

Servants & Stewards

THE GOSPEL | GOD'S WILL | TIME | WEALTH | SPIRITUAL GIFTS

A Devotional Guide

*Seeing Ourselves as God Sees Us
In Fulfilling Our Life Purpose*

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WEEK ONE

Entrusted With the Gospel

“... the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.”

— 1 Timothy 1:11, ISV

In the first week of this devotional series, we will be thinking about the meaning of the word, *stewardship*, and there will be an emphasis on our principal stewardship, the gospel. As believers, we are all a part of the greatest cause!

Throughout this devotional series, we are making an intentional effort to fine tune how we see ourselves. Being saved, attending church, career, family, friends — these are not all separate, unconnected things. All of our lives should be lived as servants of Jesus Christ. There’s nothing we have which he hasn’t given us. Life, all of it, is a stewardship.

Each week, you will have seven days to complete five devotionals, so you are given some margin for the busy-ness of life. However, avoid reading the devotionals for the week all in one sitting. Treat it like your meals. We don’t eat a feast once a week. Instead, we eat smaller meals throughout the week. So, be faithful in reading one devotional per day, reflect on what you’ve read, and allow it to “digest.”



Entrusted to You for Safekeeping

A steward is someone who manages and cares for property and resources which belong to someone else. An example would be the manager of a chain store. He doesn't own the store, but he or she is responsible to manage its business according to the policies of its owners.

The Old Testament Law describes the responsibility of taking care of property entrusted to one for safe-keeping. If there was a breach of this trust by theft or neglect, there were significant penalties (Exodus 22:7-15).

While the concept of stewardship is usually related to the care of material resources, we are specifically told that that we are stewards of the gospel. It isn't our gospel; it's the "gospel of God" (Romans 1:1, etc.).

Like the store manager, we are responsible for what we do with it; we have been *entrusted* with the gospel. Paul writes, "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ *and stewards of the mysteries of God*" (1 Corinthians 4:1). You are a steward. One cannot opt out of stewardship. A believer may be a good steward or a bad steward, but a steward he is.

We see this principle in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-28). A talent was a large unit of currency, not musical ability or something like that. Though, in the parable, the talents *represent* all that God has entrusted to us — our time, wealth, skills, and everything the Lord has given us. Included, of course, is the gospel.

We are servants, not masters. We're accountable to the Lord to use our best efforts and creativity, to invest in that which is eternal. We're not equally capable; the Lord takes that into consideration from the beginning. However, if we act out of fear and "refuse to participate," we reveal our truest beliefs about God... how we *really feel* about him. And, in turn, he tells such servants what he thinks of them, calling them "Wicked and slothful." Our goal should be to receive the job evaluation: "Well done, good and faithful servant!" We have been entrusted with the gospel!

Today's Prayer Guidance:

*I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself
Nor is it in man who walks to direct his steps.
You have created me for Your purposes and for Your pleasure
You have entrusted to my care precious gifts
Lead me in caring for them in Your way
And enable me to be faithful*

Entrusted with the Message

In church settings, when we hear the word *stewardship*, we are tempted think, “Here it comes, they’re after our money again.” So, let’s reemphasize the point: *First and foremost*, the stewardship with which we have been entrusted is the gospel. God has committed to our care, above all else, the good news.

This is a theme in the Paul’s writings which appears multiple times:

- ◇ In 1 Timothy 1:11, he speaks of the gospel “with which I have *been entrusted*.”
- ◇ In 1 Corinthians 9, he tells us he gets no extra credit for proclaiming the gospel. In fact, he says “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” Why? “I am still *entrusted with a stewardship*” (vs. 16-17).
- ◇ In 1 Thessalonians 2, Paul explains that because we have been “*entrusted with the gospel*, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts” (vs. 4).

In today’s Scripture reading, Paul tells us that God “Has revealed his word in the preaching with which I have *been entrusted* by the command of God our Savior” (vs. 3).

Therefore, if above and beyond all else, it is the gospel which has been entrusted to us, then of course, we martial all our other resources in its service.

There is a often-told story of a very wise man. This man had a reputation in the area for not getting stumped by difficult questions. But, a couple of boys decided to give it a try. According to their plan, they would catch a small bird and then ask the old man if the bird were alive or dead. If he answered, *alive*, the boy holding it would crush the bird in his hand. If he were to reply *dead*, he would release the bird and let it fly away. So, they went to the man and told him that the boy had a bird in his hand, and asked it were alive. The old man answered, “The answer is in your hand.”

The cause... the message... the mission... is in your hand.

Today’s Prayer Guidance:

Father, representing You in the world

Is the greatest, most exciting adventure

But it’s also a demanding responsibility.

For to whom much is given, much is required.

Please empower me to represent You with grace and truth

That people around me will be called to the love found only in Christ.

Entrusted With Our Spheres of Influence

Many pastors have emphasized personal evangelism to their congregations only to hear a church member remark, “But I don’t know any lost people!” The longer a person has been a Christian the greater our tendency to make the folks at church our only social circle.

People enjoy being around people like themselves, but we must not shelter ourselves within the safe fellowship of the church. Instead, we need to seek to develop appropriate relationships outside the fold. Jesus prayed, “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world” (John 17:18).

You know a many more lost people than you may think you do! Survey your life. List the members of your immediate family, your extended family, the people at work, classmates at school, neighbors, and fellow-members of organizations to which you belong. This is your sphere of influence. God has entrusted you with that sphere of influence.

How many people in your sphere of influence know the Lord? Who does not? In today’s passage, we how God had worked in Cornelius in his journey to faith... and in Peter to prepare him for this assignment. As Peter and his companions arrived in Caesarea, he sees that “Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends... [Peter] went in and found many persons gathered” (vs. 24, 27). Cornelius was faithful in his sphere of influence.

Personal evangelism isn’t confined to knocking on the doors of strangers. In fact, we will be most effective within our personal spheres of influence. Remember your favorite cousin from your growing up years. Have you worked with people for forty hours per week over a course of your career? Consider your five nearest neighbors. We must choose not to cut ourselves off from unbelievers. Make a prayer list and start praying for each one by name. Could you, over time, develop those relationships? Aren’t these people worth the risk?

Today’s Prayer Guidance:

*Father, I think today of my family I have now
And the family from which I come.
I remember before you today my neighbors
and the people with whom I work.
Please guide me in building bridges
And prompt me in speaking up with the good news.*



All Authority

Today's reading is so well-known by Christians we have a nickname for it: *The Great Commission*. This nickname name tells you it is a big deal. It refers to the one over-arching, everyone involving mission of the church. The great cosmic cause of the church... and of each believer. And it's not the only passage in the New Testament which communicates this command! (See Luke 24:47-48, John 20:21, Acts 1:8).

