Called to Be the Church Congregational Giving Program  
A Five-Week Worship Program

Discipleship *Is* Stewardship

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# Introduction

Discipleship *is* stewardship. That phrase might seem simple and obvious, and yet the implications are far-reaching for those of us who seek to walk in the way of Jesus. Discipleship is stewardship opens our eyes to the reality that everything we see is a gift from God, entrusted to our stewardship, and how we manage these gifts is an act of discipleship, a spiritual practice. How we view stewardship says much about who we are as faithful people, for stewardship grounds us in the present while focusing us on God’s mission through Jesus. You simply cannot separate the two. Maybe that’s why Jesus talked more about money and the love of God than anything else during his ministry. Stewardship is the lifestyle of the disciple!

This year, a new *Called to Be the Church* program focuses on Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth found in 2 Corinthians 9:6–15 and will address issues related to gratitude, commitment, relationship, abundance, and thanksgiving. Together, these five aspects of discipleship are embodied in a full life of stewardship. Each week includes a complete worship outline, including a sermon, with hymn suggestions from *Voices United* and *More Voices*, and a children/youth/all ages program. The material can be used as is or adapted to your local context. Please have a look through all five weeks as some activities are designed to carry over from one week to the next and require more preparation. Also bear in mind that some activities assume a five-week series and will need to be adapted if you plan to have five different times over the year to cover the material.

Each week, you will also find a module for Stewardship@Home. It’s designed to be used by households of all sizes. In keeping with our belief that stewardship is a lifestyle of the disciple, the writers of this five-week program are encouraging participants to recognize the home as part of the process of Christian nurturing and learning. The @Home portions are designed to be a time for everyone in the family to participate. It is a way of continuing the conversation about how discipleship is stewardship and how we are all enriched in every way when we share the best we have to offer for God’s mission in the world.

This year, we’ve included two pieces in worship that help connect each Sunday to the overall theme. David Kai has written a special piece of music, [“This Indescribable Gift”](#_This_Indescribable_Gift) (see the last pages of this file) and given anyone using *Called to Be the Church* permission to use it. The song is meant to be used each week as a way of tying all five worship experiences together. You’ll find a suggestion about where to include it in each worship.

The second is an opportunity to use personal stewardship faith stories or testimonies in each worship. We know you have stories and we want to give people an opportunity to share their stories about how God has enriched them in every way and how they continue to respond to God. You might choose to ask the person to speak about how something in their life is linked to that week’s focus. You might provide guiding questions such as:

* How do you understand words like gratitude, commitment, relationship, abundance, and thanksgiving?
* How do you live your life as a response to God’s blessing?
* Why do you support this ministry with your time, talent, and treasure?
* What does it mean for you to live a life enriched in every way by God?

Other tips for individuals sharing testimony:

* Encourage the speaker to talk for no more than 2–3 minutes.
* It’s helpful to have a written script.
* You might want to pre-record the person’s testimony and play it in worship.
* You might want to use the content as part of your digital ministry. (Don’t forget to obtain the person’s permission.)
* You might want to use an interview style where someone asks questions that have been rehearsed in advance.
* Encourage people to keep it personal: “This is where I see/feel/hear God and this is how/why I respond.”
* Remember, there is no wrong way to give your testimony, your faith story.

Sharing testimonies might be new for your community, and you might need to prepare your congregation by introducing what’s happening and why. We don’t often talk publicly about why we engage in and support ministry, and yet there is tremendous power in personal testimony; after all, that’s how the early church was built!

We commend this year’s program to you with the hope that it will be of benefit to you and your faith community. Please take some time while you use the material and after you have completed the material to evaluate and let us know how you found it. This will assist future writers and will enable the continued improvement of the materials to be useful to you and other communities of faith.

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# Week 1: Gratitude and Discipleship

## LITURGY

### Gather

#### Welcome

This is the first week of a five-part series on Giving and Discipleship in which we look more closely at 2 Corinthians 9. Today, the focus of our worship is on gratitude and how the spiritual practice of gratitude can ground our journey as disciples of Jesus. We can and should nurture this practice that is also the foundation of our ability to give generously.

#### Acknowledgement of Traditional Territories

(*If it is your community’s practice, you are encouraged to insert a Territory Acknowledgement here. A good source for naming the original inhabitants of your community and learning more about Territory Acknowledgement is* [*native-land.ca*](http://native-land.ca/)*.*)

#### Candle Lighting

As we gather to worship, we light this candle to remember the light and love that Jesus shared with so many. He did not keep this light to himself. After Jesus died, his friends continued to share the light. For generations upon generations the light has been shared, and love continues; Jesus is still with us. Today, in love, we welcome the light, the light of the world.

#### Call to Worship

One: We gather to give thanks, O Creator God.

**All: Holy One, we are here.**

One: Be with us as we pray and sing together.

**All: Holy One, we are here.**

One: Be with us in our words, in our listening, and in our hearts.

**All: Holy One, we are here**

One: We are here to worship, to remember the gifts flowing from you, O Creator God, and to give thanks.

#### Opening Prayer

God of infinite blessings, you touch our lives with love and blessings all around us. We come to this place today ready to hear your voice working through us, ready to celebrate your spirit among us. Help us to be open to your Word and to answer your call to each one of us. Amen.

#### Opening Song

“I Can Feel You Near Me God” (*More Voices* 48), or “Make a Joyful Noise” (Psalm 100) (*Voices United* 820)

#### Prayer of Confession

Gracious God, we know that we can get caught up in feeling powerless  
and in the hopelessness of our situation.  
We find it hard to see the blessings that surround us.  
We can get rooted in despair,  
caught up in confusion or anger at what is happening in our world.  
Forgive us, we pray.  
(*Time for silent prayer*)

#### Words of Assurance

Our journey of discipleship does not end with powerlessness or lost hope.  
Love wins; through the risen Christ we know that hope is eternal.  
God’s love and grace is all around us, freely and generously given;  
it is within us and flows through us.  
God’s love is everlasting and sustains us on the journey. Thanks be to God.

#### Response

“Don’t Be Afraid” (MV 90) or “Spirit of the Living God” (VU 376) v. 1

#### Passing the Peace of Christ

### Engage

#### All Ages Theme Conversation

(*Share the theme video (optional)*:

Gratefulness.org, *A Grateful Day*, with Br. David Steindl-Rast, [gratefulness.org/grateful-day](https://gratefulness.org/grateful-day/) (5 min) *updated version*

or

Bible Project, *Generosity*, [bibleproject.com/explore/video/generosity](https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/generosity/) (5 min)

(*Have paper hearts on hand that have been cut out ahead of time. Consider handing one to each person as they arrive for worship. Begin a conversation about the spiritual practice of gratitude: the practice of giving thanks for the blessings in our life and nurturing a heart filled with gratitude to God. You might begin with the following.*)

Do you have a special time of the day where you say thank you to God? You might do this in the morning, at meal times, or in the evening. Saying thank you to God for both the little blessings and big blessings in our lives helps us to trust God. Jesus taught us to share our blessings, and when our hearts are filled with thanks, it’s easy to share with others. The regular practice of saying thank you to God for our blessings helps us to want to share with other people—to share kind words and to share food. It also helps us to see when there are times to include other people in our play or when there are times to help them with a project. The regular practice of saying thanks to God is a part of learning to be a follower of Jesus.

(*Invite those gathered to name what they are thankful for in their lives. Each person is invited to write on their heart something or someone for whom they are thankful, or they might draw a picture.*)

(*You might use the hearts to decorate the communion table or another area central to your worship space.*)

Or

#### Testimony

(*A person, probably chosen ahead of time, shares how they use the spiritual practice of gratitude. They might share how it has helped them in their daily life and/or how a change in perspective toward gratitude has helped them deal with a difficult situation.*)

#### Song/Anthem/Special Music

[“This Indescribable Gift”](#_This_Indescribable_Gift_2) (see end of this file), or “It’s a Song of Praise to the Maker” (MV 30), or “Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow” (VU 541)

#### Scripture Reading

2 Corinthians 9:1–5 (6–15)  
Luke 19:1–10

#### Sermon

“Gratitude and Discipleship” (see [Week 1 Sermon Guide](#_SERMON_GUIDE:_Gratitude))

#### Song

“Creator God You Give Us Life” (MV 27), or “All Things Bright and Beautiful” (VU 291)

### Respond

#### Prayers of the People

God calls us to be a praying people so let us join our hearts in prayer.

Let us give thanks for the gifts of God, saying:  
**We give you thanks, Generous God.**

For the earth and the goodness of creation, the power of the earth to sustain us,  
the wisdom of people to care, to learn, and to transform,  
let us give thanks:  
**We give you thanks, Generous God.**

For the people who care and heal,  
the people who listen deeply,  
the ones who are the hands and feet of Christ in the world,  
let us give thanks:  
**We give you thanks, Generous God.**

For the people who guide and teach,  
the ones who mentor and educate,  
the people who inspire and create,  
for their wisdom and guidance,  
let us give thanks:  
**We give you thanks, Generous God.**

For those who stand up and speak out in truth,  
the people who work endlessly for justice, for liberation, for peace,  
the people who risk their lives for others,  
for those who walk in the way of Christ,  
let us give thanks:  
**We give you thanks, Generous God.**

Let us gather our voices in the prayer that Jesus taught us:

#### The Lord’s Prayer

#### Offering Our Gifts to God

#### Invitation to the Offering

As we have come to present our offerings at this table,  
we remember God’s love, freely given.  
We remember our calling to walk in the way of Christ Jesus, who is generous to all.  
I invite you to give voluntarily and generously, for you are disciples of Jesus.

#### Offering Song

“Grateful” (MV 182), or “We Give You but Your Own” (VU 542)

#### Offertory Prayer

Generous God, we bring ourselves, our gifts, our talents to you.  
Bless each one of us.  
Take us, our gifts, and all you have made us to be,  
that your work may be done in this place and in the world.  
Through the power of your Holy Spirit and in your name, we pray. Amen.

#### Closing Song

“Ev’ry Day Is a Day of Thanksgiving” (MV 185), or “This Is God’s Wondrous World” (VU 296)

### Sending Forth

#### Sending Forth and Blessings

As you go from this place,  
go with trust in God, the source of our blessings.  
Go with the spirit of gratitude,  
looking for the people and places to share generously,  
as we are a people rooted in God’s abundance.

May the love of God surround you, the Peace of Christ be within you,  
and the power of the Holy Spirit sustain you, now and always. Amen.

#### Sending Forth Song

“We Will Go with God” (MV 223), or “Let All Things Now Living” (VU 242) v. 1

## CHILDREN/YOUTH/ALL AGES FAITH FORMATION

### Introduction

We are beginning a five-week (or five-part) series focused on giving and discipleship. Today we begin the conversation with a focus on gratitude. When we regularly practise giving thanks to God, we cultivate a feeling of gratitude. It is from a place of gratitude that we share with others, willingly and generously.

### Preparation

The focus for this week is 2 Corinthians 9:1–5. Paul is writing to siblings in Christ who live in Corinth, encouraging the Corinthians to give generously to a collection he is making to help the Christians in Jerusalem. Paul asks that the gift from the Corinthians be voluntary.

As disciples, we, too, are being asked to give for the support of others in need. It is easier for us to be generous when we first practise gratitude—a feeling of appreciation and the act of thanking God for what we have in our life. When we practise saying thank you to God for the small and big things in our lives, we cultivate a sense of having enough. As followers of Jesus, and as our gratitude takes root in our lives, we are called to share with others. Jesus invites us to live as if God’s vision for the world is here and now.

***Supplies:*** Bible appropriate for the age group gathered; assortment of buttons

For the Gratitude Game: coloured sticks or pencil crayons

### Gather

#### Light the Christ Candle

#### Check In

Spend some time building community by going around the circle sharing names and inviting each participant (if they wish) to answer the check-in question for the day:

* In one word, how are you feeling today?

For young children, it is helpful to have emoji images showing different feelings. Display the images in the centre of the circle so the children can pick one to share. See [Appendix 1-1](#_Appendix_1-1:_Check-in) at the end of this section for sample check-in cards.

#### Button Prayers

Make sure there is at least one button for each person praying. Each person chooses a button. All are led in prayer with these instructions:

* Feel the hardness of the button and think about people who are going through hard times. Ask God to help them.
* Buttons are used to fasten clothing, bringing two pieces of a garment together. Ask God to bring together people who have argued and moved apart from one another. Pray that God will bring peace.
* Look at your button and see how many holes it has. Name that number of things for which you would like to say thank you to God and say thank you prayers.
* Look at the colour of the button and thank God for something that is that colour.
* Find someone who has the same coloured button as you. Say thank you to God for families. Ask God to bless them, to help them to live together, and to help them to love one another.
* Find someone who has a different button from you—it could be different in shape, size, or colour. Thank God for making everyone different and giving us all different gifts.
* Pray for the person you have found. Ask them what they would like God to help them with.

#### Song

“Like a Rock” (*More Voices* 92)

#### Story and Wondering

Retell 2 Corinthians 9:1–5 in your own words, emphasizing God’s call for us to share what we have with generosity, that is, our gifts are given freely and willingly.

Also share the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10) as a companion story. Explore what Zacchaeus gives in spite of what others think of him.

* What part of the story did you like best?
* What part of the story is the most important?
* What other than money can you give or share with others?
* Is there someone or something you can give money or time to in your church that will make a difference in your community?

For youth:

* Watch *Generosity* from The Bible Project, [bibleproject.com/explore/video/generosity](https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/generosity/).
* Explore the ideas of scarcity vs. abundance. Discuss where you see this active in our world today. What are some ways you can practise gratitude and live with a sense of God’s abundance?

If there is time, watch the video again. Ask the youth:

* What did you notice? What stood out for you?

### Respond

#### Gratitude Game

This is a game of pick up sticks. The leader holds a collection of coloured sticks or pencil crayons, stands the bundle on a hard surface, and then releases them so that the sticks fall randomly.

The goal is to remove individual sticks from the pile without moving the other sticks. Each colour represents something to be grateful for (see below for suggestions). Each participant in turn selects a stick to pull out. If they move another stick while trying to remove their stick,

they lose their turn and do not collect the stick. When a person successfully removes their stick, invite them to share something they are grateful for, according to the colour category of the stick. The player with the most sticks wins.

You might use the following guide for each colour:

* Red Sticks: Places you are thankful for
* Orange Sticks: Things you are thankful for
* Green Sticks: People you are thankful for
* Blue Sticks: Food you are thankful for
* Purple Sticks: Your choice of something you are thankful for

#### Gratitude Scavenger Hunt

This activity can be enjoyed by youth or multi-aged groups. The aim of the game is to hunt for and discover Blessings. The List of Blessings (below) can be adapted for your context; it could be adapted for an indoors activity, but an appropriate outside location would be most effective.

