challenges or family struggles—God's creation continues to bring me peace. The birds singing in the trees and the steady flow of the rivers remind me that just as God cares for the earth, He cares for me. For all this, I am deeply grateful.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for your amazing creation and for providing all that we need. Help me to be a faithful caretaker of the earth and all that is in it, just as You care for me. Amen.



October 18, 2024

Graceful Time

Adapted from Randy Asbury “Managing God’s Gifts”

Good stewardship, or “management,” of God’s gifts includes the hours, days, months, and years that God gives us.

The book of Ecclesiastes (3:11-13) says that God “*has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, God has put eternity into the human heart, yet he still doesn’t understand what God has done from the beginning to the end.*” The author says, “*I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all toil—this is God’s gift to humans.*”

Some of us are burdened by too much time. Many of our loved ones have died. We are facing illnesses that prevent us from going out and about. We can no longer do what we used to do. There are long, lonely hours throughout the day to reflect upon how short a time we are here on earth. To consider life’s joys and sorrows, successes and regrets.

For many, in our busy, restless, frenetic, workaday world with overly crowded schedules, demands that pull us in various directions, and a world of information and videos just a click away, we find it difficult to manage our time, let alone be joyful and take pleasure in our toil.

Key to managing God’s gift of time is making time to rest, especially by gladly hearing and learning God’s Word of forgiveness, life, and salvation. When we make time for the good portion of sitting at Jesus’ feet in through Worship, Bible Study and Prayer, God’s Spirit works to give us rest and refreshment to enjoy the time God gives us.

Prayer: Gracious God, when the days stretch out long before me, help me to be content with the time you have given me. When I am busy and burdened, help me to discern priorities and give me the will to rest in your Word and promises. Amen.

October 19, 2024 – Jean Larson



I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3)

I was 18 when my dad died, and it tore me up that God had allowed this to happen. In confirmation I had memorized the Small Catechism, and even believed it! “God protects me from all danger and preserves me from all evil....”

But God didn't. And I was furious. It didn't help that my pastor didn't show up much or that he preached the world's worst funeral sermon. So, God died, too, and faith became a lie.

But one thing I couldn't figure out. Why was Fr. Ray still part of the church? Fr. Ray Maiser was a Catholic priest in Great Falls who became a friend to us. He showed up at the hospital and at home, even though we weren't of his tribe. He was humble, gentle, kind, and funny. He heard me out when I ranted about God, “making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Making every effort to share the Spirit of Christ with broken-hearted me.

It seemed like the thinnest of threads, Ray's friendship. But it proved the strongest of bonds that helped me come back to faith and learn the power of grace.

Prayer:

— God, you surprise us with grace through the most unexpected people. Thank you! Open up our hearts, that we might become your surprise for the one who needs us. Amen.



October 20, 2024

God's Good Gift of Money

Adapted from Randy Asbury "Managing God's Gifts"

Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the best parts of all your produce. (Proverbs 3:9)

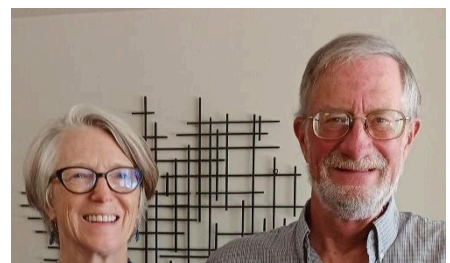
"Our" money is not really ours! Even "unrighteous wealth" belongs to God (Luke 16:11). Thus, God calls us to practice good management, "stewardship", of the money, wealth, and possessions that God gives. As in other areas of life, God wants us to manage money not only for ourselves, but also for the benefit of our neighbor and to the glory of God.

We often think, speak, and act as though money and wealth were "ours," to do with as we please, no strings attached, no guidelines placed upon us. We even claim that what we do with "our" money is only between "me and God." We certainly do not want to hear the pastor preach that dreaded "money sermon," and we do not want the church telling us to "give more." However, as with all things in heaven and earth, money belongs to God. *God's Own Self* preaches the "money sermon"!