In this passage there are several "alls." *All nations* means every people group. That would include every race, every ethnic group, and every language in every geographical place. This *all* includes *missions*, the intentional crossing of geographical, cultural, and language barriers for the purpose of evangelism. We should also consider unreached pockets of people in our own general communities. Sometimes, we simply fail to pick up on their presence.

The one key command in the Great Commission is to "make disciples." Discipleship isn't an optional upgrade to the basic Christian package. It isn't merely a class with a notebook for those who want to go deeper. When the New Testament speaks of disciples, it is speaking of Christians. However, there is a process in mind here: "Teaching them to observe *all* that I have commanded you."

The first *all* is "all authority." Jesus came to earth from Heaven, took on genuine humanity, being made like us in every way except sin, and was the Father's Man on earth. The God-Man, playing by "man rules" (rules that apply to humanity), acted only at the direction of the Father. He taught with authority, he had authority over demons, he had the authority to heal, and the authority to forgive sins. Around a dozen passages in the Gospels record Jesus' *authority* being questioned. He perfectly completed his redemptive mission. And now, after his resurrection, his mission complete, he tells them, "*All authority* in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (vs. 18). How could we say, *No*, to someone with all authority? And yet we try to do exactly that. "That's not my gift." "That's the preacher's job." Such statements are usually mere smokescreens for our fears.

But don't be afraid. The final "*all*" is: "And behold I am with you *always*."

Today's Prayer Guidance:

*Lord Jesus, You are the Head of the Church
And I am but one member of Your body.*

I confess that You hold all authority

You are the boss and I am Your servant.

Please give me the power to serve You faithfully.

Entrusted With Your Testimony

Your testimony is the story of how God has worked in your life. It is the story of how you came to understand you needed God's intervention. Of how God did for you what you couldn't do for yourself. It's about what God did, not how you pulled yourself up by your own bootstraps. It is crediting Jesus Christ above all human his instrumentality — family, pastor, church staff, friends.

Every believer has more than one testimony. He has his *salvation testimony*, of course. But there will also be growth testimonies and testimonies of answered prayer, etc. So, a testimony isn't the same thing as your autobiography; it's *one story* from your life. We should be able to tell one testimony at a time.

Even though most church folks think of a testimony as a short speech given before the congregation, generally speaking, we can sum up most of our God-stories in a single sentence. One advantage of a "sentence testimony" is that it naturally fits in personal conversations; you are "in and out" before they can change the subject. There is a simple worksheet in the back of this booklet to help you get started in putting your stories into words.

A testimony mustn't have a prideful sound to it. If we're self-aware, we realize we each have a lot to be humble about. We want to come across as "in process" and we want Jesus to come out the hero.

When we say a person has a good testimony, we aren't saying he has a way with words. We're saying his life aligns with his words. This includes attitudes, our treatment of others, and our walk. The Lord has entrusted to us *His* reputation. People often mistakenly decide what they think about God based on those who claim to be his people.

As you put into words your salvation experience, you will want to consider what it was you felt lacking before coming to Christ. Describe what you were looking for, then how you came to realize that that could be found only in Jesus Christ. What got you started thinking about it? What clinched it for you? What difference is the Lord making in your life right now?

God has given you your story. He entrusted that story to you... to share.

Today's Prayer Guidance:

*Holy God, thank You that Your grace did not leave me where I was,
That you intervened in my life's story
And gave that story a new ending.
Thank You for giving me that story to tell.
Please empower me to tell it often and well.*

Week Two

Hearing God

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

— John 10:27

Perhaps as you read this week’s theme, you’re wondering: “How is knowing God’s will related to stewardship?” The answer is that it involves God’s plan for your life. He has plans *for you* and that plan has been entrusted *to you*. But if we won’t take the time to understand his plan — or if we don’t know God’s plan — we can’t fulfill our life’s mission. So, in this way, God’s guidance is a stewardship.

Sometimes, it’s hard to know how to go about seeking God’s definite leading for a specific situation. So, this week, we will consider some practical principles related to hearing God and being led by the Spirit.

Hearing Comes Standard

As we begin this emphasis on stewardship, some may fear that this will be five weeks of incessant talk about money. They may fear that everything will be carefully crafted to manipulate them into giving more than they can afford to give... that the church would take the shoes off their children's feet... that if they get behind on a pledge, the church bill collector will be asking questions. So, let us start by addressing these fears.

First, in the Bible, money is but one portion of stewardship. Thumb through this booklet and see for yourself. It's much bigger than that!

The Spirit's leading shouldn't be confused with giving on emotional impulse. Instead, when money is the subject, you're asked:

- *To think it through*, slowly and deliberately. To run the numbers... to use your mind.
- *To talk it through* with your spouse and family.
- *To pray it through* and then give at the Lord's specific leading.

This is an unhurried, carefully considered process. It is understood that one's financial situation could change. Right on the form, in print, as *part of* the commitment, it says you promise to contact the church office and revise your commitment should your financial circumstances change. That's better terms than you got on your car loan!

Some people freak out when they're asked to seek God's definite direction in giving. One reason is that they don't have experience in listening for the Spirit's leading... in *any area* of life. So, it strikes them like something one would do in a cult group — like eating live chickens. But Romans 8:14 tells us, "All who are *led by the Spirit* of God are sons of God." Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice" (John 10:27). The Bible tells us that hearing the voice of God comes standard... for every believer.

Today's Prayer Guidance:

O Lord, You are my Shepherd.

You lead me and direct my steps.

It is in my heart to follow Your leading. I want to do Your will.

Please enable my spirit to recognize Your voice

And lead me in the right paths that I might honor Your name.



Recognizing God's Will

In dialing into God's distinctive plan for our lives, there are several gates through which our choices must pass:

The first gate: *Is it biblical?* Regardless of any subjective feelings we may have... or how circumstances seem to have “supernaturally” fallen into place... God has spoken! And the Holy Spirit isn't one to change his mind. 1 Timothy 3:16-17: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” The Bible shows us the right path, it warns us when we get off the right path, it guides us into getting back onto the right path, and it equips us to serve God.

Are we approaching our evaluation from a committed heart? Most believers are familiar with Romans 12:2 and its call for commitment, but notice how the verse connects commitment to knowing God's will. “Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God—what is good and well-pleasing and perfect” (NET).

Did we seek advice from godly people? Did we truly *hear* their questions? Or, were our answers really about proving what we already wanted to do was OK? Proverbs 20:18 tells us to, “Finalize plans with counsel” (cp. 11:14; 19:20–21).