***Supplies:*** Cameras/phones or paper and pens

***Instructions:*** Hunt in small groups or as a whole group. In a whole group situation, each participant should have an opportunity to contribute. With small groups, establish guidelines for time and geographic boundaries. Each small group has a pen and paper or phone/camera. If using phones/cameras, hand each group a sheet to keep track of their photos of gratitude. They do not need to be documented in this order.

##### List of Blessings

1. Nature
2. Sound
3. Taste
4. Smell
5. A challenge
6. Something I’d like to share
7. Someone older than me
8. Recently discovered or learned
9. Shows a vibrant colour
10. Has words on it
11. Makes me feel strong
12. Makes me laugh
13. Makes me cry
14. Someone I love

### Random Acts of Giving

***Supplies:*** print the “Random Acts of Giving” poster, either completed or blank, found in [Appendix 1-2](#_Appendix_1-2:_Random) at the end of this section

***Instructions:*** Discuss how God calls us to live a life of gratitude. We develop this by practising saying thank you for the blessings in our lives. As followers of Jesus, we are called by God to live out God’s love for all, and we can do this by giving to others. The Apostle Paul reminds us to give freely, and Zacchaeus reminds us to share what we have with others. Brainstorm ways the group can give to others. The blank “Random Acts of Giving” chart can be filled with ideas of ways of giving to other people. If using the completed chart, participants can plan how and when they will fulfill these acts. Individual copies can be made for the participants.

#### Gifts with Vision Project

Share with the group about Mission & Service and Gifts with Vision, 2021 ([giftswithvision.ca](http://giftswithvision.ca/)). As a group, decide which gift(s) to give from the Gifts with Vision options. You could decide on several gifts to give depending on your timeframe. The goal is for the project to be completed by the end of this series of five sessions.

Using the scripture passages from 2 Corinthians and Luke as inspiration, create a plan to raise the funds and to include the whole church community in this project.

#### Create a Gratefulness Video

***Supplies and resource person:*** obtain permission from parents/guardians for youth to use a phone and any app decided upon to create a video; a leader who knows how to use the technology to make a video; items needed to write or create

##### Instructions

Brainstorm a list of things for which you are grateful. Then decide how to share these lists, either by writing the words or by creating a piece of art. Your challenge is to create a video focused

on gratefulness. Using the phone that has the app chosen to make the video, record individuals acting, writing, or creating. (Make sure that you have permission to show each person’s face

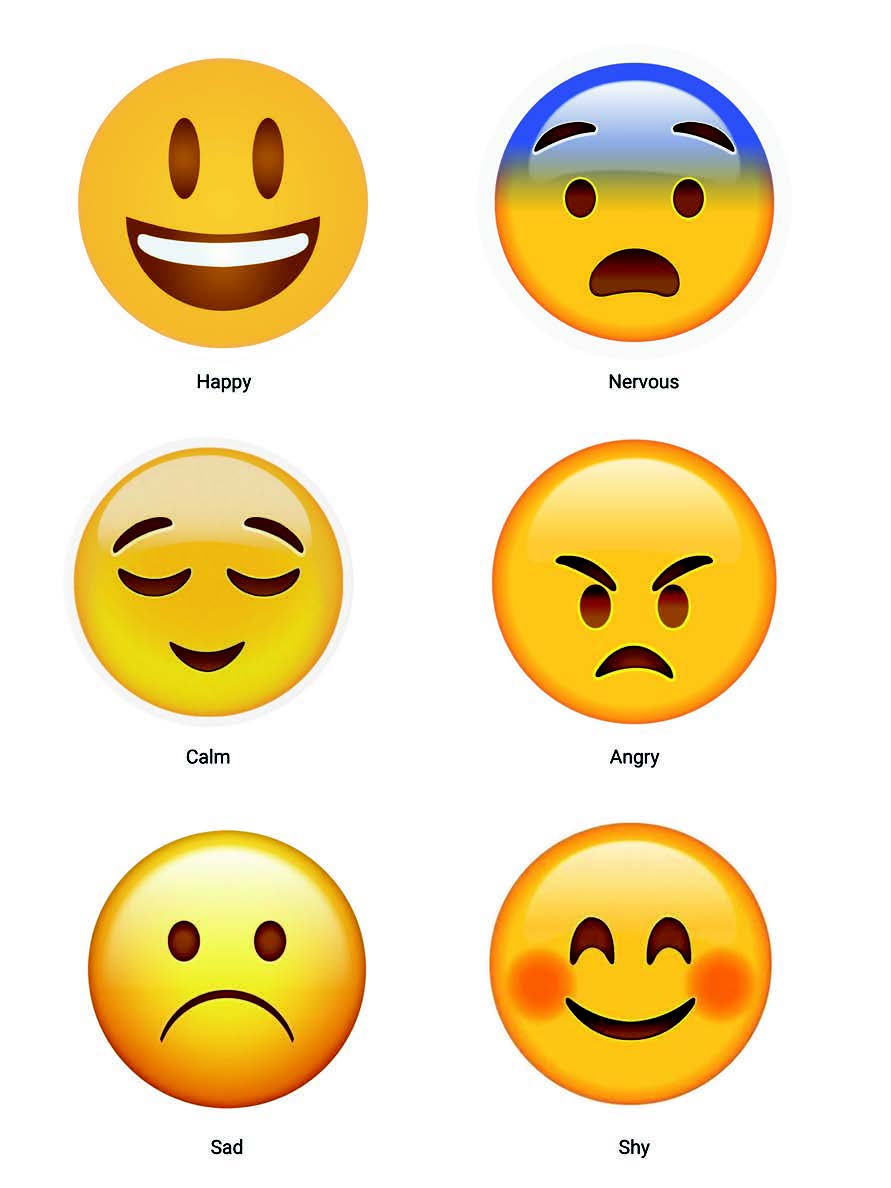
in the video.) You can record someone writing or creating each item. If you are adding music, decide what would be a good match for the theme of gratefulness. You will also need to decide how to share the video. Will it be made public? Perhaps it could be shared with the whole community of faith during worship.

### Closing

#### Closing Prayer

Loving God, we give thanks to you for the people in our lives who care for us.  
Help us to pay attention to the blessings we have in our lives.  
Help us to say thank you. Help us to share what we can with others.  
Help us to remember that you are always with us and love us always.  
In Jesus’ name, Amen.

## Appendix 1-1: Check-in Cards



## Appendix 1-2: Random Acts of Giving





## STEWARDSHIP@HOME

### Preparation

Decide on a version of the Bible that is most accessible to your family. Have a Bible on hand. There are translations of this week’s scripture focus, 2 Corinthians 9:1–5, from the *Common English Bible* and the *New Revised Standard Version* in [Appendix 1-3](#_Appendix_1-3:_Scripture) at the end of this section. Have copies of the scripture passage available for each person.

Also prepare the items needed for a gratitude jar (see below).

You might consider creating a centrepiece in your home for devotions. This can be at the dining or kitchen table, coffee table, fireplace hearth, or wherever your family gathers to share. You can place the centrepiece on a cloth the colour of which complements the liturgical season. Add a candle and any number of symbols of our faith, e.g., a cross, a rock with words of inspiration, flowers, a plant.

### Devotional

1. **Pray:** Invite everyone to take three slow, deep breaths.

Dear God, we give thanks for this day. May we remember you are as close to us as the breath that we breathe. Be with us in our hearts, in our speaking, and in our listening. Amen.

Take a few minutes for each person to name joys and concerns from the day or week.

1. **Listen:** Have one family member read 2 Corinthians 9:1–5 aloud; or even better, someone tells the story using their own words. The apostle Paul focuses on gifts that should be generous and voluntary. As disciples of Jesus, we can nurture our spirit of generosity by practising gratitude.
2. **Discuss and Engage:** As a family, discuss the Bible reading. What do we do as a regular spiritual practice of gratitude? How do we express our gratitude to others? How do we share with others as an expression of gratitude to God?

### Prayer Walk

Take a walk in the neighbourhood, in a park, or along a trail, and as you journey, notice what you are thankful for. You might take a photo of each item or keep a list. Here are suggested items you might look for:

* something outside you enjoy looking at
* something that is useful for you
* something that is your favourite colour
* something you know someone else will enjoy
* something that makes you happy
* something that smells amazing
* something you have never seen before

### ABCs of Gratefulness

Have fun with saying or singing your ABCs and, for each letter of the alphabet, share something for which you are grateful. You could take turns with each letter or each person could share something for each letter.

### Create a Gratitude Jar

***Supplies:*** wide-mouthed jar or vase, glue gun, ribbon or string, scissors, double-sided tape or glue, printed gratitude label on card stock (see Appendix 2 at the end of this section); paper and pencils

##### Instructions

Either print the gratitude label provided (see [Appendix 1-4](#_Appendix_1-4:_Gratitude)) on a piece of card stock, or create your own label.

Decorate the jar with string or yarn. Place a dab of glue on one end of the string and attach it firmly to the mouth of the jar. Wrap the string around the mouth of the jar as many times as you like. Cut the string, making sure to leave a little at the end. Dab more glue on the end and attach to the jar. Add any other decorations you like.

Attach the label for your jar using double-sided tape or glue. Using pre-cut pieces of paper, invite each family member to note (either by writing or drawing) things and people they are grateful for, someone or something they appreciate, an act of kindness from a stranger, or a favourite memory, and place all of the pieces in your gratitude jar. (See Gratitude Jar Ideas, below, for suggestions.)

You can make this a ritual in the way that best suits your family: perhaps once a day or once a week, in the morning, afternoon, or evening.

##### Gratitude Jar Ideas

* What made you smile or laugh today?
* What is something you are good at doing?
* What do you like most about where you live?
* Do you have a favourite place to visit in your community?
* List five people for whom you are grateful.
* Did you listen to a song you liked?
* List some of your favourite scents.
* What family tradition are you most grateful for?
* What do you love most about your partner/family/friend?
* What are you grateful for that you normally take for granted?

### Gratitude Ball

This is a fun, interactive activity for all ages. Use a small, soft ball and partner up or sit in a circle. Spend two minutes passing the ball back and forth, saying something you are grateful for with each pass.

### Sharing with Others

Decide as a family on an individual or family for whom you could create a care package. Maybe it is a member of your congregation, a neighbour, or a relative. Make a list of things that you could create together that will help the person know you care about them and are thinking of them.

You might include baked goods, a card, a coupon to mow the lawn, an invitation to get together for a movie night, or whatever you think the person or family might like.

### Closing

Close your time together with a prayer. Include praying for each other and each person’s joys and concerns that were named earlier.

## Appendix 1-3: Scripture Versions

### 2 Corinthians 9:1–5, *Common English Bible*

It’s unnecessary for me to write to you about this service for God’s people. I know about your willingness to help. I brag about you to the Macedonians, saying, “Greece has been ready since last year,” and your enthusiasm has motivated most of them.

But I’m sending the brothers so that our bragging about you in this case won’t be empty words, and so that you can be prepared, just as I keep telling them you will be. If some Macedonians should come with me and find out that you aren’t ready, we (not to mention you) would be embarrassed as far as this project goes.

This is why I thought it was necessary to encourage the brothers to go to you ahead of time and arrange in advance the generous gift you have already promised. I want it to be a real gift from you. I don’t want you to feel like you are being forced to give anything.

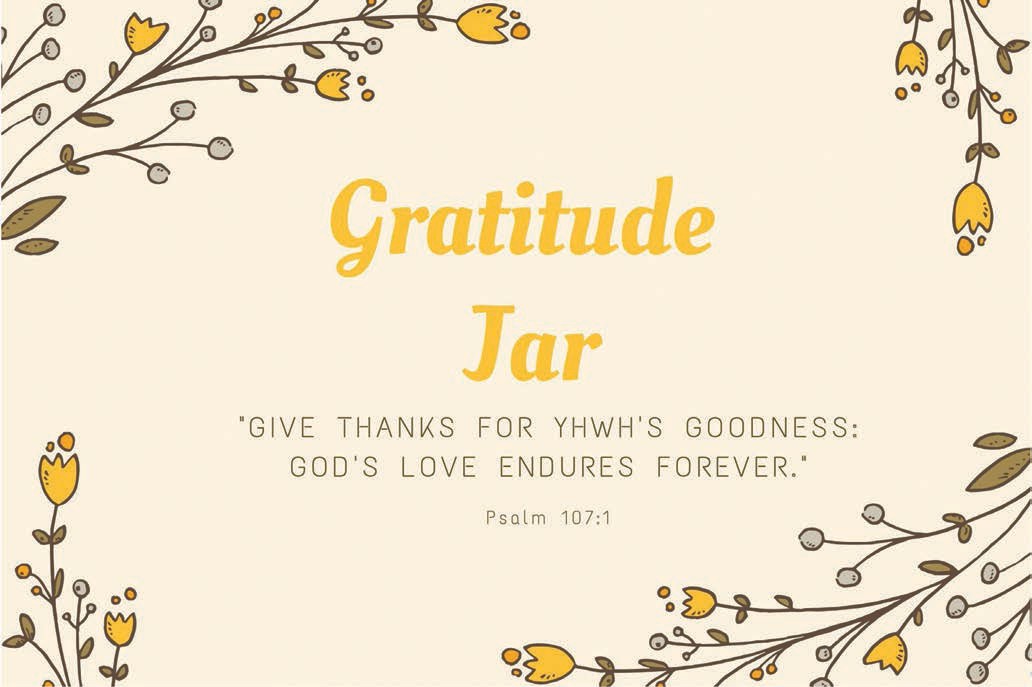
COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE. © Copyright 2011 COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE. All rights reserved. Used by permission. ([www.commonenglishbible.com](https://www.commonenglishbible.com/)).

### 2 Corinthians 9:1–5, *New Revised Standard Version*

Now it is not necessary for me to write you about the ministry to the saints, for I know your eagerness, which is the subject of my boasting about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them. But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you may not prove to have been empty in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be; otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—in this undertaking. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion.

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## Appendix 1-4: Gratitude Jar Label



## SERMON GUIDE: Gratitude and Discipleship

### 2 Corinthians 9; Luke 19:1–10

This is the first week of a five-week series focused on Giving and Discipleship. In the coming weeks, we shall reflect on giving as a patient commitment having the potential to stir generosity when done intentionally. We shall also reflect on giving as it is rooted in God’s economy and as a demonstration that we are disciples. Today, we begin with a focus on the spiritual practice of gratitude and how this practice is foundational to being a follower of Jesus and our generosity.