God gives us this means of exchange, this instrument of commerce and economic transaction, in order that we may show forth God's glory and serve our neighbor. Since money belongs to God, God actually has a lot to say about it in God's Word. God wants us to manage money with wisdom and faithfulness in accordance with God's will for us, for others, and for the Church.

Prayer: Abundant and Gracious God, thank you for money and financial resources I have. Help me to manage money wisely and faithfully - my debt, my income, my savings, and my investments that I may use it according to your will for the benefit of others and the Good News of Jesus Christ. Amen.

October 21, 2024-Scott Hedegaard



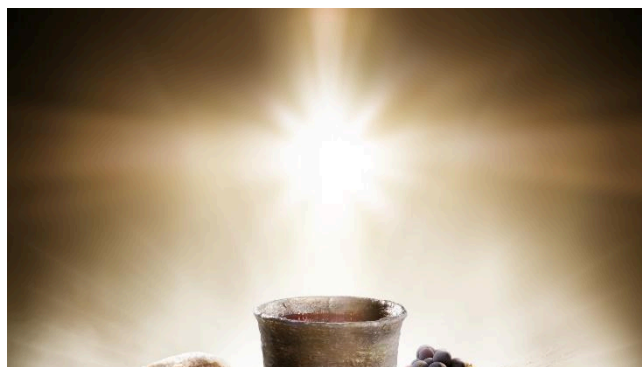
In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14)

Arnold farmed up on the Hi line near Saco. Now Arnold was one of those guys who would never buy new farm equipment. If he wasn't able to repair his old machinery, he would search the equipment dealers or the farm auctions to find what he needed. His reasoning was simple: His farm was his family's legacy, and he wasn't going to jeopardize it by going into debt.

Arnold's congregation in Saco decided to build a new church. They borrowed the money and constructed their new facility. When the debt was paid, the congregation held a mortgage burning. When they had the ceremony, to the surprise of Arnold's family, the congregation, and the community, they learned that Arnold, who would never borrow to buy new farm equipment, had put up the farm as collateral for the loan.

Sometimes God will call us to do things, to give, that would seem to us and those around us to be out of character. Yet we are reminded that what we do, that our good works are not so that we might be lauded before others, but that God might be glorified. Let your light so shine!

Prayer: Good and Gracious God, your generosity surprises us everyday. Thank you for those who have been generous to me. Teach me to so trust in the Good News of Jesus, that I would sacrifice all my possessions for the true treasure in you. Amen.



October 22, 2024

God's Money Priorities: For Us

Adapted from Randy Asbury "Managing God's Gifts"

Money is just a means of exchange, a tool for carrying out commerce, a convenient instrument we use for purchasing clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, and so on. Having more money does not make you a better person, and having less money does not devalue you, especially in God's eyes. And contrary to common notions in our culture today, being wealthy does not make you evil, nor does being poor somehow make you more virtuous. Money is merely a means of exchange. How you manage money and what you do with it reveals who you are, what your priorities are, and what kind of manager you are.

What priorities does God give us for managing God's gift of money? We can sum them up in three categories: first, for ourselves; second, for our neighbor; and third, for God's Church.

The first priority is pretty obvious: for ourselves. We know we need to eat and drink, wear clothing, have a place to live, have transportation, and so on. So, God provides our "daily bread" for the support and needs of the body. The same Lord Jesus who said, "*Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on*" (Matthew 6:25), also provides us with work and wages to provide for ourselves. God gives us the gift of money to provide, first, for our families and ourselves.

Prayer: Abundant and Gracious God, thank you for supplying all my needs: food and clothing, home and family, friends and neighbors, peace and health, education and government and so on. Guard me from anxiety and worry about money, so that instead of serving my wealth, I serve You. Amen.

October 22, 2024 – Sumer Pellet



The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it. (Psalm 24:1)

About 20 years ago, I was informed that a coworker had stolen over \$100,000. I couldn't believe it. The person who had done it was someone I considered a friend, I'd been to her house, and we'd chatted many times at the office. She wasn't someone I would have ever believed would do something like that.