Do we have the right motives? “Jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.” In contrast, “the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere” (James 3:15, 17, NLT).

Did we wait for God's timing? Sometimes, we want to pick the fruit before it's ripe. Satan rushes us; God makes us wait (Isaiah 40:8).

Do we have a holy peace about it? Or does something seem off? Colossians 3:15 urges us, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.”

Is the door of opportunity open? Paul once extended his stay in Ephesus because “a wide door for effective work has opened to me” (1 Corinthians 16:8).

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Father, please compose my spirit and set it at rest.

Free me from being driven, insistent, impatient.

Cause my heart to want the right things for the right reasons

And to wait for them to come at the right time.

Since You save Your best for those who wait on You.



Ask!

Not every decision is a moral decision. If I'm picking my socks for the day, the color selection usually comes down to good judgment. I'm not in sin if I do a poor job of matching my clothes. If I'm considering a career change, that's usually not a matter of right and wrong, so much as a "wisdom decision."

Wisdom is using insight and gathered information to, in light of light of biblical principles, make good choices. James tells us what to do when we're in need of wisdom:

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (vs. 5).

Ask God. Asking shows a dependence on God. Asking demonstrates humility. Asking expresses a recognition of God's wisdom. One who asks is aware that God's ways are higher than our ways. Our very asking implies that.

There are different ways people ask God for wisdom. There are some who know exactly what they want to do and ask God to stop them if he doesn't want them to pursue that path. There are some who don't want to do what God has already clearly revealed; they dare God to *make them* do it. Then, there are those who really don't know what the wise course of action would be. They want to do God's will; they are simply at a loss as to what their next step should be.

When we ask God for wisdom, he "gives generously... without reproach." That is, he gives us all the wisdom you need and never fusses at us for having to ask.

The Lord doesn't limit his leading to a special few. He "gives his wisdom generously *to all*." This is a promise to his every child.

God *wants us* to know his will. He doesn't bury his will in an immeasurable mountain of unimaginable regulations. So that, when we can't find it, he can pounce on us with the charge, "Ignorance of the law is no excuse!" Instead, God graciously leads us. He may not give us the full itinerary, but the Lord always shows us our next step.

Today's Prayer Guidance:

*Almighty God, the secret things belong to You.
The mysteries and the details of Your eternal plan
They are Yours alone to know.
But thank You for giving us the promises in Your Word
And the indwelling presence of Your Spirit.
Please order my steps to follow Your plan.*



Being an Active Listener... With God

In a stewardship campaign, in determining a definite amount to give, in practical terms, what should that look like?

First, start with God. Don't wait until you've made a decision and then ask him to bless it. In today's reading, God's people were deceived. Their crucial mistake is found in verse 9: They "did not ask counsel from the LORD." Begin by asking God to guide you through the steps of the process and to a specific answer in the end. Before discussing it, agree with your spouse that you will each seek God's definite leadership.

Next, gather all the information. Your budget... every fact and factor... holding each facet up to the light and looking at it from every angle. Consider your decision in light of your commitments to God and to others. What are my priorities? Am I expending my resources in line with those priorities? (Something isn't a priority merely because we say it is. Our priorities are what we choose when it comes down to a choice.)

Choose to be a part of what the Lord is doing through his church. What's *the least* I should do? What is *the most* I would want to do? What do I sense that God is giving me a *desire* to do? Can I do this without endangering other important priorities in life?

Discuss your impressions with your spouse. Say it out loud; see how it sounds. Bounce your ideas off the other. It's surprising how often you both will have in mind the exact same amount. When there is a difference, discuss the possibility of going with the larger amount. Pray it through, think it through, talk it through... until you're sure.

We should use a similar process in considering a job offer, a career change, choosing a college to attend, and in making other decisions.

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Lord Jesus, You are the Head of the Church and its only Owner.

Holy Spirit, You have baptized me into the body.

Heavenly Father, I want to be engaged in Your plan for the ages

A participant and not a spectator.

Please show me when I fit in and what to do next.

Speak, for Your servant is listening.



Keeping in Step with the Spirit: A Lifestyle

Our lives should be permeated by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The promptings of the Spirit should rule our choices. Flashes of insight from the Spirit should make us more discerning. The Spirit's enabling should produce spiritual results in our service. These experiences should be so frequent and so normal that they are part of our lifestyle. They are not reserved for the mountain-top experiences only. They are also for the valley's work. They result from a thousand little choices.

When the Apostle Paul appealed to the Philippian church to choose unity, he based his appeal in this way, "If, then, there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, *if any fellowship with the Spirit...*" (Philippians 2:1, CSB). Of course, believers *do* experience fellowship with the Holy Spirit. So, it is a natural basis of his appeal.

We see an example of the Spirit's promptings as the old saint, Simeon, "came in the Spirit into the temple" (Luke 2:27). There he would see the Messiah in his lifetime, just as the Lord had promised him.

"Praying at all times in the Spirit" is a command in Ephesians 6:18 (also Jude 20). This means we listen for the Spirit's guidance as we pray, being alert to his reminders and his promptings. It means we rely on him to help us pray when we don't know what to pray for (Romans 8:26-27).

The Holy Spirit generates a new love for the Lord and for other believers. Hence, Colossians 1:8 speaks of believers' "love in the Spirit" (cp. vs. 4-5; Romans 15:30).

Since the Holy Spirit gave us new life in the new birth, we should be careful to keep our lives in alignment with him. "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16).

Today's Praise Guidance:

Eternal Father, thank You for sending us the Spirit.

I confess my inability to know Your will

And my lack of power to walk in Your ways.

Indwelling Holy Spirit, thank You for Your abiding presence

Please enable me to hear Your cadence and to keep in step.

¹ In Acts 19:21, Paul "resolved in the Spirit" — that is, he made a decision as the Holy Spirit led him to understand God's will. The NIV and NET understand this to refer to Paul's human spirit and refers to him making a decision.

WEEK THREE

Stewards of Our Time

“David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep”

— Acts 13:36

It's possible for a nation can grow its economy and it's possible to increase one's personal wealth. We can grow our family. We can increase our knowledge. We can expand our library. We can enlarge our sphere of influence. But our time is finite. We must make it count.

In Acts 13, Paul is in a synagogue proclaiming the resurrection. In verse 36, while explaining that an Old Testament prophecy didn't refer to David, who died, he briefly touches on the point: *David served God's purpose in his own generation*. That's the only time in which any of us can count in the Kingdom; in our own generation.

This week, we will reflect on our lives and making them count in God's kingdom.