We are in relationship with each other as a community of people on our faith journey. We seek to live as a disciple of Jesus and to centre our lives in the love and grace of God. The expression of our faith is action in the world. As a disciple of Jesus, how do we seek individually and as a community to share God’s abundance and love with each other and the world?

In the 2 Corinthians scripture passage, Paul is writing to remind the Corinthians of the gift they have promised to give. The gift is a collection Paul is taking to the Christians in Jerusalem. Paul is sending some brothers in advance to make sure that the gift is generous and given voluntarily.

What does Paul’s instruction for a generous and voluntary gift mean to us today? How do we give to the church and to others from a generous and voluntary place in our hearts?

For a gift to be voluntary and generous, we need to look at how we orient and root our spiritual selves. There are many practices that sustain us on this journey: spiritual practices that can help us be strong in mind and help us to remember why we are here, practices that nurture our soul and strengthen us in the journey to love Jesus and serve as he showed us. These practices help us to centre ourselves in God’s love and abundance.

We can make a habit of beginning and ending our day with a ritual of gratitude. We can create a ritual at meal times to say thank you to God. To begin or end our day naming the blessings of our day and in our life helps us to name that God is good. We trust in God. We bring to our consciousness the blessings in our life and know God is present in our lives when we can name them. Gratitude is our response to God and God’s blessings. When we know in our heart that God’s grace is freely given, no strings attached, we are able let go of trying to hold on. We can rest in God who is generous, and then we can cultivate a life lived from a place of abundance.

The spiritual practice of gratitude makes a difference in us when we start to live differently and reach out to the world.

When the practice of gratitude is rooted in us, we breathe more deeply and we are inspired. We breathe deeply into the sense of abundance and from this place we are inspired to give freely, no strings attached. But there are many things in our life that get in the way of centring ourselves in

God’s love and grace. The pain and anguish in life is real. There is violence, despair, and poverty in our lives and in the lives of too many people.

There are many voices around us advocating for individualism, consumerism, and autonomy. Too many of us are caught up in busyness, the push to produce, achieve, and attain. It is exhausting. And when we are caught in this whirlwind, it leads us to live in a world of scarcity.

There is so much that encourages us to view our world through the lens of scarcity. When we are rooted in this world of scarcity, of not enough, then we cannot give to others of ourselves, of our time, of our money. If we do give, it is not freely given, not voluntary. Jesus knew and taught of God’s abundance. He knew that God’s love and grace is freely given.

The Gospel reading today from Luke is the story of Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector, someone most people hated. A chief tax collector in the time of Jesus was a person who collected taxes for the Roman oppressors. Luke describes Zacchaeus as wealthy. One gets wealthy as a tax collector by extortion and embezzlement, by taking advantage of the people, including the working poor and the elderly. Luke also tells us that Zacchaeus has changed. Zacchaeus has seen that what he has done is wrong and is returning the money he has extorted.

I wonder what happened to Zacchaeus to make him change? When we meet him, he is trying to climb a tree to get a glimpse of Jesus. Might he have heard Jesus speaking and been changed somehow by Jesus’ message of God’s love for all? Jesus sees Zacchaeus in the tree, names him, and invites himself to Zacchaeus’ home for dinner. We can imagine Zacchaeus being thrilled to have Jesus in his home. Zacchaeus promises to give half of his income to the poor and, if he is caught cheating in the future, he will pay four times the damages. Jesus approves of his actions and names him as being a part of the family, a child of God.

Can you imagine what must have been going on in the heart and mind of Zacchaeus? I imagine he was filled with love and gratitude. He had a moment of transformation that led him to give his income to others. He seems to now live life out of a sense of abundance and generosity. And to prove to Jesus he has changed, he states that if he is caught cheating, he will pay four times the damages!

Zacchaeus is changed. He now sees the world through the lens of abundance and he is filled with gratitude. God has called him and named him, and he responds with gratitude and giving. God calls each of us and names us, and through Jesus, teaches us to live a life of gratitude and giving.

Trusting in God’s love and abundance does not mean that there will not be difficult times. What it means is that we can move through difficult life experiences and trauma with resilience. Seeing the world in abundance can strengthen us to move through life when it is difficult. To give generously and voluntarily is our response to God’s love, which is freely given, no strings attached.

We are human and we need to be in relationship with each other, with God, with Jesus, to help us on this journey in life. These relationships are foundational in the practice of discipleship. We are called to co-create God’s vision here on earth, and this is not easy or light work. Our spiritual practices, done together and individually, help us to live with a sense of abundance and give us the will to share our abundance with others. We are blessed to be a blessing.

Amen.

# 

# Week 2: Inspiring Commitment

## LITURGY

### Gather

#### Welcome

This is the second week of a five-part series on Giving and Discipleship. Last week we learned how the spiritual practice of gratitude can ground our journey as disciples of Jesus. This week, we look at the theme of commitment through the lens of 2 Corinthians 9:10. Like the sowing of seeds in preparation for the harvest, discipleship requires sustained commitment. One of the key ways God transforms us and our world is when we make a prolonged commitment to giving without controlling the outcome. One of the primary ways we commit ourselves as disciples is through giving to the local church.

#### Acknowledgement of Traditional Territories

(*If it is your community’s practice, you are encouraged to insert a Territory Acknowledgement here. A good source for naming the original inhabitants of your community and learning more about Territory Acknowledgement is* [*native-land.ca*](http://native-land.ca/)*.*)

#### Candle Lighting

As we gather to worship, we light this candle to remember the light and love that Jesus shared with so many. He did not keep this light to himself. Jesus shared it with his friends, and after Jesus died, his friends continued to share the light with their friends. For generations upon generations, the light has been shared, and love continues. Jesus is still with us. Today, in love, we welcome the light, the light of the world.

#### Call to Worship

(based on Psalm 65; 2 Corinthians 9:10)

One: God is the hope of all the ends of the earth, and of the farthest seas.

**All: Praise is due to the Giver of all good gifts.**

One: God visits creation to water it, blessing its growth and providing its people with grain.

**All: Praise is due to the Giver of all good gifts.**

One: The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy.

**All: Praise is due to the Giver of all good gifts.**

One: Let us worship the One who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, so that we, too, may be sowers of the kingdom’s harvest.

#### Opening Prayer

Gracious God,  
in your Son, Jesus Christ,  
you have blessed us with every good gift—  
justice, joy, and daily bread.

Sow the seed of your gospel within each of us, we pray,   
that through us your kingdom may multiply  
in love, generosity, and righteousness  
throughout the earth  
and for the sake of all of its people. Amen.

#### Song

“All Creatures of Our God and King” (*Voices United* 217), or “Creator God, You Gave Us Life” (*More Voices* 27)

#### Prayer of Confession

Lord of heaven and earth,  
you are not only the source of our first breath,  
but you are the author of each moment,  
and the supplier of every need.

We confess that we too easily forget.  
Too quickly, too naturally, we take credit for your abundance.  
Rather than scattering seeds of generosity,  
we hoard them and shut ourselves off from their power to bless.  
Too often, too effortlessly, we turn your good gifts into objects of our own selfishness.

Forgive us, we pray.

Give us glad and generous hearts,  
that we may spread the gift of your grace with our lips  
and share all we have for the sake of your glory. Amen.

(*Time for silent prayer*)

#### Words of Assurance

Just as God sends the rain on the just and the unjust alike,  
so, too, does Christ shower love on the loveless and mercy on the merciless.  
In Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. Go and do likewise.

#### Response

“Love Us into Fullness” (MV 81)

#### Passing the Peace of Christ

### Engage

#### All Ages Theme Conversation

(*Have paper seed shapes available, cut out ahead of time. You might consider handing one to each person as they arrive for worship.*)

Have you ever given money away to someone? Have you ever given it to them not knowing how or what they will use it for? Today, we’re talking about commitment to generosity. Paul in our scripture passage describes God’s giving as seeds to plant for a “harvest of righteousness.” Like a seed, the outcome of generosity is not immediate—more often than not, we don’t see the direct outcome of our giving. But we give anyway, trusting that God will use what we give to make a difference. We are given God’s gifts not to keep to ourselves, but to be given away in trust that the seeds we plant will grow and transform the world.

Invite those gathered to name an instance where someone else’s generosity planted the seed of transformation in their own life. Each person is invited to write or draw someone or something they are thankful for on their seed.

You can use the seeds, along with the previous week’s hearts, to decorate the communion table or another area central to your worship space.

Or

#### Testimony

A person shares a personal story about how they have seen the gifts that they have given to the church (time, talent, and treasure) make a difference in their own life and the lives of others.

#### Song/Anthem/Special Music

[“This Indescribable Gift”](#_This_Indescribable_Gift_2) (see last pages of this file), or “Heaven Is Singing for Joy” (VU 230), or “Soil of God, You and I” (MV 174)

#### Scripture Reading

2 Corinthians 9:10

#### Sermon

“A Patient Harvest” (see [Week 2 Sermon Guide](#_SERMON_GUIDE:_A))

#### Song

“Spirit, Open My Heart” (MV 79), or “It Only Takes a Spark” (VU 289)

### Respond

#### Prayers of the People

Trusting that God hears all of our prayers and responds to all of them in love, let us pray together saying: Gracious God, hear our prayer; and in your love answer.

Merciful One,  
we thank you for your endless blessings:  
for food, for shelter, for family, and friendship,  
for the gift of life itself and the gift of new life in Jesus Christ,  
for the comfort of your salvation and the challenge of discipleship.

**Gracious God, hear our prayer; and in your love answer.**

Acknowledging our gifts, we come to you also with our needs:  
We pray for the world you love:  
that the seeds of power be sown fairly and your bread shared widely,  
that the peoples of the world and their governments  
may become dispensers of righteousness,  
rather than stockpilers of stinginess.

**Gracious God, hear our prayer; and in your love answer.**

We pray for your church, here and all over the world,  
that we, too, will not store up our inheritance,  
but cast it near and far in word and deed,  
so the world may know your beauty.

**Gracious God, hear our prayer; and in your love answer.**

We pray for our local community,  
for its safety, security, and well-being,  
and that our own ministry bears the fruit of reconciliation  
within our neighbourhoods and between our neighbours.

**Gracious God, hear our prayer; and in your love answer.**

And we pray, O Lord, for all those in need of your grace:  
We pray for healing for the sick, the afflicted, the addicted,  
and for justice to the oppressed.  
We remember all who have died, especially (*names*);  
bring those grieving comfort, peace, and consolation, we pray.  
In all of these things, give us the wisdom to discern your will,  
and the courage to respond with the same love you have shown to us in Christ.

**Gracious God, hear our prayer; and in your love answer.**

#### The Lord’s Prayer

#### Offering Our Gifts to God

#### Invitation to the Offering

Now is the offering time, when we offer up our gifts of time, talent, and treasure for God’s mission in the world. For followers of Jesus, giving isn’t simply about keeping the church going. Giving is a discipline; it is an act of our commitment to God. We trust that God will not only use it to change us, but to change the world.

God not only gives us bread to fill our bellies, God gives us seed to extend the reach of the harvest. I invite you to plant the seeds you’ve been given by offering up your gifts and tithes for God’s work in the world. The offering will now be received.

#### Offering Song

“We Give Our Thanks” (MV 187), or “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow” (VU 541)

#### Offertory Prayer

Receive these gifts, O Christ, as gratitude for all you have given us.  
We pray that all we return to you will be used faithfully in ministry to the world. Amen.

#### Closing Song

“Joyful, Joyful We Adore You” (VU 232), or “Grateful” (MV 182)

### Sending Forth

#### Sending Forth and Blessing

Go forth from this place as a people who have been given an endless supply of grace.  
May you dispense it as recklessly as Christ:  
 where there is suffering, give your heart away in love and compassion; where there is violence, surrender your hatred in exchange for peace;  
 where there is need, dedicate your hands, feet, and your wallet to [God’s] service.

And may the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you today and every day. Amen.

#### Sending Forth Song

“Take Up His Song” (MV 213), or “Amen” (Strathdee) (VU 974)

## CHILDREN/YOUTH/ALL AGES FAITH FORMATION

### Introduction

This week we continue our conversation about commitment as a spiritual practice. Today, we will learn about how discipleship requires commitment to love God and share God’s love with the world through giving.

The focus for this week is verse 10 of chapter 9 in 2 Corinthians. This is a letter from Paul to siblings in Christ who live in Corinth. Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to give generously to a collection he is taking for the Christians in Jerusalem: “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness” (2 Corinthians 9:10). Following Jesus takes commitment, and one of the ways we commit ourselves to God is by giving of ourselves and what we have to bless God’s world. Here, the Apostle Paul compares the commitment of giving to planting seeds for God’s love to grow in the world. Just as when we plant seeds, we often don’t get to see the outcome of our generosity for a long time. God promises, however, that every act of generosity that is sown will eventually reap “righteousness,” even if we can’t see it.

***Supplies:*** buttons of various shapes, sizes, and colours; transparent plastic cups (or preferably reusable jars); potting soil; dried kidney or lima beans (soaked overnight); watering can with water; masking tape/permanent marker for writing names on cups

### Gather

#### Light the Christ Candle

#### Check In

Spend some time building community by going around the circle sharing names and inviting each participant (if they wish) to answer the check-in question for the day:

* In one word, how are you feeling today?

For young children, it is helpful to have emoji images showing different feelings. Display the images in the centre of the circle so the children can pick one to share. See [Appendix 2-1](#_Appendix_2-1:_Check-in) at the end of this section for sample check-in cards.

#### Button Prayers

Make sure there is at least one button for each person praying. Each person chooses a button. All are led in prayer with these instructions:

* Feel the hardness of the button and think about people who are going through hard times. Ask God to help them.
* Buttons are used to fasten clothing, bringing two pieces of a garment together. Ask God to bring together people who have argued and moved apart from one another. Pray that God will bring peace.
* Look at your button and see how many holes it has. Name that number of things for which you would like to say thank you to God and say thank you prayers.
* Look at the colour of the button and thank God for something that is that colour.
* Find someone who has the same coloured button as you. Say thank you to God for families. Ask God to bless them, to help them to live together, and to help them to love one another.
* Find someone who has a different button from you—it could be different in shape, size, or colour. Thank God for making everyone different and giving us all different gifts.
* Pray for the person you have found. Ask them what they would like God to help them with.

#### Song

“This Little Light of Mine” (*All God’s Children Sing* 66)

#### Story and Wondering

Retell 2 Corinthians 9:10 in your own words, emphasizing how God uses our gifts to plant seeds of love, and how it takes patience and commitment for these seeds to grow. Consider telling the story of the call of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 12) as a companion story, “I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” (Genesis 12:2), or the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31–32) as an example of how God uses the least likely people and smallest actions to grow the kingdom.