Just today I ran across a handwritten letter from her soon after, where she thanked me for reaching out to her. She said she had felt so isolated, and it was such a relief to hear from someone who still cared about her. I don't specifically remember what I said in my letter to her, but I bet she still does.

God's grace is abundant, and His love for his children is unconditional. He created this world for ALL of his children. That includes when we make bad decisions, when we don't avoid temptation, and when we hurt other people and ourselves. God forgives us our trespasses.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Remind us that this is your world, and everyone who lives here is yours. Please help us to see the good in others. Help us to show grace. Amen



October 23, 2024

God's Money Priorities: Loving Others

By Randy Asbury from "Managing God's Gifts"

Good stewardship, or "management," of God's gifts to us includes the people God puts in our lives. After God created Adam, God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18), and then God made Eve.

Other people are God's gifts to us because God wants us to live in community. However, we need not worry about loving and serving the billions of people in the world all at once. God gives us the people in our lives—in our families, in our churches, and in society—to love and serve in our vocations.

By God's grace, we also strive to love and serve our neighbor differently than the worldly wisdom of "how to win friends and influence people." The world would have us love our neighbor for our own benefit, but Jesus teaches us to love our neighbor for his or her benefit. Christ calls us to "*do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than [ourselves]*" (Philippians 2:3).

Being good managers in our relations with others also leads us to love and serve them by bearing witness to the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Prayer: Good and Gracious God, thank you for creating me to live in communion with you and in community with others. Help me see the people in my life as gifts and to manage these relationships with patience, generosity and kindness, Christ Jesus, Our Lord. Amen.

October 24, 2024 – Deacon Dr. Rob Stuberg

Bwana Asifiwe! Praise the Lord!

By Deacon Dr. Rob Stuberg



Psalm 150

Praise the Lord!

Praise God in his sanctuary;

praise the Lord in his mighty firmament!

Praise God for his mighty deeds;

praise the Lord according to his surpassing greatness!

Praise God with trumpet sound;

praise the Lord with lute and harp!

Praise God with tambourine and dance;

praise the Lord with strings and pipe!

Praise God with clanging cymbals;

praise the Lord with loud clashing cymbals!

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord!

It is one of my life's privileges to teach worship to first-year students in Tanzania, who in four years will be ordained as Lutheran pastors. I always teach the students a version of Psalm 150, a song I learned as a kid at church camp, "Praise the Lord with Trumpet Sound." The song involves dancing and spinning around, and miming the playing of a trumpet, lute, harp, timbrel, big bass drum and crashing cymbals. The first time the students are timid. By the third time, however, they can be heard singing all over the entire campus. Their singing-and-dancing praise is glorious and loud, heart-singing, and soul-freeing.

In Tanzania, the offertory has a place of honor in worship. There is no "passing the plate" here. People come forward to the chancel to reverently place their offering in a bucket. Those who don't have money bring goods—food, vegetables, or fruits. One Sunday morning the entire group I was with began to weep together, as we watched an elderly woman walk slowly to the front and lay one single egg before the altar. We knew it was all she had to give. Her sacrifice of praise was silent and humble, but also heart-singing and soul-freeing,

Prayer: Lord God, let my heart sing, and let my soul be free to praise you, always, with everything I have. Amen.



October 25, 2024

God's Money Priorities: The Church

Adapted from Randy Asbury "Managing God's Gifts"

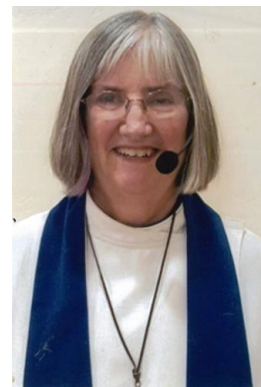
The third priority that God gives us for managing the gift of money is for God's Church. Yes, in this fallen world, driven by economic realities, it does take money to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel itself is free, of course. Christ's atoning death on the cross is absolutely free. Our salvation and forgiveness from Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is absolutely free—no strings attached, no works required, no down payments needed.

However, we know that buildings are built to proclaim this precious Good News. Pastors and staff need to be paid in order to support their families and themselves. Bread and wine must be purchased for receiving our Lord's body and blood. Books and supplies must be provided. Light, heating, cooling bills and utilities must be paid. Materials for outreach and publicity efforts must be purchased, printed and distributed.