What the Bible Says About Time

Your life is time. And the Bible has some things to say about it.

Our time is surprisingly short. It blazes down the tracks and then, suddenly, locks up the breaks; *ride's over!* "What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes."

Only those who live in light of the brevity of life are prepared to live. Twice, in the book of Psalms we see this insight being sought in prayer.

- "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." (Psalm 90:12)
- "O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am!" (Psalm 34:2)

Life is uncertain. Proverbs 27:1 says, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring." A sudden accident. A diagnosis. A financial setback. Downsized. A divorce you didn't see coming. We may have plans and talent and determination, but we are not the masters of our fate.

There are seasons of opportunity. Henry L. Lyon once compared life's opportunities to something floating down the river, carried along by the current. Sitting in his boat, a fisherman may be able to easily reach out and pluck it out of the water. But if, at that moment, he fails to reach out and take it, the opportunity has come and gone. There is a past due date for salvation. "Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). And how many times have Christian witnesses bumped themselves on the forehead at the sudden realization they had just missed an opportunity!

What is done in time can impact eternity. That's what Jesus means when he urges us to "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6:20). C. T. Studd wrote, "Only one life twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last." Indeed, "The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." (1 John 2:17).

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Triune God, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You are the living God and eternal King.

Please teach me to number my days

To remain conscious of my short season on this earth

And to calculate eternal gain.

Redeeming the Time

Coach Paul Bryant carried in his wallet a copy of a poem by Heartsill Wilson. He said that he re-read it often. Sometimes he'd read it to one of his players. There are several videos on YouTube where you can hear him read it.

*This is the beginning of a new day.
God has given me this day to use as I will.
I can waste it or use it for good.
What I do today is important
as I am exchanging a day of my life for it.
When tomorrow comes, this day will be gone forever.
Leaving something in its place I have traded for it.
I want it to be a gain, not loss—good, not evil.
Success, not failure, in order that
I shall not forget the price I paid for it.*

There are two lines one should notice; did you catch these? “I am exchanging a day of my life for it” and “Leaving something in its place *I have traded for it.*”

In today's passage, Ephesians 5:16 (also Colossians 4:5), there is a phrase. In modern versions, it is translated something along the lines of “making the most of the opportunity” or “making the best use of the time.” The King James and the New King James Versions translate it “redeeming the time.” It is a word related to commercial activity, literally meaning to “buy out.” Picture the old black and white movies where an aggressive businessman tells someone over the telephone, “Buy up every available share of stock in that company!” One form of this word referred to buying someone out of slavery. It's used twice in Galatians of our redemption in Christ (3:13; 4:5). We're being told that time and its seasons of opportunity are a valuable commodity to be bought up.

You can waste your life, spend your life, or invest your life. For what are you exchanging the days of your life?

Today's Prayer Guidance:

*Dear God, please give me the eyes to see the opportunities —
Opportunities, to serve You, to encourage others, to share the gospel.
Deliver me from the painful moments of delayed insight
When I slap my forehead in the realization of an opportunity lost.
Please guide me, moment by moment, to see them
To invest time, and not merely waste it or spend it.*

¹ Dr. Heartsill Wilson, 1954



What is Your Life's Purpose?

If most Christians were asked if Jesus has brought meaning to their lives, most would reply, “Of course, he has!” And what exactly would that purpose be?

Christians would all affirm some general life principles. We exist to know God and to enjoy God in a way that is both reverent and relational. It starts with worship. It includes our witness. We exist to glorify God.

Our Designer defines our life purpose. Ecclesiastes describes a person trying on “for size” various life pursuits. But none of these self-assigned quests fit. A secular life — a life lived without reference to God — is meaningless... even if one attends church on Sundays. Some people work only to make money to play. Yet, when our lives are only about trifling little things, we get bored. Unless we are living for something bigger than ourselves, we feel unfulfilled.

God has a plan for your whole life. Bear in mind your family priorities. Your church commitments. Your career goals. None of us live in isolation. Consider your personal strengths and the gifts God enables you to bring to the table.

The Lord has an eternal plan for good works prepared in advance for you to do (Ephesians 2:10). But does this represent for you, so far, an unlived life?

What would you want people to be able to say about you at your funeral?

Could you put your life's purpose into words? Because, unless we can articulate it, we're not as clear on it as we might think. Pause and write a first draft of your *personal* mission statement below:

Now, read your mission statement. Ask yourself if it's distinctively Christian or if a “nice” lost person could have written it. If the latter, reword and refocus it.

One day each of us will approach the end of life. Each of us want to be able to pray, as Jesus prayed, “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.” (John 17:4, NKJV)

Today's Prayer Guidance:

*Everlasting Father, from all eternity past, You've had plans for me
An itinerary of adventures in serving You
An agenda of good works and usefulness
To help others and to bless Your church.
Thank You that Your eternal plan includes me.*



Strategically Placed

Ever wish you lived in a different period in history. Or perhaps in a difference place on earth? In Acts 17, Paul explains how we are each strategically placed scheduled in history, explaining how we are each placed so as to provide each one his or her optimum opportunity to find God.

“And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us...” (vs. 26-27)

When God put his children in time out in the Babylonian exile, Jeremiah told them it would last seventy years. They were to settle in for the duration, get married, have children, build houses. They were to “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf” (29:7).

Once, during the exile, they faced a life-threatening crisis. However, Queen Esther was herself a Jew, and was in a unique position to come to their aid. She would have to risk her own life to do so. One would be tempted to try to play it safe. Mordechai challenged her with these words:

“For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14)

First Chronicles 12 recounts the time representatives of the twelve tribes came to Hebron to turn over the kingdom of Saul to David. Some groups had been early adopters, but now others pledge their loyalty to David, also. Among them were the leaders of Issachar, whom the Bible describes as: “Men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (verse 32).

So, look around you. Know where you are and why you’re there. There will be clues to tell you. Understand the season you’re in. Go where you’re sent. Bloom where you’re planted. Stay in the moment. Care about your people. Represent the King and his Kingdom. Fulfill your mission.

Today’s Prayer Guidance:

Sovereign God, Lord of history, Lord over the whole earth.

It is no accident that I am in this period of history and in this place.

According to Your cosmic plan for all the ages.

Please enable me to remember that I’m not randomly here, but placed here

For Your purposes and for Your service.



Walking With God

What does it mean to walk with God? Walking with God is *relational*. It means we spend time alone *with him*, maintaining a vibrant devotional life. We read and reflect on God's Word. We engage in serious prayer. We listen for his voice, being alert to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Walking with God is a lifelong process of *alignment*. We learn to walk in his ways (Deuteronomy 10:12-13)... because he's not going to walk in ours.