Questions to consider in wondering about the scripture and the story:

* What part of the story did you like the best?
* (for older youth) Can you think of examples of ways people have helped or supported you that have made a difference to you as you got older? A year later? Only when you look back?
* Is there something that you were taught when you were little that you’re really good at now? (Provide an example from your own life, e.g., learning to tie your shoes, to ride a bike, or to catch a ball.)
* Is there someone or something you can give money or time to in your church that will make a difference in your community?

### Respond

#### Bean Plants

***Supplies:*** Transparent plastic cups (or preferably re-usable jars), potting soil, dried kidney or lima beans (soaked overnight), watering can with water, masking tape/permanent marker for naming cups

Preprint the following for the participants: Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches” (Matthew 13:31–32).

##### Instructions

Each person is given two or three beans to plant in soil in a cup or jar and given a little water as a reminder of how God uses our generosity to grow the kingdom. Invite each person to label their plant with their name.

##### Follow-up Activity

Encourage each person to take a selfie with their plant as it grows and send/bring the photo to church.

#### Gifts with Vision Project

How is the plan to raise funds for the gift(s) going? (For those who were not present for Week 1, share how a gift or gifts were chosen from Gifts with Vision.) Discuss with the group how an idea can grow and become bigger, how more and more people can become involved, which makes more possible. This project will require the group to work together and will require commitment if the goal is to be reached.

* How is this project like a mustard seed, growing bigger and bigger?

#### Create a Video

***Supplies and resource person:*** obtain permission from parents/guardians for youth to use a phone and any app decided upon to create a video; a leader who knows how to use the technology to make a video; items used to write or create

##### Instructions

Discuss how God uses our gifts to plant seeds of love; talk about the patience and commitment it takes for these seeds to grow.

Discuss what commitment means. What does commitment look like? Think of a time in life where one needs time and regular practice to learn something well. It can be a skill or an attitude that starts small but grows strong with the commitment of time, love, and energy.

Brainstorm ideas around what this could look like in a video—an example of something that begins small and grows over time with love and care.

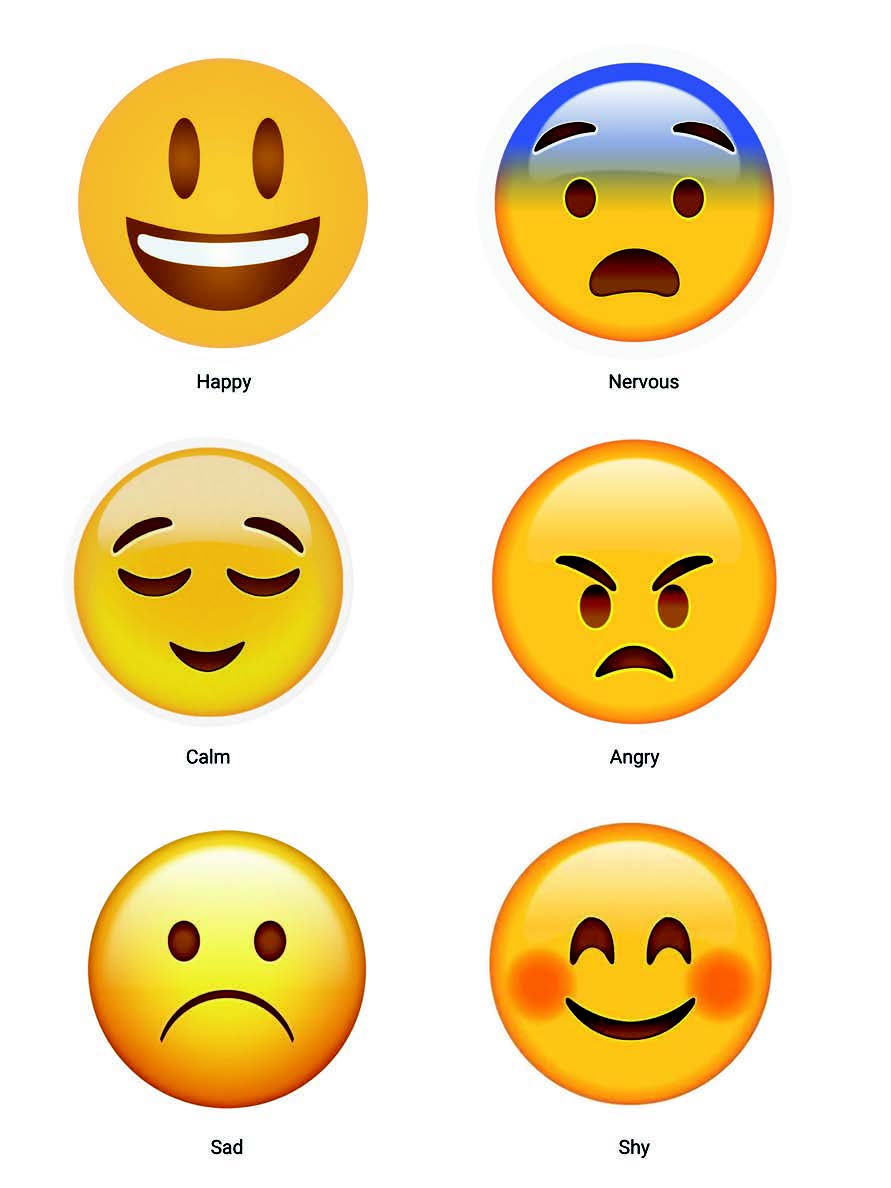
Using the phone that has the app chosen to make the video, record individuals writing or creating. Make sure that you have permission to show each person’s face in the video. You can record someone writing or creating. If you are adding music, decide what would be a good match for the theme of gratefulness. You will also need to decide how to share the video. Will it be made public? Perhaps it could be shared with the whole community of faith during worship.

### Closing

#### Closing Prayer

Holy One, you not only give us food to eat, you give us seeds of love to plant wherever we go. Help us to commit ourselves to you by planting these seeds, and give us the patience to trust that they will grow big and strong even when we cannot see their growth or even their outcome. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

## Appendix 2-1: Check-in Cards



## STEWARDSHIP@HOME

### Preparation

Decide on a version of the Bible that is most accessible to your family. Have a Bible on hand. There are translations of this week’s scripture focus from various Bible versions in [Appendix 2-2](#_Appendix_2-2:_Scripture) at the end of this section. Have copies of the scripture passages available for each person.

Also have a seedling or small plant ready for planting together with wood or other material for a plant marker.

You might consider creating a centrepiece in your home for devotions. This can be at the dining or kitchen table, coffee table, fireplace hearth, or wherever your family gathers to share. You can place the centrepiece on a cloth the colour of which complements the liturgical season. Add a candle and any number of symbols of our faith, e.g., a cross, a rock with words of inspiration, flowers, a plant.

### Devotional

1. **Pray:** Invite everyone to take three slow, deep breaths and pray:

Creator God, you are the source of all things. In Christ, you promise to bring all creation to blossom in the fullness of time. Send your Holy Spirit among us now to plant seeds of gratitude, patience, and commitment in each of our hearts, so we may love you and care for the world you love more deeply. Amen.

Take a few minutes for each person to name joys and concerns from the day or week.

1. **Listen:** Using the Bible version your family prefers, have one family member read aloud the three passages—2 Corinthians 9:10–11, Matthew 13:31–32, and Galatians 6:9–10. Then ask another family member to read aloud the following reflection:

Saint Oscar Romero (1917–1980) was a Salvadoran archbishop in the Roman Catholic Church. He was murdered while presiding over worship after speaking out against poverty, social injustice, assassinations, and torture during a time of political conflict in his country. The following reflection is often attributed to him, but was composed by Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw, Michigan, in 1979 in his honour, for a celebration of departed priests:

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God’s work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the church’s mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything. That is what we are about. We plant a seed that will one day grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realising that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord’s grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.

1. **Discuss and Engage:** The Bible passages and the reflection include images of seeds, planting, and harvesting. To get from planting to harvest takes the commitment of hard work, attention, and patience. Our commitment to following Jesus is the same, though more often than not we don’t get to see the outcome. Here are a couple of ideas to help participants engage in the practice of commitment:

**Brainstorm**

Have you ever committed to giving your time or money to something that took time to grow into something good? In what way is giving to your church community like this? What programs or projects does your Community of Faith do that are like this?

**(Literally) Plant Something**

If you have a back yard or small green space, consider planting a seedling for a bush or a tree. If you don’t have direct access to a green space, plant or purchase a smaller house plant.

In either case, create a marker for the plant or tree using wood or another material and inscribe it with the date and “Galatians 6:9–10.” This can be a regular reminder to you and your family of not only the patient commitment it takes to follow Jesus, but also God’s slow and steady work of changing the world.

You can plant the tree during the liturgy, or prior to it. Bless the tree with these words:

Sustainer of seed and soil, of tree and flower, you have created this world and all that lives in it. As you breathe your life into us, fill this tree/plant with your Spirit. May it grow strong and true, and in its budding may it be a reminder of your unwavering patience and steadfast love for each of us. Amen.

### Closing Prayer

Close your time together with prayer. Include praying for each other and each person’s joys and concerns named earlier. You may end the devotional with the following prayer:

Loving Lord, you work slowly and behind the scenes for the good of all. We pray that you not only give us deep and generous hearts, but that you also give us the patience to give of ourselves and love others even when we can’t see the difference it makes. Help us to trust in your wisdom and your power for life. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

## Appendix 2-2: Scripture Versions

### 2 Corinthians 9:10–11, *Common English Bible*

The one who supplies seed for planting and bread for eating will supply and multiply your seed and will increase your crop, which is righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way. Such generosity produces thanksgiving to God through us.

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### 2 Corinthians 9:10–11, *New Revised Standard Version*

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us.

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### Matthew 13:31–32, *Common English Bible*

He told another parable to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and planted in his field. It’s the smallest of all seeds. But when it’s grown, it’s the largest of all vegetable plants. It becomes a tree so that the birds in the sky come and nest in its branches.”

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### Galatians 6:9–10, *The Message*

So let’s not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time, we will harvest a good crop if we don’t give up or quit. Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith.

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## SERMON GUIDE: A Patient Harvest

### 2 Corinthians 9:10

Last week we began our reflection on the discipline of giving. We will be spending another four weeks digging deeper into these stewardship principles. Here is the short version, if you missed it: last week we highlighted the fact that the spiritual practice of gratitude can make a difference in us and influence how we live differently and reach out to the world. Today we will reflect on the principle that giving goes beyond simple self-interest; it is a matter of prolonged, patient, trusting commitment to God.

I remember being around eight years old, unwrapping my final present one Christmas morning, and asking, “Is that it?” My parents would have been justified in taking every present away that morning. But they gracefully replied with a big smile, reciting familiar words: “’Tis better to give than receive.” This was more or less a direct quotation from the Book of Acts 20:35. I’m not sure whether they knew it was from the Bible or not—I certainly didn’t. But I do know that it was the last year that I shared those feelings aloud.

We all know that giving is a good thing. Scientific studies suggest that generosity makes us happier.[[1]](#footnote-1) There are even studies that show how generosity results in greater health not only for those who receive, but also for those who give. You don’t have to be the parent of an ungrateful eight-year-old brat to know that it’s a nice, Christian thing to do. Giving makes us feel good in the brain and in the body. Giving is good for us.

For followers of Jesus, though, giving goes beyond simple self-interest. Giving is a matter of prolonged, patient, trusting commitment to God.

Today’s scripture is from Paul’s second letter to the church in Corinth. We tend to think of the Apostle Paul exclusively as a theologian, but he was also a remarkable enabler of people’s generosity. Paul was constantly raising funds for the impoverished church in Jerusalem. Encouraging disciples of Jesus to be generous was so important that he spends a great deal of time on it in four of his letters (Romans, Galatians, and 1 & 2 Corinthians). While other churches have given generously, the Corinthians are falling short on their commitment. So here Paul is offering his top-notch rhetorical skills to melt their hearts and open their wallets.[[2]](#footnote-2)

He tries everything. He shames the Corinthians for not holding up to their prior commitment, comparing them unfavourably with the Macedonian church. He reminds them that what they have is not their own, but is a gift to them from God, meaning that it’s not theirs to be hoarded. Gifts call for gratitude, and gratitude is expressed in sharing.

The tenth verse in this chapter, though, gets at the heart of Paul’s reasoning behind generosity. Paul says, “[God] who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.”

Here Paul speaks of generosity in agricultural terms. In the same way God provides seeds for the harvest of food, God gives them their gifts to produce their own harvest. In this case, the harvest is “righteousness,” meaning both right moral actions and right relationships among people. It recalls the calling of Abraham and Sarah, that they had been chosen not for their own benefit, but so the whole human family might be blessed through them. Like Abraham and Sarah, the Corinthians may not receive or may not see an immediate benefit for their giving. But they are to trust that God will use them like planted seeds to sow God’s mercy and grace, to transform the lives of others in largely unseen ways.

Here Paul is telling the Corinthians, and telling us, that generosity isn’t just good for us. Not only does generosity bring us health and wellbeing, it also brings growth to the world in ways often beyond our seeing and our knowing. To practise generosity is to commit ourselves, long-term, to God and God’s purposes in the world. To practise generosity is an act of devoting one’s entire self to the mission of God, trusting God with the ultimate outcome.

It sounds good, but the truth is that it’s much harder in practice. Let me give you an example. The Rev. Ryan Slifka of St. George’s United Church in Courtenay, British Columbia, tells this story.

Our church hosts a Soup Kitchen five days a week in partnership with five other churches in the Comox Valley. More than 100 people are served a hot meal daily. While this has garnered the church a positive reputation, it’s also brought criticism. Many believe the service draws social problems like addiction and crime, while others— including some church people—believe that it enables dependence rather than encouraging independence. If we are honest with ourselves, the latter criticism carries much truth because many of the clientele return day after day, week after week, year after year in the same or worse condition as when they first walked through the doors. I have seen cruelty, manipulation, and self-destruction in ways that have tested my faith in Christ and my love for humanity. There’s no denying it.