Yes, in this world of economic realities, it takes money to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus. Remember, Jesus Himself spoke of using "unrighteous wealth" (Luke 16) for eternal purposes, namely, proclaiming and spreading the Good News of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. Part of managing God's gift of money is indeed using it to support the Church in the work of extending the reach of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Abundant and Gracious God, thank you for providing me a community of faith among whom I may worship, serve, learn and give. Guide me as I consider what I give to the church in time, talent and in treasure. Amen.

October 26, 2024 – Melanie Martin-Dent



Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.” (Colossians 3:16)

The word of Christ indeed dwells in us richly when we sing to God! How many times have I sung hymns and camp songs to myself until worries subsided, the procedure was over, or my loved one returned. I recommend this if you haven't tried it!

Then there was the retired music teacher who suffered from dementia. In a memory care unit, he did not speak or respond unless you sang. His eyes brightened and face came alive if you sang Amazing Grace, How Great Thou Art or other classic hymns. He'd start mouthing the words or even sing along! How great was that? What a testament to the power of music to bring healing and hope to our lives. The only other time he seemed present in was during communion when I spoke the Word of Institution and prayed the Lord's Prayer.

Music and liturgy go deep into our minds, deeper than we know. It pops up to the surface when cued, bringing joy, hope and love with it every time.

This is why we need to go to church, whether we feel like it or not. You never know when you will need these memories to get you through.

Prayer: Gracious God, help me to remember your words of promise and hope, especially when I forget or when I'm struggling. Thank you for the gift of musicians and songwriters who proclaim your presence and help to me. Amen.



October 27, 2024

God Money Priorities: Generosity and Joy

Adapted from Randy Asbury “Managing God’s Gifts”



Exodus 35 gives a glorious picture of the joy of using wealth for God’s holy purposes. The children of Israel had just fled from Egypt after over four hundred years of slavery. I doubt they had nearly as much money or as many possessions as we wealthy Americans have! And yet, these freed children of God joyously provided for the construction and use of the tabernacle, the very place where God’s Own Self would dwell among them and shower them with grace and the blessing of salvation.

Those who had blue, purple, or scarlet yarns gladly brought them. Those who had silver or bronze brought them. Those who could weave the cloths did so. Those who could build the frames or set the stones joyously did so. *“All the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them to bring anything for the work that the Lord had commanded by Moses to be done brought it as a freewill offering to the Lord”* (Exodus 35:29). See how they were gladly and joyously managing God’s gifts for God’s glory!

Exodus 36 shows us the abundant fruit of the freewill offerings. Two people organized the work crews of craftsmen, and people kept bringing their wealth for service in the Lord’s tent. So much so that they had to tell Moses, *“The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do”* (Exodus 36:5). So, Moses actually had to end the collection, because the people were giving so much! What generosity! What joy! What marvelous managing of God’s gifts of money and possessions for God’s purposes!

Prayer: Abundant and Gracious God, send your Spirit upon me that I may find marvelous joy using your gifts of money and possessions for God’s purposes. Amen.

October 28, 2024 – Ron Marks

“Rejoice in the Lord always again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God.” (Philippians 4:4-6)

This text from Philippians has “rejoice” 2 times in the first line. It must be important. We should rejoice with God in the good things in life. We also often pray to God for things that are worrying us or that make us sad. These are the “laments” that the Psalms teach us about.

When teaching Confirmation “several” years ago, I learned from a former pastor at Immanuel, Pastor Aprille, that the Psalms had a particular pattern. Some of the Psalms were psalms of praise or joy. Some of the Psalms were Psalms of lament or sadness. But ALL of the Psalms ended with praise or thanksgiving for the gifts of God.

This surprised me but taught me to pray for our needs and lament with God. Maybe as we pray and lament, we shouldn’t worry but end our prayers with rejoice and be thankful that God is near us.

Let us pray:

Dear God, be near to us in our joys and our laments. Remind us to be thankful that you walk with us in all of our life. Amen.