Walking with God includes *walking before God*. As Jacob came to the end of his life, the Bible tells us that "He blessed Joseph and said, 'The God *before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked*, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day...'" (Genesis 48:15).

At the temple dedication, Solomon praised the Lord for "showing steadfast love to your servants *who walk before you* with all their heart" (1 Kings 8:23).

Walking before God means living our lives in recognition of his continuous presence, ever conscious we are an open book to him. We don't try to hide anything. He already knows, anyway.

We are, by nature, self-protective. We want to avoid the hurt of conviction... the pain of repentance... the humiliation of looking in the mirror to confront that dark, fallen stranger, glaring back at us. So, humility is needed. In today's reading, the prophet Micah lays out the requirements the Lord has of us, the last of which is to "*walk humbly with your God*" (Micah 6.8).

Genesis 5:24 tells us, "Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." One gets the picture of daily appointment and long walks. One can almost hear the Lord say, "Enoch, we're closer to my house than yours; why don't you just come home with me?" For a believer, the experience of going to Heaven should be a natural transition, not culture shock. It should be a continuation and intensification of the heavenly foretaste our earthly walk had provided.

Walking with God requires the investment of time... over time.

Today's Prayer Guidance:

*Gracious God, as I seek Your direction for the various parts of life
I rejoice that there is one constant theme in each
That I get to live my life with You.*

Walking before You in fellowship and communion.

*Please cause my heart to delight in dedicated times alone with You
And though the course of each day, to embrace Your abiding presence.*

WEEK FOUR

Stewards of Our Wealth

“Since you excel in so many ways—in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, and your love from us—I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving.” — 1 Corinthians 8:7, NLT

Jesus talked about money more than anyone else in the Bible. He discusses money in ways both literal and metaphorical. It's found in his parables, in his warnings, and as he discusses our heart's truest values. There does seem to be a golden cord connecting our wallet to our hearts. In the verse above, Paul tells us that giving is a Christian grace we should excel in, and until we excel in it, we can grow in it.



Renounce Ownership

Sometimes, a church has a stewardship emphasis of some kind, and regardless of how mildly everything is worded, how low key it's all presented, there is so often that guy who gruffly responds, "No one is going to tell me what to do with my money!" It reminds one of the saying, "If you throw a rock into a pack of dogs, the one you hit is the one that yelps." If this person were to say everything he really means by this sentence, he would complete it with the phrase, "...not even Jesus Christ."

As stewards, we manage that which belongs to someone else. The Lord owns it all.

- "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein." (Psalm 24:1)
- "Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it." (Deuteronomy 10:14)
- "For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills." (Psalm 50:10)

In fact, as Christ's bond-servant, you don't even own yourself — "You are not your own. for you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

To really make a difference in the eternity, we must renounce ownership. We must realize that we are here for only a short time.

It is said that one way to capture wild monkeys is to cut a hole in a coconut and to chain the coconut to a tree. Then, place a shiny object in the coconut. When a monkey sees the shiny object he reaches in to get it, but his balled-up fist won't fit back out the hole in the coconut. They are able to capture the monkey because he won't let go of his treasure. And sometimes, we are trapped because we won't let go.

Today's Prayer Guidance:

*Father, purchased at horrific cost, I am Yours
and everything in my hands belongs to You.*

*Please guide me in managing
what You've so graciously entrusted to me
To live my life and to do Your work in Your way.*

Stewardship Isn't Just About What You Give to the Church

When the church speaks of stewardship, some hear it demanding, “Give more money to the church!” Actually, what we are discussing represents a much bigger picture than that! It’s about arranging your time to match your life priorities. It’s about the special people in your life, your family, entrusted to your care. About loving your wife like Christ loves his bride, the church. About helping your children develop as disciples. About being a steward of your home and using it to show hospitality. About using your spiritual gifts and learned skills to serve the Lord. About working on the job as an act of worship and adding value to the company which employs you. It’s not about your offerings, only.

For example, 1 Timothy 5:8 says, “If anyone does not provide for his own family, especially for his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” So, if a deadbeat dad gives a million dollars a year to his church, he’s still not a good steward.

In today’s passage, we read how Joseph, though betrayed by his brothers, experienced God’s blessing. No one would have realized it at the time, but God was preparing him to be Prime Minister of Egypt. His enslavement is the first stage in earning his Master’s in Government Administration. The Lord so blesses his work that his master “made him overseer in his house and over all that he had” (vs. 5). Joseph could say, “My master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge” (vs. 8). Because of his faithful stewardship, “The Lord blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field” (vs. 5).

Like Joseph, you are a steward. Everything you have and everything you are. Is the Master finding you faithful?

Today’s Prayer Guidance:

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your tender mercies

Your many gifts of grace entrusted to my care.

Thank You for my spouse and for our children.

Thank You for my job. Thank You for our circle of friends.

Please prompt and inspire me in doing all I should do for them.



The Tithe is the Lord's

A.M. Smith told about the time he said to his wife, “Vi, I think we should start tithing.” She agreed and, though they weren’t sure how they were going to pull it off, they began. They noticed their daughters didn’t seem to need to go to the doctor as often and things like that. It was like the tithing farmer explained, “The chickens lay more eggs.” The Lord says, “Test me now and this and see...”

What is a tithe? The word doesn’t refer generally to making religious donations; it means giving ten percent. So, is tithing still an expectation for New Testament Christians? Some advocate “generous giving,” rather than tithing. Some would say that tithing is strictly Old Testament Law. Or, is tithing a timeless principle?

After Abraham rescued Lot and his family, on the way home, he met the King-Priest, Melchizedek. He blessed Abraham and “Abraham gave him a tenth of everything” (Genesis 14:20). This event *predated the Law* by around 400 years. Adrian Rogers used to say, “If we give less under grace than we would under the Law, that would be a disgrace to grace.” Jesus did speak of a righteousness that *exceeds* (Matthew 5:20).

Some understand “generous giving” to be an excuse to *give less...* giving what’s *left over* after as many trips to the beach as they desire, eating out multiple nights per week, and playing till they’re tired... they’ll plop a twenty in the offering plate. The median household income in the United States is \$80,610. \$20 per week would represent 1.3% of that amount. Would that really be a statement that one is out to change the world?

Or, would “generous giving” look more like this? Some believers chose to live what has been called a “simplified lifestyle,” getting by on as little as possible in order to give more to the support of missions and other Christian causes.