What keeps me going, however, are signs of the “harvest of righteousness” that Paul talks about. A couple of years ago, the church received a lovely card from someone who had hit rock bottom a couple of decades earlier. His life was a mess, the letter said, but the steady meals at the soup kitchen allowed him to survive long enough to turn things around. He was now living in northern B.C., married, with a steady job, and living something of a regular life. Enclosed was a modest cheque of $500 as a token of thanks for helping to set his life straight.[[3]](#footnote-3)

(*Insert a story from your own community of faith that illustrates the idea of how sustained generosity leads to new life and a “harvest of righteousness.”*)

This is a glimpse of the harvest of righteousness Paul was talking about. This is the kind of patient, sustained commitment discipleship takes. We may have not seen an immediate resolution to this man’s trouble, and so often our efforts can seem futile. But this person’s story represents the “first fruit” of the harvest of righteousness. In our congregations, all across the country, there are countless stories like this that show the sustained commitment it takes to follow the Way of Jesus Christ. In the same way that God provides the sower with seed and the bread for food, God uses our generosity to change lives in the long game toward the eternal harvest we call the kingdom—God’s loving rule of justice, equity, and universal peace. Though most of our work, including our giving, may appear to be in vain, the promise is that God will use every good we do in the end to bring about a New Creation.

So, friends, take up the challenge of generosity. ʼTis better to give than to receive. Give like it’s going out of style. Not only because it’s good for our own spiritual hygiene—which it is. But because giving is our commitment to God and God’s work, in the local church and across the world. And because in doing this we trust that through even the smallest act, the Lord of the harvest is bringing about the good of all.

Amen.

# 

# Week 3: Giving with Intention and Love

## LITURGY

### Gather

#### Welcome

This is the third week of a five-part series on Giving and Discipleship. On the first week of our journey, we focused on gratitude and how the spiritual practice of gratitude can ground our journey as a disciple of Jesus. In the second week, we reflected upon giving as a sustained commitment without controlling the outcome. Today, we focus on the discipline of giving.

#### Acknowledgement of Traditional Territories

(If it is your community’s practice, you are encouraged to insert a Territory Acknowledgement here. A good source for naming the original inhabitants of your community and learning more about Territory Acknowledgement is [native-land.ca](http://native-land.ca/).)

#### Candle Lighting

As we gather to worship, we light this candle to remember the light and love that Jesus shared with so many. He did not keep this light to himself. Jesus shared it with his friends, and after Jesus died, his friends continued to share the light with their friends. For generations upon generations, the light has been shared, and love continues. Jesus is still with us. Today, in love, we welcome the light, the light of the world.

#### Call to Worship

One: What have you brought to give today?

**All: We have brought our hopes and our fears.**

One: What have you brought to give today?

**All: We have brought our joys and our sorrows.**

One: What have you brought to give today?

**All: We have brought our prayer and our voices.**

One: What have you brought to give today?

**All: We have brought our talents and our money.**

One: Let us give all of ourselves in this time of worship. Let us, with gratitude and joy, worship God!

#### Opening Song

“We Praise You, O God Our Redeemer” (*Voices United* 218), or “God of the Bible” (*More Voices* 28)

#### Opening Prayer

One: Giver of life, you have sown love and hope in your world since creation. You have planted joy and kindness in our hearts and watered it with your patience.

**All: You shine your peace upon us, that even as we experience life’s challenges, your gentle presence reassures us that you are in control. Let your Spirit of generosity fill our lives and stir our desire to share with others what you have so graciously given to us. Amen.**

#### Prayer of Confession

One: Gracious God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden, hear us as we offer our confession.

**All: Gracious One, we confess that too often we give sparingly, yet expect to reap abundance. Too often we give the bare minimum out of fear that we do not have enough; other times we give sparingly because we believe our efforts do not make much difference. Forgive us, we pray, for not giving generously. Give us clarity to see our giving as our way of celebrating your goodness to us and our contribution toward caring for those in need in the world you love. Help us to trust you to supply what we need and give us the courage to share what we have, being fully confident of your continued provision. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.**

(*Time for silent prayer*)

#### Words of Assurance

One: Friends, know that forgiveness is available in abundance, “pressed down, shaken together, running over” (Luke 6:38). It will never run out. Receive forgiveness, be free from the fears that affect your giving, forgive yourself and others as you have been forgiven this day. Amen.

#### Response

“Spirit of the Living God” (VU 376) v. 1, or “Lord Prepare Me” (MV 18)

### Engage

#### All Ages Theme Conversation

Share the video (optional): Latter Day Kids, [*The Cheerful Giver: A Story about Giving*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=A9vjgNt3_Fo) ([youtube.com/watch?v=A9vjgNt3\_Fo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9vjgNt3_Fo), 4 mins)

Or

#### How Much Matters

You’ll need: 1 cracker, 1 burger bun, and 1 loaf of bread (substitute similar objects if necessary; what matters is quantity)

**Ask:** Looking at these three gifts given for people who are hungry, which one of them will feed the most people?

**Say:** So how much you give matters. The more you give, the more is available to be given to others. The more you give is the more we have to do what needs to be done.

**Say:** Hear what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 9:6.

**Read:** “The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6).

**Ask:** Wait! Does that mean that the other gifts don’t matter?

**Say:** Not at all. Every gift matters. What is important is that everyone gives. When everyone gives, there will be more available to give to others.

**Ask:** Should someone feel sad because they are only able to give one cracker or the burger bun? Should someone feel embarrassed because they cannot afford to give a whole loaf of bread?

**Say:** Not at all. Hear what it says in the Bible, 2 Corinthians 9:7.

**Read:** “Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

**Say:** What that means is that each of us must make up our minds about what we can afford to give. When we decide, then we should give it happily. We should be happy that we have something to give, no matter how small. When we can’t give things like money and supplies, then we do what we can to help: we give our time and our talent cheerfully. No matter what we give, when we give cheerfully, God loves it!

**Let us pray:** God, we thank you for giving to us so that we have something to give. Bless what we give—money, food, time or talent—and help us to give as much as we can, no matter how small it may seem. Help us to give it cheerfully. Amen.

Or

#### Testimony

A person shares a personal story about how they have seen the gifts that they have given to the church (time, talent, and treasure) make a difference in their own life and the lives of others.

#### Song/Anthem/Special Music

[“This Indescribable Gift”](#_This_Indescribable_Gift_2) (see last pages of this file), or “Lead Me, God” (VU 662) or “Know That God Is Good” (MV 104)

#### Scripture Reading

2 Corinthians 9:6–7

#### Sermon

“Giving on Purpose” (see [Week 3 Sermon Guide](#_SERMON_GUIDE:_Giving))

#### Song/Anthem/Special Music

[“This Indescribable Gift”](#_This_Indescribable_Gift_2) (see last pages of this file), or “All Who Are Thirsty” (MV 4) or “O God We Call” (VU 411)

### Respond

#### Prayers of the People

One: Loving God, giver of all creation, we pray to you in faith with thanksgiving in our hearts. We give you thanks for all you do to care for us. Give us grace to care for others and to love others as Christ loves us. We are grateful that your love is steadfast and enduring, offered to all through Jesus Christ. We ask your help for all who suffer and strength for those who bring your help to them.

**All: Make us faithful stewards of your goodness.**

#### Refrain

“O God We Call” (VU 411) (once only), or “All Who Are Thirsty” (MV 4) (refrain only)

Leader: Compassionate Jesus, healer of all creation, we pray for the sick and those who sit with grief and all those who are in need of your healing touch. We pray for the ministry of healing and caring that comes from the church and other organizations. We pray for the leaders of nations, for honesty, integrity, justice, and compassion in national, provincial, and international politics, and for financial resources to be distributed equitably. We live in a world where people struggle to meet their basic needs while others are denied basic human rights. War and corruption stifle the economic and social advancement of many.

**All: Make us faithful stewards of your goodness.**

#### Refrain

“O God We Call” (VU 411) (once only), or “All Who Are Thirsty” (MV 4) (refrain only)

Leader: Holy Spirit, sanctifier of all creation, help us to be generous in meeting the needs of others through the gifts of our time, kind words, and a listening ear. Bless those whose lives are touched through our gifts to Mission & Service. We pray for those known to us who are in need of your care for their minds, body, or spirit at this time. Especially, we pray for.…

**All: Make us faithful stewards of your goodness as we join our voices together to pray the prayer our Saviour taught us:**

#### The Lord’s Prayer

#### Offering Our Gifts to God

#### Invitation to the Offering

As we offer our gifts today, let us give considering the magnitude of the needs we are trying to help: in this community, across Canada, and around the world. Give with this in mind: the more you can give, the more lives you can impact, and every kind of gift, in any amount, makes a difference in the lives of those who have little or none.

Today, I invite you, if you do not already give, to make a difference in lives across Canada and around the world through Mission & Service. Please choose to do so.

#### Offering Song

“We Give Thee but Thine Own” (VU 543), or “Christ Has No Body Now but Yours” (MV 171)

#### Offertory Prayer

May the gifts we offer today be dedicated to your work, O God: to save and change lives, to help people live with meaning and purpose, and to build a better world.

As you have given freely to us, we return a portion to you with joy. Bless us and our gifts to be a blessing. Amen.

#### Closing Song

“Breathe on Me, Breath of God” (VU 382), or “Come, Touch Our Hearts” (MV 12) vs. 1–4

### Sending Forth

#### Sending Forth and Blessing

May God, the Giver of all good gifts, pour out blessing, that you may always have all that you need, abundance enough that you may know the joy of generosity.  
And the blessing of God Almighty, the Creator, the Christ, and the Comforter, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

#### Sending Forth Song

“Go Now in Peace” (VU 964), or “May the Love of the Lord” (MV 218)

## CHILDREN/YOUTH/ALL AGES FAITH FORMATION

### Introduction

This week we continue our conversation about giving as a spiritual practice. Today, we will learn about how our attitude when we give affects how things turn out. We will also learn that how much you put in affects how much you get out of something. Little effort gives little results; a lot of effort gives better results.

### Preparation

2 Corinthians 9:6‒7

This is a letter from Paul to siblings in Christ who live in Corinth. Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to give generously to a collection he is taking for the Christians in Jerusalem. Our time this week is designed to explore what it means to give as a discipline. We will discover that God encourages us to give as much as we can because the more we give, the more will be available for others. Our disciplined practice of giving ensures that needs are met. We will also discover that God cares about the attitude with which we give.

***Supplies:*** buttons of various shapes, sizes; three facial expressions, each drawn on a separate piece of paper—sad, happy, frowning

For the sowing and reaping lesson: foam cups (or preferably reusable jars), potting soil, seed, plastic wrap

### Gather

#### Light the Christ Candle

#### Check In

Spend some time building community by going around the circle sharing names and inviting each participant (if they wish) to answer the check-in question for the day:

* In one word, how are you feeling today?

For young children, it is helpful to have emoji images showing different feelings. Display the images in the centre of the circle so the children can pick one to share. See [Appendix 3-1](#_Appendix_3-1:_Check-in) at the end of this “Children/Youth/All Ages” section for sample check-in cards.

#### Button Prayers

Make sure there is at least one button for each person praying. Each person chooses a button. All are led in prayer with these instructions:

* Feel the hardness of the button and think about people who are going through hard times. Ask God to help them.
* Buttons are used to fasten clothing, bringing two pieces of a garment together. Ask God to bring together people who have argued and moved apart from one another. Pray that God will bring peace.
* Look at your button and see how many holes it has. Name that number of things for which you would like to say thank you to God and say thank you prayers.
* Look at the colour of the button and thank God for something that is that colour.
* Find someone who has the same colour button as you. Say thank you to God for families. Ask God to bless them, to help them to live together, and to help them to love one another.
* Find someone who has a different button from you—it could be different in shape, size, or colour. Thank God for making everyone different and giving us all different gifts.
* Pray for the person you have found. Ask them what they would like God to help them with.

#### Song

“This Is the Day” (*More Voices* 122), or “This Is the Day That God Has Made” (*Voices United* 175)

#### Story and Wondering:

**God Loves a Cheerful Giver (younger children)**

(***You will need:*** *Three facial expressions, each drawn on a separate piece of paper—sad, happy, frowning.*)

**Say:** Did you know that your attitude matters when you do things? (Wait for answers)

**Ask:** Can you give me some examples of how your attitude makes it better? (Prompts might include: What kind of attitude do you need when you are learning something that is a little difficult? How about when your sports team is not winning? After this discussion, continue with the following.)

**Say:** God also wants us to have a particular attitude when we give.

**Read:** 2 Corinthians 9:6–7 aloud with the children. Share that the point of the story is that the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

**Say:** Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

**Show:** the picture of a sad face

**Ask:** Is this the attitude that God wants for us when we give money or our time? (Wait for answers)

**Show:** the picture of a frowning face

**Ask:** Is this the attitude that God wants for us when we give money or our time? (Wait for answers)

**Show:** the picture of a happy face

**Ask:** Is this the attitude that God wants for us when we give money or our time? (Wait for answers)

**Ask:** God wants us to give with our minds made up. When we have made up our minds to give, we should give cheerfully. We should give because we are happy to give. Why should we be happy? We should be happy to give because God gave to us first. We give because we are happy to share from what God gave us to help the church share the good news with the world. If we give a little, only a little will be available to share with others, and if we give more, there will be more available to share.

#### Sowing and Reaping

Fill three foam cups (or reusable jars) with potting soil and plant different amounts of seed in each. Moisten the soil and then cover with plastic wrap, poking a few holes in the wrap to allow for air circulation.

**Show:** The different cups to the class and use them to demonstrate 2 Corinthians 9:6.

**Ask:** the children what they would rather do if they were farmers—sow sparingly and get a small crop or sow bountifully and get a large crop. The answer is obvious. Connect the illustration to how we are to sow our time, money, and energy in the kingdom of God.

Provide time for the group to check in about their plants that were planted in Week 2. How tall are their plants? Who is looking after the plants at home?

#### Video

Crossroad Kids Club: [*God’s Story: Generosity*]((youtube.com/watch?v=VyXe25LyrcYhttps://bibleproject.com/explore/generosity) (for older children or youth; start at question 4 if there is no video) ([youtube.com/watch?v=VyXe25LyrcYhttps://bibleproject.com/explore/generosity](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyXe25LyrcYhttps://bibleproject.com/explore/generosity), 4 mins)

##### Questions

* What was your favourite part of this video?
* What is the most important part of this video for you?
* In the story about the widow who gave two coins (covered in the video at 2:24), why do you think that Jesus was so pleased with her?
* Read Luke 21:1–4.

##### Questions about This Week’s Focus Scripture

* How does the following verse make sense to you? (read) “The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6).
* How does the following verse make sense to you? (read) “Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

*If you have time, it is beneficial to watch the video a second time.*

### Respond

#### Create a Video

***Supplies and resource person:*** obtain permission from parents/guardians for youth to use a phone and any app decided upon to create a video; a leader who knows how to use the technology to make a video; items used to write or create

##### Instructions

Discuss the differences between having a smile on your face when you give something to a person versus having a frown on your face. What difference does it make to the receiver when the giver has a smile on their face? How does it feel for the giver to have a smile on their face when giving rather than a frown?