Jesus sees the widow’s mites, each small but incredibly sacrificial offering (Luke 21:1-4). The church isn’t after the last penny of the elderly couple who’ve outlived their retirement and now subsist on a minimal Social Security check. But, for those of us in more typical circumstances, the tithe is a timeless benchmark for giving... for many of us, a starting place.

Today’s Prayer Guidance:

*Almighty God, You who supplies our every need
Who opens the windows of Heaven and pours out blessings on us.
I make Yours the first check, that I might not take what is Yours
And I give from the heart, as an act of worship
Knowing I could never outgive the Lord.*

Offerings

Sometimes, we give an offering as an expression of thanksgiving. The Lord has shown us great grace in some way, and we want to express our gratitude in a tangible way. King Hezekiah restored worship at God's temple. The Bible says "the assembly brought sacrifices and *thank offerings*, and all who were of a willing heart brought burnt offerings" (2 Chronicles 29:31).

Sometimes, we give an offering to join in a great cause. Offerings allow us to engage in strategic giving. When they were preparing to build the Tabernacle in the wilderness, "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). Notice three phrases: "whose heart moved them," "as a freewill offering," and "to the Lord." They were under no compulsion to give; these were heart-felt offerings, freely given. These people *wanted* to be part of the cause.

Sometimes, we can be tempted to give our offerings to the "shiny new cause." Giving to the exciting new ministry may seem more fulfilling, but we mustn't forget the "grown-up giving" which pays salaries and the power bill. Such giving isn't always exciting, but it's always necessary.

In setting an offering goal, the question isn't so much about what we will give, as what we will give up in order to give it. David was once in a position where he needed to offer a sacrifice to avert a plague. The landowner offered to give the king the land and the animals for sacrifice. But King David refused, saying, "No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:24).

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Praise the Lord!

You have done so much for me, blessing me in so many ways

And I give to You to express my thankfulness.

You have included me in Your work in the world

And I give to join You in what You're doing.

I make sacrifices where I feel the pinch that You might feel my love for You.



Legacy Giving

A legacy is a benefit handed down by someone in the past. This may be a parent who leaves an inheritance. Or it may be someone who paved the way for others to have a better life. An example would be the freedoms secured for us by the Founding Fathers.

We enjoy the legacy of our church, left to us by those who founded it and built it up through the years. They did that for the Lord... and for us! The legacy they left blesses us. But we don't want to be the kind of people who only enjoy the blessing; we want to leave a blessing!

Legacy giving flows from a "Kingdom Perspective." The Kingdom of God is about something much bigger and longer lasting than ourselves. It's about investing in eternity. It's about generations to come after us.

God wouldn't allow David to build the temple. So David made plans and gathered precious metals for Solomon to build it. David was willing to set the stage for the one who would follow. (1 Chronicles 28-29)

Every believer should be engaged, right now, in things of eternal value. While retirement is a time to enjoy some pleasures we had deferred until later, it's also a time to count in the Kingdom.

We can have a Christian will. Sure, we could leave it all to our son-in-law to spend on bass boats and beer... or we could continue giving tithes and offerings after we're gone. That's where most of our wealth is to be found and represents our best opportunity for significant giving.

"So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come." (Psalm 71:18)

Today's Prayer Guidance:

*O God, You whose years endure throughout all generations
Give me discerning eyes to see where to invest
That, in Your Kingdom, I may keep on counting
To help set a place at the table for others
That a generation yet to be born might praise Your name.*

WEEK FIVE

Stewards of Our Spiritual Gifts

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another,
as good stewards of God’s varied grace” — 1 Peter 4:10

God doesn’t expect us to serve him in our own power. He doesn’t throw us into the water and tell us, “Swim!” He give us abilities with which to serve him. And these spiritual gifts represent a stewardship.

The New Testament doesn’t contain a glossary with a list of definitions of the spiritual gifts. We have to take a clues from the word meaning, the context of its use, and by comparing other passages where the gift is mentioned. So, this subject must be approached with a measure of humility. What follows is a sampling of spiritual gifts and our best understanding of their meaning. These are provided in the hope that others will be helped in discovering their spiritual gifts and putting them to work.



What is a Spiritual Gift?

Spiritual gifts are supernaturally empowered specialties in Christian service, given to build up the church and to glorify God.

Spiritual gifts are supernaturally empowered. Spiritual gifts are not the natural talents we are born with, but rather supernatural capacities we receive from the Holy Spirit. A person without Christ, devoid of the Spirit, may be highly intelligent and possess many God-given talents, but will not possess a spiritual gift. Spiritual gifts are empowered by the Holy Spirit and produce spiritual results.

Spiritual gifts are specialties in Christian service. Every believer should be a Christian witness (2 Timothy 4:5), but some believers have the gift of evangelism; they are especially effective witnesses. Every believer is to practice good stewardship, but some believers have the gift of giving. Every believer should encourage others, but some believers have the gift of exhortation.

Spiritual gifts build up the church. Spiritual gifts are given for use in the context of the church. Each gift “promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part” (Ephesians 4:16).

Spiritual gifts glorify God. Peter encourages us to use our spiritual gifts from the right motives: “So that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ in everything” (1 Peter 4:10-11).

Every believer has a spiritual gift. So many church members have remarked, “I don’t have a spiritual gift!” What they generally mean is that they don’t have the ability to preach, teach, or sing. They’re saying they aren’t people who “lead from the front.” However, not every gift is a speaking gift nor is every gift used in leadership. The Bible teaches that, “A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:7).

So, if we are genuinely saved, we have a spiritual gift. It then becomes our responsibility, as believers, to “fan into flame the gift of God” (2 Timothy 1:6).

Today’s Prayer Guidance:

*Father, for every demand You make on our lives
You provide the dynamic.*

*There are no unempowered expectations.
You include us in Your work, then enable us to serve.
This in itself is a gift, for which I give thanks.*



How Do I Recognize My Spiritual Gift?

Your spiritual gift isn't a secret God keeping is from you. Here are eight questions to ask yourself as you clarify your gifting:

1. *Have I received Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior?* If the answer is *yes*, you have a spiritual gift.
2. *Am I walking in the Spirit?* Am I being led by the Spirit? If you are, the Spirit will be leading you to use your gift. "For all those led by God's Spirit are God's sons" (Romans 8:14). This verse tells us that every child of God is led by the Holy Spirit. So, how does he lead you to serve?
3. *What can I do now, which I couldn't do before I was saved?* What can I do now which I couldn't do before I was indwelt by the Holy Spirit?
4. *When I get busy serving the Lord, what do I find myself doing?* What do I want to do in such times? The truth is, God gives us desires to use our gifts. Philippians 2:13 says "God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him" (NLT).
5. *What needs and opportunities in the church's ministry do I see?* The needs you have the eyes to see — and about which you feel concern — can be a great indicator of your gifting. Like Jesus, who saw the multitude and felt compassion, and "so he began to teach them" (Mark 6:34). It works like that: You see a need, feel compassion for people, and you do something.
6. *What aspects of service do other believers affirm in you?* If you are around fellow Christians, they may remark, "Wow, that was a blessing; you must have the gift of..." A man named Joseph was such an encourager the apostles gave him a nick-name. It meant "son of encouragement." We all remember him by that nickname, Barnabas (Acts 3:36).
7. *Have I asked God to show me my gift?* James 1:5 promises, "Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him."
8. *As you read the lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament, which one says, "That's me, right there!"?* You get excited just thinking about serving in that way?

Today's Prayer Guidance:

*Spirit of God, please flow in my life in such a way
That it will fan into flame the gift You have placed within me.
Give me clarity concerning my part in the body
and a humble awareness of my place.*

Two Categories of Gifts

If asked, most American Christians would list two categories of spiritual gifts: preaching and leading music. However, today's passage mentions *speaking gifts* and *serving gifts*. Other passages (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 & 14, and Ephesians 4) enumerate more detailed lists. However, Peter is making a more general point on the proper use of our gifts, so he lumps all the gifts under these two headings. He urges, "*Whoever speaks*, as one who speaks oracles of God; *whoever serves*, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies" (vs. 11). Regardless of which category under which our gifts fall, we are given eight principles for their use:

All gifts are expressions of God's grace. "As each has received a gift as good stewards of God's varied grace." We are gifted by the grace of God.

All gifts are a stewardship from God. The Lord has entrusted you with an ability with which to serve him. It's not your gift to neglect or to misuse.

All gifts are to be used to serve others in the Lord's church. "As each has received a gift, use it to *serve one another*" — but not lord it over one another.

All gifts should be used with a conscious reliance on the leading and power of God. "Whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God" — when teaching, it's our job to accurately represent God's Word and to get it right. If we preach, we should strive to bring a message from God. You may have been incredibly skilled with your hands before you were even saved, but we are told, "whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies." One might think: "You don't have to have a spiritual gift to mow the lawn." However, in these cases, the divine empowerment comes in the ability to identify the needs and the selfless attitude with which such acts are offered to the Lord. These people often won't have to be asked; they'll volunteer! We should consciously trust the Spirit to do spiritual things through our tangible ministry.

All gifts should be used to bring glory to God. The glory isn't ours to steal (including by falling to the subtle temptation of drawing attention to ourselves by incessantly talking about how we want God to get all the glory) "...in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever."

Today's Prayer Guidance:

*Lord Jesus, Head over all things in the church,
Thank You for placing me in Your body with a purpose.
Holy Spirit, indwelling each believer, present among God's people
I confess my need of Your power and choose to rely on Your divine enablement.*



A Sampling of Spiritual Gifts

The Gift of Service: *The gift of service is the supernatural ability to help others in practical ways.*

This is the same word from which we get *deacon*; it refers to serving in general, though the term literally meant, *to wait on tables*. Such persons enjoy doing the non-glamorous, behind the scenes work. They can be very selfless and creative in identifying ways to help. They are often found on the sound crew, doing clean-up, doing data entry, putting letters on signs, etc.

See: Romans 12:7; 1 Corinthians 16:15; Hebrews 6:10

The Gift of Exhortation: *The gift of exhortation is the supernatural ability to come alongside a struggling brother, and bearing the Lord's presence, to provide encouragement, comfort, motivation, or biblical counsel.*

See: Romans 12:8; Acts 4:36; 11:19-23; 14:22; 1 Thessalonians 2:11; 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9; 2:15

The Gift of Giving: *The gift of giving is the spiritual specialty of giving to the Lord's work generously and from a selfless heart. God enables this person to acquire resources and leads them in strategically giving for the sake of the Kingdom.*

See: Romans 12:8

The Gift of Mercy: *The gift of mercy is the supernatural ability to show genuine compassion to those in distress, bringing to them a kind presence, and doing helpful gestures which relieve their anxiety, sorrow, or suffering.*

See: Romans 12:8

The Gift of Helps: *The gift of helps is the spiritual specialty of assisting another with practical needs that they might be freed to concentrate on spiritual ministry.*

Word Meaning: A compound word which means to accept the load of another and bear it in his place. To take up or grasp, to partner with and assist. One who aids or assists, a helper. "Those whose ministry it is to help others."

Some associate pastors and some church secretaries have this gift.

See: 1 Corinthians 12:28

Today's Praise Guidance:

Today Father, I thank You for those who serve Your people behind the scenes

Without being noticed or receiving credit.

*Show me what I can learn from those
whose greatest blessing is to be a blessing.*



More Spiritual Gifts

The Gift of Administration: *A person with the gift of administration is empowered by the Holy Spirit to organize resources and people to fulfill God's purposes in effective ministry.*

The word in Romans 12:8, *leads*, refers to one who is placed over others, who supervises. The gift has a nurturing nature (as opposed to throwing one's weight around). 1 Timothy 3:4-5, speaks of one whose role it is to "take care of the church of God." In 1 Corinthians 12:28, the word for administration is used of a helmsman, the pilot of a ship, responsible to guide the ship through storms, reefs, and rocks. It may be that the *leading* in Romans 12:8 refers to those managers who oversee the daily details and personally work with people to oversee a ministry, while the gift of administration in 1 Corinthians 12:28 refers to big picture leaders, who are involved in casting vision and delegating some of the ministry management.

The Gift of Evangelism: *The supernatural ability to relate to lost people, to winsomely initiate conversations about the gospel with them, to clearly communicate the message, and to be persuasive in so doing. Such persons have a greater burden for the lost and see results from their evangelistic efforts more frequently.*

In the New Testament, the word, *preach*, doesn't refer to a style of communication (tone of voice, faster-paced delivery, more emotion, etc. — that's our cultural perception), but instead focuses on gospel content.

See: Ephesians 4:11; Acts 8:35; 21:8; 2 Timothy 4:2, 5

The Gift of Discernment: *The supernatural ability to distinguish between that which of God and that which is not, between what is true and what is false. It is the ability to affirm the things of God and detect the presence of evil spirits, evil motives, and theological error. Note: This is not the gift of criticism.*

See: 1 Corinthians 12:10; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 2 Timothy 4:1; 1 John 4:1

Today's Prayer Guidance:

*Holy Father, please work in my spirit in such a way that my service to You
Is unpolluted by self-will, self-seeking, or self-promotion.
Instead, tie my heart to the Great Commission
So that, as I do my part, Your church is helped to grow
in both numbers and in strength.*

WEEK SIX

Final Thoughts

“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,
knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.