Brainstorm ideas around what this could look like in a video. Using the phone that has the app chosen to make the video, record individuals acting, writing, and creating. Please make sure that you have permission to show each person’s face in the video. You can record someone writing or creating each segment. If you are adding music, decide what would be a good match for the theme of gratefulness. You will also need to decide how to share the video. Will it be made public? Perhaps it could be shared with the whole community of faith during worship.

#### Gifts with Vision Project

How is the plan to raise funds for the gift(s) going? If the group is working together to raise funds, discuss how it feels to work together on this project. What has it been like to engage with other people when you are fundraising? Are people happy to donate to this project?

Evaluate where you are in your fundraising goals. Do you need to make a new goal or adjust this one?

#### Option for Local Giving

What are some of the needs that you see in your community or school or church? What do you have to give that will help?

Encourage the children and youth to bring something for a need they identify.

### Closing

#### Closing Prayer

Loving God, be with each of us as we leave this place. Help us to remember all the blessings in our life. Help us to remember to share what we have with others and to do so cheerfully. Amen.

## Appendix 3-1: Check-in Cards



## STEWARDSHIP@HOME

### Preparation

Decide on a version of the Bible that is most accessible to your family. Have a Bible on hand. There are translations of this week’s scripture focus, 2 Corinthians 9:6–7, from the *Common English Bible* and the *New Revised Standard Version* in [Appendix 3-2](#_Appendix_3-2:_Scripture) at the end of this section. Have copies of the scripture passage available for each person.

Also, have paper, pencils, and shoe boxes (one per family member) ready for the Shoe Box Gifts activity.

You might consider creating a centrepiece in your home for devotions. This can be at the dining or kitchen table, coffee table, fireplace hearth, or wherever your family gathers to share. You can place the centrepiece on a cloth the colour of which complements the liturgical season. Add a candle and any number of symbols of our faith, e.g., a cross, a rock with words of inspiration, flowers, a plant.

### Devotional

1. **Pray:** Invite everyone to take three slow, deep breaths and pray:

Dear God, we give thanks for this day. May we remember you are as close to us as the breath that we breathe. Be with us in our hearts, in our speaking, and in our listening. Amen.

Take a few minutes for each person to name joys and concerns from the day or week.

1. **Listen:** Have one family member read aloud 2 Corinthians 9:6–7 from your Bible, or even better, someone might retell the passage in their own words.
2. **Discuss and Engage:** As a family, discuss the passage. Here are some ideas to engage the spiritual practices of disciplined giving.

### Shoe Box Gifts

As a family, or individually, research and find a ministry or social agency to which you are able to make a gift. Gifts could be items, or money, or time. The Gifts with Vision catalogue may be helpful ([giftswithvision.ca](https://giftswithvision.ca)). Other ideas might include a local food bank, thrift shop, or shelter. Give each member of your family a shoe box that they will fill, to make up the gift. If you are giving time or money, you might use the shoe box symbolically. Put symbols in it as a way to remind yourself of what your gift will be. Together, go and give the gifts.

### Closing Prayer

Loving God, thank you for loving us and taking care of us. You provide us with the things we need and some of the things we want. Help us to cheerfully share from what you have given to us, so that others might have what they need.

Pray for each other; include the joys and concerns of each person.

## Appendix 3-2: Scripture Versions

### 2 Corinthians 9:6–7 *Common English Bible*

What I mean is this: the one who sows a small number of seeds will also reap a small crop, and the one who sows a generous amount of seeds will also reap a generous crop.

Everyone should give whatever they have decided in their heart. They shouldn’t give with hesitation or because of pressure. God loves a cheerful giver.

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### 2 Corinthians 9:6–7 *New Revised Standard Version*

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

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## SERMON GUIDE: Giving on Purpose

### 2 Corinthians 9:6–7

We have been reflecting for the past two weeks on the discipline of giving. If you have missed any of those weeks, here is the short version. In Week 1, we highlighted the fact that the spiritual practice of gratitude can make a difference in us and influence how we live differently and reach out to the world. In Week 2, we learned that giving goes beyond simple self-interest; it is a matter of prolonged, patient, trusting commitment to God. This week, we focus on the potential of giving to stir greater generosity when it springs from loving intention. We will take a deeper look at 2 Corinthians 9:6–7.

Paul writes this portion of his letter to the Corinthian church to address one specific area of their Christian witness: their financial giving to support those in need in Jerusalem, including needy Christians. This letter was also written to stir the people to give more diligently as a famine had swept across Judea (late 40s C.E.). Within these two verses, I lift up two key principles for us

to consider as we think about giving: 1) it matters how much we give and 2) giving should be intentional with love in mind.

### It matters how much we give.

Using the principle of sowing and reaping, Paul highlights that generosity begets greater generosity. He asserts: “…the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6). This verse alludes to Proverbs 11:24–26, which reads: “There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself. The people will curse him who withholds grain, but blessing will be on the head of him who sells it.” (*New King James Version*)

This is a principle that holds true in the natural and spiritual world. It is a principle that would be obvious to a farmer or a gardener. There is a direct relationship between the abundance and sparsity of a harvest based on the quantity sown. If we scatter seed sparingly in a field, it will produce a meager crop. If we scatter seed generously, it will produce an abundant crop.

The word “sparingly” is a good translation of the Greek word pheidomenos. It means to hold back, to give with restraint, to measure with a teaspoon rather than a jug. By using this word, Paul highlights his suspicion that there are givers who are holding back from giving, even though they have enough available to give more. If that is the case, then the restraint is not just about the money; it is about the state of the heart of the giver.

The seed you and I sow may be money, or time, or talent.

What holds you back from giving more than you are giving to the needs around you (more time, more talent, more money)?

What holds you back from giving more, when in reality you can give (more time, more talent, more money)?

Too often we give out of a sense of scarcity rather than a sense of bounty. Too often we give from a heart that fears that we do not have enough. Too often we give from a heart that forgets that all we have comes from God, the provider and sustainer. Too often we give from a heart that struggles to trust God. We often give forgetting that Jesus says: “…give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back” (Luke 6:38). We forget that Jesus says, “…do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Are you not of more value than they?… And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.… But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:25–26, 28–29, 33).

If our expectation is to make a difference, if our expectation is for more needs to be met by our giving, then we cannot give sparingly; we need to change the way we sow our seeds, we need a change to the way we give, we need a change of heart from giving sparingly to giving bountifully.

Paul presents the principle of bountiful giving, using the Greek word eulogia, a combination of two words, *eu* (good), and *logos* (word). Eulogia literally means good word, later coming to mean blessing. The term carries the idea that those who bless will be blessed, those who give generously will receive generosity in return.

Where does this blessing come from? There are several directions: let’s take two. The blessings come from:

* the act of giving itself—those who give generously speak of feeling a sense of satisfaction and joy to have contributed. Jesus also says “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35)
* God – God promises blessing for generosity. Proverbs 19:17 reads “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to [God], and will be repaid in full”; Proverbs 28:27 reads “Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing”; Psalm 41:1–3 reads “Happy are those who consider the poor; [God] delivers them in the day of trouble. [God] protects them and keeps them alive; they are called happy in the land. Youdo not give them up to the will of their enemies. [God] sustains them on their sickbed; in their illness you heal all their infirmities”

### Giving should be intentional with love in mind.

Paul says, “Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Paul uses the Greek phrase *ek lupe*, which means “out of grief or sorrow” and the Greek phrase *ek anagke*, which means “out of necessity or compulsion” to convey the idea that when we give, it should not be a painful experience; it should not feel like someone is twisting your arm or holding you to ransom; we should not grieve the money we put on the offering plate or give out of guilt.

Eugene Peterson, in *The Message*, translates this verse like this:

Remember: A stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop. I want each of you to take plenty of time to think it over, and make up your own mind what you will give. That will protect you against sob stories and arm-twisting. God loves it when the giver delights in the giving.

That translation makes it a lot clearer, doesn’t it? When we think about charitable giving, quite often, it is driven by guilt tripping, arm-twisting, and sob stories. It’s hard to say no to images of poverty on the screen, children in need of surgery that will save their lives, parents who need assistance so that they can give their children Christmas presents, or the look on the face of a person in need when they receive their donated supply of groceries from the food bank. It’s hard to resist the ad campaigns that urge us to do these good things and alleviate suffering in the world, though admittedly the tactics are designed to tug on our emotions. Paul wishes to draw our attention to the fact that sometimes when we give, it is not a matter of the heart, it is merely out of emotion, and it shouldn’t be that way. While compassion is the emotional response to suffering, if after giving we feel guilt or regret, then one has to question what drove the response to begin with.

Instead, Paul says, give as you have “made up your mind,” coming from the Greek word proaireō that means “to reach a decision beforehand, commit oneself to, to prefer.” If we think about it, this makes sense, because our circumstances differ. From moment to moment our circumstances change, and we have to respond to those circumstances even when we contemplate our giving. In other words, when we are asked to give, we are invited to deliberately consider the need and decide on our gift, based both on what we have to give and what the size of the needs are that we are trying to meet. While it is our responsibility to give both to the work of God and to help those in need, and though the tithe is the suggested starting point for us to give intentionally to the work of the church, Christian giving should be a product of thoughtful discipleship. When we give to the Mission & Service of the United Church or (include here other projects that your congregation collects gifts for), it is not to be done under compulsion or because we are made to feel bad about the suffering of others. We should give because we want to give, and what we give should be a conscious decision based on the depth of the need and the extent of our resources.

What God desires are people who are happy to give because they are able to give as they are able to give and are committed to give so that God’s work will flourish. That happiness in giving comes when we give with love in mind. When God gives, God gives with love in mind, “For God so loved the world, that [God] gave [God’s] only Son” (John 3:16). That is what Paul means when he says “for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). A cheerful giver is one who gives with love on their mind. A bountiful giver is one who gives from a heart that wants to share and out of love for those in need, out of love for God’s work, and the desire for that work to continue.

This morning, I invite us to give out of love, and not because of shame, fear, or a sense of responsibility. Give out of love, a love that has no limits, a love that has but one desire, that is to see that the beneficiary experiences a better life and to ensure that the good work continues.

This is the point: Give generously, give intentionally, give with love in mind, for God loves a cheerful giver. A cheerful giver is one who gives on purpose and not under compulsion.

Amen.

# 

# Week 4: Giving as Abundant Witness

## LITURGY

### Gather

#### Welcome

Discipleship is stewardship. It is a fundamental spiritual discipline that grounds our lives both in Holy Mystery and gratitude. Today is Week 4 of our five-week focus on the spiritual practices of stewardship and how they create the opportunity for us and others to be enriched in every way. So far, we’ve focused on the spiritual practices of gratitude, commitment, and discipline.

Today we’re focusing on abundance: in God, within community, through us, and how we are each invited to be full participants in the stewardship of God’s abundance.

#### Acknowledgement of Traditional Territories

(*If it is your community’s practice, you are encouraged to insert a Territory Acknowledgement here. A good source for naming the original inhabitants of your community and learning more about Territory Acknowledgement is* [*native-land.ca*](http://native-land.ca/)*.*)

#### Candle Lighting

As we gather to worship, we light this candle to remember the light and love that Jesus shared with so many. He did not keep this light to himself. Jesus shared it with his friends, and after Jesus died, his friends continued to share the light with their friends. For generations upon generations, the light has been shared, and love continues. Jesus is still with us. Today, in love, we welcome the light, the light of the world.

#### Call to Worship

One: We live with such abundance.

**All: Yet people go hungry every day and try to exist below the poverty line.**

One: We have so many blessings.

**All: Yet people try to sleep when they are cold, fearful, and unsafe.**

One: We have been supplied with all the seed we need.

**All: Yet people are limited based on their colour, race, creed, ability, identity, age, orientation, education, and language.**

One: God calls us to be a thankful people.

**All: In this worship experience, may we be reminded that from our abundance we are called to love and serve others, reaching both inward and outward. This is a sacred invitation to be part of God’s mission in all aspects of creation.**

#### Opening Song

“We Praise You, O God Our Redeemer” (*Voices United* 218)

#### Opening Prayer

Gather us in, O God, and pull us closer to the sacred centre of our existence. Ground us in your abundant blessing and a limitless supply of both seed and bread. Help us to see the abundance of creation all around us, so that we, too, can engage in acts of joyful witness and build a community where everyone is wanted, included, and affirmed. Amen.

#### Prayer of Confession

One: Followers of Jesus, God’s love is limitless. There is nothing we have done that moves us outside of God’s grace, and so we can own our actions, knowing we are loved.

**All: Giver who blesses us abundantly, we acknowledge there are times when we have held that abundance to only benefit ourselves. There have been times when we’ve treated your abundance as an entitlement, times when we’ve only scattered the good seed amongst those who reflect our own image, and times when the bread we provide is limited by a list of conditions of our making. We have engaged in service for the compliments, pats on the back, and gift cards instead of seeing our service as living out our thankfulness. Help us own our actions and the pain they have inflicted on others and ourselves. Help us shift from seeing our lives through the lens of abundance in life toward life in abundance, so that with you, in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, we can change the world one act of gospel love at a time. Amen.**

#### Silent Prayer

(*Time to sit in God’s loving and forgiving presence*)

#### Words of Assurance

One: Friends, reconciliation and healing are possible. Forgiveness and renewal are offered to us without limitation, precondition, or exception. In God’s grace we are all forgiven, reconciled, and healed.

**Many: In God’s love we are made whole. In this sacred community we embrace our imperfections, trusting in God’s abundant blessing. We are loved. You and I are loved as people created in the image of God.**

#### Prayer Song for Transformation

“Spirit of the Living God” (VU 376) v. 1

### Engage

#### All Ages Theme Conversation

##### 1. Growing Abundance

You will need two bowls, each filled with about 250 mL (1 cup) of warm water with a little sugar dissolved in it. You also need 2 portions of dry instant yeast: 1 grain and 30 mL (2 tbsp). You might want to practise this ahead of time to check the timing.

As you start, show people that you are placing one grain of yeast in the water in one bowl and sprinkling the yeast on the water in the other bowl.

Ask people about the things they like to do or the hobbies they have (e.g., playing an instrument, playing sports, painting, drawing, playing video games).

Do they know other people who enjoy the same things or have the same talents that they do?

*(By now the yeast should be starting to grow. Continue asking questions.*)

Could they play in a band alone? How about hockey? How about soccer?

One person alone can’t do any of those things well. Each person needs to share what they can do.

Show the water with one grain of yeast. Observe that the one grain has done what it was supposed to, yet there’s not enough to make bread.

You can’t make bread from one grain of yeast. It just won’t work.

Show the water with more yeast. Observe that more yeast gives a bigger reaction. Now you can make bread!

When we give from our abundance, when we share the best that we have with one another and God, things multiply!

Or

##### 2. Music and Stewardship

(*Plan ahead, engaging someone who plays the piano to help you with the following exercise.*)

Ask the musician to play one note—which note doesn’t matter, but just one note—over and over until you ask them to stop.

Ask everyone: “Wasn’t that great music?” Try humming the note over and over.

If you can, go over to the instrument with people and repeat the process. Observe that there are a lot more keys that aren’t being used. Ask to have two keys used. Then three. Then a chord. Then left and right hand. Then a phrase of music. With each step, comment on how it’s starting to sound more and more like something familiar. (This might be a way to lead into the next hymn.)

Comment, “We’re like the instrument. We all have gifts and talents, yet sometimes we only use one key…one talent. God calls us to use all we’ve got—to share all our keys with the world.”

Or

#### Testimony

A person shares a personal story about how they have seen the gifts that they have given to the church (time, talent, and treasure) make a difference in their own life and the lives of others.

#### Hymn/Song/Anthem

“Love Is Something if You Give It Away” (Magic Penny), “I Come with Joy” (VU 477), or “We Give Our Hands to You” (*More Voices* 187)

#### Scripture Reading

2 Corinthians 9:8, 11–12

#### Anthem/Special Music

[“This Indescribable Gift”](#_This_Indescribable_Gift_2) (see last pages of this file)

#### Message

“Enriched in Every Way: Abundant Living” (see [Sermon Guide for Week 4](#_SERMON_GUIDE:_Enriched))

#### Hymn/Song/Anthem

“Grateful” (MV 182)

### Respond

#### Prayers of the People

Creator, you bless us abundantly in all things. We give you thanks, that within your abundance, there is room for all creation without needing to worry about whether there is enough. Help us to see that there is enough to go around, ensuring that each of us has what we need to experience life abundantly. We are grateful for the opportunities you provide for us to be generous on every occasion. Help us to address the distribution challenge of our world so that an economy rooted in gospel equity is our goal.

In you, O God, we seek and have our being. You foster a network of interconnectedness that spans time and space, age and location. Grounded in that deep sense of relationality, we pray for people, place, and events that are in our minds and on our hearts:

* For those wrestling with mental health, mental illness, and all forms of addiction
* For those whose experience is a complete lack of abundance of anything other than violence, pain, fear, frustration, and struggle
* For those who yearn and work for a just and equitable distribution of resources in our community and around the world
* For those who try to change unbalanced systems that turn people into consumers and products into promised happiness
* For those trying to support family members and walk beside them
* For those who are grieving and struggling with how life can have any sense of abundance, now or in the future
* For ourselves as we discern how to embody our response in action to the call you place upon our lives

And we hold sacred space to name aloud or in the silence of our minds and hearts the prayers we carry within us. (Name any prayers that have been requested, if that is part of your tradition.)

(*Time of silence—at least 30 seconds*)

Christ, you call us to be your hands, feet, and voice in the world. Help us to engage in ministry that is an overflowing expression of our gratefulness. Help us to be part of your response in the world as we join together in the prayer that Jesus inspired for his disciples so many years ago…

#### The Lord’s Prayer

#### Offering Our Gifts

(*Testimony may be included here*)

#### Offertory Invitation

Each of us gives from the abundance God has given us. Each of our gifts is different, yet all are necessary and all are rooted in the same sense of gratitude and discipleship. Thank you.

Today, I also invite you to make a commitment in faith about how generous you plan to be over the coming months. If you have not already returned your Faith Commitment card, I hope you will do so today.

Together we respond to God’s abundance in our lives so that our offerings represent an overflowing expression of thanks and commitment to God’s mission in this community, and through Mission & Service across Canada and around the world.

#### Offering Hymn/Song

“We Give Thee but Thine Own” (VU 543)

#### Offertory Prayer

O God, bless these expressions of our commitment to your mission in the world. Together with our time and talent, may they embody our continued response to the abundance you provide so that others may share in the blessing you provide. Amen.

#### Hymn/Song

“Go, Make a Diff’rence” (MV 209)

### Sending Forth

#### Sending Forth and Blessings

Go into the world embodying what it means to live in abundance with overflowing thanksgiving. Go and embody what it means to live rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Go and be the church in action.

And as we go about our daily lives, may the blessing of our co-creative God enliven and shape your lives; may the love of God shown to us in the life of Jesus and the resurrection of Christ challenge our perceptions of abundance; and may the Spirit encourage us to bear faithful witness in all we do. Amen.

#### Sending Forth Song

“Go Now in Peace” (MV 211), or “May the Love of the Lord” (MV 218), or another congregational favourite

## CHILDREN/YOUTH/ALL AGES FAITH FORMATION

### Introduction

The focus for this week is 2 Corinthians 9:8 and 11–12. Paul reminds us that an abundant life is rooted in God and that as we respond from God’s abundance, people can receive everything they need. Paul reminds us that having a lot of stuff isn’t the same as living an abundant life. Being a disciple of Jesus is different from just having more things. It’s about giving to serve others. As we give, we show God’s abundance to others through our actions.

### Preparation

The reading is from a letter from Paul to siblings in Christ in Corinth. Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to give generously to a collection he is taking for the Christians in Jerusalem. The time this week is designed to explore what it means to give from God’s abundance. We will discover that as we give from God’s abundance, we are able to help others. Our disciplined practice of giving ensures that needs are met. We will also discover that God cares about the attitude with which we give and that there is a preferred attitude.

***Supplies:*** buttons of various shapes, sizes, and colours

For the collage: pictures of people being generous and sharing with others, large piece of Bristol board, glue, paint, glitter, and other scrapbooking items

### Gather

#### Light the Christ Candle

#### Check In

Spend some time building community by going around the circle sharing names and inviting each participant (if they wish) to answer the check-in question for the day:

* In one word, how are you feeling today?

For young children, it is helpful to have emoji images showing different feelings. Display the images in the centre of the circle so the children can pick one to share. See [Appendix 4-1](#_Appendix_4-1:_Check-in) at the end of this section for sample check-in cards.

#### Button Prayers

Make sure there is at least one button for each person praying. Each person chooses a button. All are led in prayer with these instructions:

* Feel the hardness of the button and think about people who are going through hard times. Ask God to help them.
* Buttons are used to fasten clothing, bringing two pieces of a garment together. Ask God to bring together people who have argued and moved apart from one another. Pray that God will bring peace.
* Look at your button and see how many holes it has. Name that number of things for which you would like to say thank you to God and say thank you prayers.
* Look at the colour of the button and thank God for something that is that colour.
* Find someone who has the same colour button as you. Say thank you to God for families. Ask God to bless them, to help them to live together, and to help them to love one another.
* Find someone who has a different button from you—it could be different in shape, size, or colour. Thank God for making everyone different and giving us all different gifts.
* Pray for the person you have found. Ask them what they would like God to help them with.

#### Song

“This Is the Day” (*More Voices* 122)

#### Story and Wondering

##### Gratitude Collage

Take the pictures of people being generous and sharing with others together with the large piece of Bristol board, glue, paint, glitter, and other scrapbooking items. Spread the materials around your space so that people will be able to find the items easily.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:1–12. Say: “God has given us all we need to be generous.”

Invite people to go and find the items spread around to make the gratitude/sharing collage. Ask how the pictures show giving or being generous or sharing. Add them to the collage.

When the collage is finished, talk about how everything you needed was available, yet it took everyone looking, gathering, and gluing to make the collage. God has given us all we need when we share together in ministry.

#### Sowing and Reaping

Check in with the group and ask how the seeds that were planted in Week 2 are doing at home. Does anyone have selfies with their plants to share? Who is looking after the plants at home?

Comment on how it takes commitment to nurture the plant as it grows.

Check in about the seeds that were planted in Week 3. Are they growing? Brainstorm ideas of where you could plant the seedlings so that they might grow large and strong. Is there a local community garden or the garden of someone in the community of faith?

Or

#### Video

View the video [*One Human Family, Food for All*](youtube.com/watch?v=qhU5JEd-XRo) ([youtube.com/watch?v=qhU5JEd-XRo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhU5JEd-XRo)). Read 2 Corinthians 9:8, 11–12.

##### Questions

* What was your favourite part of this video?
* What is the most important part of this video for you?
* What did you notice in the video?
* When you hear this reading, what stands out for you?
* How were the characters “enriched in every way” (2 Corinthians 9:11) to be generous? What do you think it was like for them? Easy? Hard? Did they figure it out right away?

*If you have time, it is beneficial to watch the video a second time.*

* How are you “enriched in every way” to be generous? What are things you can do to serve others?

### Respond

#### Create a Video

***Supplies and resource person:*** obtain permission from parents/guardians for youth to use a phone and any app decided upon to create a video; a leader who knows how to use the technology to make a video; items used to write or create

##### Instructions

Brainstorm ways in which people are generous and share with others. Perhaps there are some examples from the group to share. Your challenge is to create a video that focuses on generosity and sharing with others.

Using the phone that has the app chosen to make the video, record individuals acting, writing, and/or creating. Please make sure that you have permission to show each person’s face in the video. You can record someone writing or creating each item. If you are adding music, decide what would be a good match for the theme of gratefulness. You will also need to decide how to share the video. Will it be made public? Perhaps it could be shared with the whole community of faith during worship.

#### Gifts with Vision Project

How is the plan to raise funds for the gift(s) going? Have you met your goal? Do you need to reassess and make a new goal? Review the activities you have done in order to raise funds for the gifts. This project takes discipline to remain focused on planning and executing activities in order to raise funds. How does the group feel now compared with how they felt at the beginning of the project?

#### Option for Local Giving

* What are some of the needs that you see in your community or school or church?
* What do you have to give that will help?

Give to a need: Encourage the children and youth to bring something for a need they have identified.

### Closing

#### Closing Prayer

Loving God, be with each of us as we leave this place. Help us to remember all the blessings in our life. Help us to remember to share what we have with others and to do so cheerfully. Amen.

## Appendix 4-1: Check-in Cards



## STEWARDSHIP@HOME

### Preparation

Decide on a version of the Bible that is most accessible to your family. Have the Bible on hand. There are translations of this week’s scripture focus from the Common English Bible and the *New Revised Standard Version* in [Appendix 4-2](#_Appendix_4-2:_Scripture) at the end of this section.

Have copies of the scripture passage available for each person together with copies of [Appendix 4-3](#_Appendix_4-3:_Giving) and [4-4](#_Appendix_4-4:_Share) depending on which activities you choose.

You might consider creating a centrepiece in your home for devotions. This can be at the dining or kitchen table, coffee table, fireplace hearth, or wherever your family gathers to share. You can place the centrepiece on a cloth the colour of which complements the liturgical season. Add a candle and any number of symbols of our faith, e.g., a cross, a rock with words of inspiration, flowers, a plant.

### Devotional

1. **Pray:** Invite everyone to take three slow, deep breaths.

Dear God, we give thanks for this day. May we remember you are as close to us as the breath that we breathe. Be with us in our hearts, in our speaking, and in our listening. Amen.

Take a few minutes for each person to name joys and concerns from the day or week.

1. **Listen:** Have one family member read aloud 2 Corinthians 9:8–12, or even better, someone can retell the reading in their own words.
2. **Discuss and Engage:** As a family, discuss the passage. Share stories about a time/experience when someone gave something to you and how it made a difference. It could be something that meant more to you as the receiver than it seemed to mean for the giver. When were you the giver? What was it like to give from your abundance?

### Daily Giving from Abundance Chart

Use the Giving from Abundance Chart. (See Appendix 2 at the end of this section.) Or

### Share a Compliment

Each day, take one compliment from the sheet in Appendix 3 at the end of this section and share it with someone.

### Closing Prayer

Loving God, thank you for loving us and taking care of us. You provide us with the things we need and some of the things we want. Help us to cheerfully share from what you have given to us, so that others can have what they need.

Pray for each other; include the joys and concerns of each person.

## Appendix 4-2: Scripture Versions

### 2 Corinthians 9:8–12 *Common English Bible*

God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace. That way, you will have everything you need always and in everything to provide more than enough for every kind of good work. As it is written [God] scattered everywhere; [God] gave to the needy; [God's] righteousness remains forever.

The one who supplies seed for planting and bread for eating will supply and multiply your seed and will increase your crop, which is righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way. Such generosity produces thanksgiving to God through us. Your ministry of this service to God’s people isn’t only fully meeting their needs but it is also multiplying in many expressions of thanksgiving to God.

COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE. © Copyright 2011 COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE. All rights reserved. Used by permission. ([www.commonenglishbible.com](https://www.commonenglishbible.com/)).

### 2 Corinthians 9:8–12 *New Revised Standard Version*

And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, “[God] scatters abroad, [God] gives to the poor; [God's] righteousness endures forever.”

[God] who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

*New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

## Appendix 4-3: Giving from Abundance Chart

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Sunday** | **Abundance of Conversation** | Think of someone you haven’t talked to in a while. Take some time today to have a really good chat. |
| **Monday** | **Abundance of Relationships** | Make a card for someone you know is unwell. |
| **Tuesday** | **Abundance of Kindness** | Smile at 10 different people today. |
| **Wednesday** | **Abundance of Compassion** | Be generous with your words today. Give as many compliments to people as you can. |
| **Thursday** | **Abundance of Grace** | Tidy up someone else’s mess today without letting them know it was you. |
| **Friday** | **Abundance of Connection** | Spend less time on screen today and play a board game or engage in another activity with family or friends. |
| **Saturday** | **Abundance of Gratitude** | Today is “no complaining Saturday.” Yup! Just don’t do it. |

These are only examples of what you might do. You might want to create your own chart using the same headers with different activities.

***Created your own chart?***

*Please share your ideas on the Called to Be the Church Facebook page or website.*

## Appendix 4-4: Share a Compliment



## SERMON GUIDE: Enriched in Every Way—Abundant Living

### 2 Corinthians 9:8, 11–12

We have been reflecting for the past three weeks on the discipline of giving. If you missed any of those weeks, here is the short version. In Week 1, we highlighted the fact that the spiritual practice of gratitude can make a difference in us and influence how we live differently and reach out to the world. In Week 2, we learned that giving goes beyond simple self-interest; it is a matter of prolonged, patient, trusting commitment to God. In Week 3, we focused on the potential of giving to stir greater generosity when it springs from loving intention. This week, we’re looking at how God’s economy of abundance is different from the world’s and what can happen when we root ourselves in God’s economy.