You are serving the Lord Christ.” — Colossians 3:23-24

This past Sunday was Commitment Sunday. Regular giving now begins (weekly, monthly, or however you needed to schedule it). What follows is one more devotional with a final word of encouragement.



Rewards

If you have considered the stewardship of your life and have made a faith commitment, you may find this new level of giving to be a greater challenge than you anticipated. So, let each one of us remind ourselves:

You can't do this without the Lord. Once you have sensed God's leading to a specific amount and turned in your commitment form, it's not over. Continue to trust the Lord for his guidance and for his provision. There may be some "big bill" months ahead. Some unexpected challenges. Keep trusting God.

You can be tempted to quit. Some of these challenges may cause you to want to throw in the towel. There may be frustrations in your Christian walk and service as well as your giving. Hear Galatians 6:9: "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."

You can't outgive the Lord. R.G. LeTourneau was a Christian and a multi-millionaire. He lived off 10% in order to give 90% to the Lord. He testified to a fact which other givers have affirmed: "I shovel it out, and God shovels it back, but God has a bigger shovel."

God sees. As we invest our lives and resources into eternity, God does not fail to take notice of even the smallest sacrifice for the cause. Hebrews 6:10 says, "God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints."

As Paul urges us "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Today's Praise Guidance:

*Lord, I do not have the greatest wealth
From which to support Your work
But I give You thanks that You have more than supplied our needs
And that as we consistently give, it will add up
To an amount that is not insignificant.
Please accept our small sacrifice as an offering to You
And as an acceptable expression of worship.*



PERSONAL GROWTH WORKSHEET

FOR THE WEEK OF: _____

Christ: The Hub of My Life

Lordship of Christ: Are there any controversies between God and myself? List areas of surrender and fresh obedience below:

Holy Spirit: Am I currently living in dependence on the Holy Spirit to empower me? List any area the Lord has shown me that I need to depend more on Him:

Overcoming Sin: Are there any action steps I should take to be a clean vessel, useful to Christ? List any sins to confess, people to see, accountability partners to seek out, etc.:

Focused on & Enjoying God: Am I abiding and staying plugged into Christ, and enjoying Him? List any action steps I need to take to get better plugged into God:

Bible Study: How God Speaks to Me

Key Verse for Me from my Time in the Word Today:

Sunday: _____

Monday: _____

Tuesday: _____

Wednesday: _____

Thursday: _____

Friday: _____

Saturday: _____

A Promise I Need to Claim:

I Need to Remember and Obey:



Prayer: How I Communicate with God

Thanksgiving: List things God has done for me lately for which I am thankful:

Praise: List qualities of God that I have seen lately which make me love and adore Him more:

Petitions: Right now, what heart burdens am I trusting God for that He alone can handle? List areas of dependence and trust below:

Intercession: Praying for Others

List other people for who need God to intervene in their lives right now:

Fellowship: How I Relate With Others

Check the qualities that I need to develop to better relate to others as a Christian:

Ability to control tongue	Goodness	Not harsh	Responsible
Considerate, thoughtful	Graciousness	Not self-centered	Self-control
Diligence	Humility	Outgoing, friendly	Self-discipline
Encourager	Initiative	Patience	Teachable spirit
Faithfulness	Kindness	Reasonable	Uncritical spirit
Good listener	Loyalty	Respectfulness	Unselfish

List any conflicts I need to resolve, any bad friends I need to avoid, any people I need to encourage, anyone with whom I need to spend time, any disciples I need to mentor, etc.:

Career / School: Serving the Lord Heartily

List goals I should set and action steps I should take this week for my place of work:

Witnessing: How I Influence those Who Don't Yet Know the Lord

List new people God has brought into my life. Do I know if they are Christians?

List people with whom I need to have a conversation about Jesus:

Praying for My Children

Name: _____

Spiritual Condition: *Uncertain/Find Out Lost Backslidden Saved & Growing*
(Mark one)

Character Qualities I'm Asking God to Develop in Him or Her
(Mark all that apply)

Ability to control tongue	Graciousness	Not self-centered	Respectfulness
Considerate, thoughtful	Humility	Outgoing, friendly	Responsible
Courage	Initiative	Patience	Self-control
Diligence	Joy	Peace	Self-discipline
Faithfulness	Kindness	People skills	Teachable spirit
Good listener	Love	Pure thought-life	Uncritical spirit
Goodness	Not harsh	Reasonable	Unselfish

Protect Them Unto Yourself— From:

Disease & Accidents Evil People Wrong Friends Temptation False Thinking

Present Needs & Challenges:

Their Future

Future Spouse:

Patience to wait for each other Prepare them for each other
To be unwilling to settle for anyone else To value the qualities the other has to offer
To bless the marriage of his/her parents To guide them as they rear him/her
That his/her future spouse will be saved young and grow to be strong in the Lord

Education/Employment:



Praying for Lost Friends

Name: _____

“And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. — 2 Timothy 2:24-26

Experiences and hurts that have misinformed their thinking:

Truths they do not understand or refuse to accept:

The sins to which they are held captive and from which they need deliverance:

Things that hinder them from coming to Christ:

Pray...

- *That God will arrange circumstances in their lives to cause them to think about Jesus. That God will meet them in their thoughts and reason with them.*
- *That God will send just the right people to share Jesus at just the right moment.*
- *That God will cause them to sense the love of Jesus for them and attract them to Christ.*
- *That God will deliver them from the traps and lies of Satan.*
- *That God will make the light come on and they will get it.*
- *That God will convict them of their sins and impress the urgency of salvation upon them.*
- *That God will make them come to their senses and give them a repentant heart.*

Action Steps for Me to Take:

One-Sentence Testimony Worksheet

Before I became a Christian...

I struggled with: _____

I was looking for: _____

I thought: _____

I felt: _____

I was afraid that: _____

My goal was: _____

I was always disappointed by: _____

I gave almost religious devotion to: _____

I tried finding _____ in _____

Since I became a Christian... (Or, Since I began to take my faith more seriously...)

I feel more: _____

I fear _____ less

I continue to struggle with _____, but one of the things that has really helped me is: _____.

When I went through _____, I learned _____ about myself.

As I have worked on my Christian commitment, I have grown...

In _____

And had to face my _____

I have discovered a new _____

I realized that _____

Being in church...

Has helped me _____

Made a big difference for me when _____

You can download additional prayer worksheets at:
www.smalltownbaptist.net/strategies.htm