Friends, let’s pray together.

We give you thanks, O God, for the opportunity to hear again the stories of the faith that shape and mould us as disciples of Jesus and as stewards of God’s abundance. Help us see afresh how these stories shape and inform our lives, so that together we can ground ourselves in your abundant blessing—rather than in the latest upgrade the world tells us to crave. Bless the words of my mouth and the hearts, minds, and souls of those that hear them and help us turn them into action. Amen.

“And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

That’s quite the statement that Paul included here as part of his second letter to the church in Corinth. It’s quite a statement because of the assumptions it makes that might fall as hollow on our 21st-century ears. In many ways it’s easy to hear these words from Paul and dismiss them as the ramblings of an ancestor to today’s televangelists. It’s even easy to hear in these words a version of the prosperity gospel: “Just give enough and God will grant your every whim, like he gave me a private jet and $5000 limited edition sneakers.” In other words, it is easy to dismiss these words outright as being utterly irrelevant to our lives today, yet if we did that, we’d miss what Paul is really trying to get at. We’d miss that there is a difference between “being blessed and sharing abundantly” and “having and living in abundance.” We’d miss the difference between the God-rooted economy Paul is talking about and the kind of accumulation of products economy that we live with every day.

One of the challenges Paul faced was very much the same kind of dilemma: how do you talk to people about money, blessing, abundance, and good work? As a general rule, unless it’s about their perceived lack of money or what’s happened to their investments, people tend not to talk about money. It’s a private matter. Yet Paul challenges the early church community in Corinth to see it another way. You can imagine the reception a letter like this would get. “Who are you to tell me how to spend my hard-earned money!” If we’re honest, we’ve all said or thought some variation of that phrase, even if it was as teenagers when our parents told us we couldn’t just spend it all. Paul sets up a different understanding: God’s economy and our economy are similar, yet different. The challenge is often for us to understand what living abundantly looks like when it’s all bound up with having abundance.

(*Show or describe the video clip of PBS Frontline, The Persuaders,* [*youtu.be/qg6UsQEObpg*](http://youtu.be/qg6UsQEObpg)*.*)

Paul was talking about meaning: an economy of meaning rooted in God’s grace and abundance. It’s the same concept that megabrands have tapped into over the last 20 years. It’s not just a watch…it’s a personal accessory that empowers greatness. It’s not just a drink…it’s rocket fuel that will turn you into a super athlete. It’s not just a computer…it’s a way of life and you can never have too many of these things, because the next version, the next upgrade, will enable you to do even more and make you a happier person. If you just have enough stuff, if you just surround yourself with an abundance of things, then having meaning in life is as close as your next trip to Costco or Walmart.

The amazing thing is that Paul was facing the same challenge! When it comes to having “enough of everything,” it isn’t about the individual. It isn’t about my perceived need to have impossible goals or a third space to create community. Living in abundance isn’t having abundance. No amount of abundance will ever fill the need we have for meaning, and narrative, and transcendence. No amount of stuff will ever fill that spot in our souls where only God is big enough. You see, abundance, having “enough of everything,” isn’t about me. It’s about you. It’s about the prodigal other. It isn’t about how much stuff we can buy at what discount price so we can bring it home, bag it up in three months, and go buy more. It isn’t about the never- ending cycle of cynical consumerism that promises us more meaning and more happiness if we only buy more. It isn’t about chasing the capitalist dream down the self-entitled rabbit hole of soul-destroying nihilism. And I believe that at a certain heart level, we all know that none of this is true. We know we cannot create meaningful community and relationships based on the abundance of stuff we surround ourselves with.

And that’s really what’s at the heart of the letter to the church in Corinth. The way Paul uses the word “abundance” and the phrase “enough of everything” in his letter can easily be misunderstood today. The Greek word he uses is autarkia (ow-tar-kay-a). It can mean things like “self-sufficiency” or “contentment,” yet even if we use this language, we can miss Paul’s meaning.

In Paul’s context, being self-sufficient, *autarkia*, means something like a frame of mind which was completely independent of outward dependency. It’s a frame of mind that is self-sufficient from the influences of the best emotive marketing, from the constant drumming mantra of “buy more, shop more, get more.” And it’s rooted in something beyond the self. For the Christian, that’s the gospel of Jesus and the abundance of God. That’s the grounding for a life of abundance. That’s the place from which Paul calls his community to be generous. That’s the place from which you and I are invited to be generous too. Not from the place of our leftovers and “this will do,” but from the place of abundance in God, because Paul knew something else too: with abundance comes responsibility.

Believe it or not, the abundance that God provides isn’t for us to squirrel away and hoard for some proverbial rainy day. It’s for us to share with one another and with the world. The abundance isn’t given so we can dig a hole and hide it away. It’s not given to sit in some bank account accruing interest. It’s not given so we can only share our time and talent when there’s a clear and obvious return on that investment. It’s given so we can use it together for ministry in the world. That’s what Paul is getting at. God has given the church community in Corinth every blessing in abundance so that they can share abundantly. That’s how they could build the kin- dom of God in their midst—by modelling a completely different form of economy that shared the various, yet equally important, gifts that each person had in abundance, so that the needs of the saints—of the people—were met and the doors of God’s economy were thrown open wide.

And here’s the thing: this wasn’t only true for the early church in Corinth. It’s true for us. It’s true for you and me. Each of us has an abundance of blessings that we’re called to share with one another and the world. Each one of us has time and talent and treasure that we’re invited to share with one another and the world. Yes, each response to God’s abundance is going to look different. We’re different people, yet our responses are all given equally as a response to God’s abundance. When we share from God’s abundance, we can change the world.

When we share from God’s abundance we can support (name a local outreach project/ministry). When we share from God’s abundance, the Mission & Service of the United Church is able to make a real, tangible difference in people’s lives. When we share from God’s abundance, we can face the challenges of our society and work for systemic change. When we share from God’s abundance, our focus isn’t on the mountain of stuff we have and whether we have more than the people next door. When we root ourselves in God’s abundance, we move beyond the question of “What’s in it for me?” and into the question “How can I make a difference?” When we respond to the invitation to give from God’s abundance, to be full participants in God’s economy, we live into being a gospel people, enriched in every way.

Amen.

# 

# Week 5: Giving Thanks and Serving

## LITURGY

### Gather

#### Welcome

#### Theme Background

Stewardship is the lifestyle of discipleship. Stewardship calls upon us to recognize that all we have is a gift from God. We are called upon to use our gifts to the best of our abilities, to serve God, and to serve each other. The disciple is one who has made a commitment to follow the teachings of Jesus.

As we have journeyed this year, we have focused on four spiritual practices of stewardship and how they create opportunity for us and others to be enriched in every way. Our journey has taken us to consider gratitude, commitment, discipline, and witness. Today in our worship, we will bring our journey to an end as we focus on service and thanksgiving.

#### Acknowledgement of Traditional Territories

(*If it is your community’s practice, you are encouraged to insert a Territory Acknowledgement here. A good source for naming the original inhabitants of your community and learning more about Territory Acknowledgement is* [*native-land.ca*](http://native-land.ca/)*.*)

#### Candle Lighting

As we gather to worship, we light this candle to remember the light and love that Jesus shared with so many. He did not keep this light to himself. Jesus shared it with his friends, and after Jesus died, his friends continued to share the light with their friends. For generations upon generations, the light has been shared, and love continues. Jesus is still with us. Today, in love, we welcome the light, the light of the world.

#### Call to Worship

(adapted from Psalm 92:1–4)

One: It is good to give thanks to God,

**All: And to sing praises to your name, O God.**

One: Let us declare the steadfast love of God in the morning,

**All: And at night we will speak of God’s faithfulness.**

One: With the music of instruments our praise shall arise;

**All: With our shouts of joy we make known our thanksgiving.**

One: For you, O Lord, have made us glad by your work;

**All: At the work of your hands we sing for joy.**

#### Opening Song

“When We Seek Language” (*More Voices* 49), or “Praise with Joy the World’s Creator” (*Voices United* 312)

#### Opening Prayer

Jesus, you said that you were among us as one who serves. You washed the feet of your disciples and, in so doing, gave us an example of service. As we come to worship this day, help us to fully understand the example of service you gave us. Show us how to serve so that we can glorify you without calling attention to ourselves.

One: Show us that in serving,

**All: we can show our gratitude and commitment to you.**

One: Show us that in serving,

**All: we witness to your goodness.**

One: Show us that in serving,

**All: we are offering thanksgiving for all that you have done. Amen.**

#### Prayer of Confession

One: Jesus said, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35*b*). Let us make our confessions about the ways we have been hesitant to serve the needs of the world.

**All: Holy One, help us to serve following the example of Jesus who offered true service and not self-righteous service. Teach us to avoid the type of service that seeks to impress others, that seeks external rewards, that seeks to pick and choose who to serve, and that serves based on our moods and feelings. Where we have sought to serve others and have been insensitive to their needs, and where, in serving, we have humiliated or belittled others, forgive us. Help us to offer service that is grounded in our relationship with you, service that does not need to calculate results, and service that is based on the needs of others. Help us to have the mind of Christ and teach us your lifestyle of service.**

(*Silent prayer—time to sit in God’s loving and forgiving presence*)

#### Words of Assurance

One: Friends, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and gave them an example of servanthood.  
Know that Jesus even today washes our feet and enables us to walk the path he sets before us.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

#### Response

“We Give Our Thanks” (MV 187), or “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy” (VU 271)

#### Passing the Peace of Christ

### Engage

#### All Ages Theme Conversation: Thanksgiving Tree

(*Before the service, place a tree (or a large branch held upright in a pot with stones or soil) at the front of the church. Print and cut out paper flowers. Make enough for everyone who attends the worship. Have string or tape available to attach the flowers to the tree.*)

There once was a tree, and not just any type of tree. This was a “Serve Thanks Tree.” This tree had the most beautiful flowers you could find anywhere, and they gave off the sweetest scent. No one got sick from the scent of these flowers—in fact, once you smelled it, you felt good!

People in the town soon discovered that the only time the flowers came out on the tree was when people did something for others. When people did something unselfishly, and did not expect any reward or publicity, when people used their talents and gifts to help others, the tree was filled with flowers. When that happened, everyone in the town felt good.

Today, the tree only has a few flowers on it. Can you help the tree to bloom with more flowers? On the flower you have, write down something that you can do for others or something you have seen someone else do for which you are thankful. It does not have to be anything big.

When you have written something, come and attach your flower to the tree. Let us make the tree full of the flowers—full of the ways in which we can serve and be thankful.

(*Allow time for people to come forward to attach flowers to the tree. Music might be played.*)

(*When all (who want to) have attached their flowers, invite the congregation to say together*…)

**Help us, good Lord, to serve as you have served. Help us to give thanks that we can serve others, and may our service give you glory!**

**Amen.**

Or

#### The Ways We Give

(*Before the service, create four large signs on which one of the following words has been written: GIVING, DUTY, GRUDGE, THANKS. Ask for four volunteers.*)

We have been talking about giving this morning, but do you know we have a choice about how we give? In fact, you could say we have three choices.

(*One volunteer holds up the word GIVING.*)

We are encouraged to give by serving others. Each of us has gifts and talents that we can give. (*Ask for examples of talents that can be used in giving.*)

Friends, we can give because we are expected to give. You could say that it is our duty to give. When we give, you could say that we give out of a sense of duty.

(*Ask a volunteer to hold up the word DUTY on the left-hand side of the word GIVING.*)

You could also say that this is DUTY-GIVING. But friends, there is another way we can give. We can give because we feel forced to give. This happens when we give because we are afraid of the consequences of not giving. When this happens, we are sometimes unhappy that we are forced to give, and we grumble about giving.

(*Ask the volunteer to lower the word DUTY.*)

(*Ask another volunteer to hold up the word GRUDGE on the left-hand side of the word GIVING.*)

When we are forced to give and we are afraid of what will happen if we do not give, we could call this GRUDGE-GIVING. But friends, there is still another way we can give. We can give as a response to that which we have received. We can give out of gratitude for the things we have. You could say that we give in this case because we are giving thanks.

(*Ask the volunteer to lower the word GRUDGE.*)

(*Ask a volunteer to hold up the word THANKS on the left-hand side of the word GIVING.*)

When we give because we are grateful or because we are thankful, then this is what we call THANKSGIVING.

Friends, we have a choice about how we give. However, if we pause to remember all that God has given to us, then it would seem that as disciples, we need to give from a place of thanksgiving.

Or

#### Testimony

A person shares a personal story about how they have seen the gifts that they have given to the church (time, talent, and treasure) make a difference in their own life and in the lives of others.

#### Song/Anthem/Special Music

[“This Indescribable Gift”](#_This_Indescribable_Gift_2) (see last pages of this file), or “Grateful” (MV 182), or “Let All Things Now Living” (VU 242)

#### Scripture Readings

2 Corinthians 9:12‒15, John 13:1‒5

#### Sermon

“In Giving We Show We Are Disciples” (see [Sermon Guide for Week 5](#_SERMON_GUIDE:_In))

#### Hymn

“Three Things I Promise” (MV 176), or “We Are Pilgrims” (VU 595)

Or

#### Choir Anthem

(as local custom may dictate)

### Respond

#### Prayers of the People

One: Jesus, you said, “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you” (Matthew 7:7). Trusting in your word and promises, we come asking, seeking, and knocking, not only for ourselves, but for the needs of the world around us.

We lift in our prayer the world and all the peoples of the world. We remember especially before you the people who live in want, hunger, or need. Move us beyond sympathy to see the ways that we can serve them.  
You have given to us the gifts and talents to serve others.

**All: Help us to serve with thanksgiving using the gifts you give.**

One: We remember those places where adequate medical care is not available to all, places where otherwise treatable medical conditions lead to prolonged illness or death.  
Move us beyond tears to see the ways that we can serve to help ensure medical care is available for all.  
You have given to us the gifts and talents to serve others.

**All: Help us to serve with thanksgiving using the gifts you give.**

One: We remember those who are discriminated against because of their female and trans gender; women who are given less pay for the same work; women and trans-people who face humiliation and danger because of their bodies and their functions; all those who face abuse and violence in their homes. Move us beyond trying to ignore the cries for help to see ways that we can serve, so that all may live with dignity and joy.  
You have given to us the gifts and talents to serve others.

**All: Help us to serve with thanksgiving using the gifts you give.**

One: We remember those who are discriminated against because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. We hold before you those who are afraid to be themselves because the truth of who they are will lead to ostracism and abuse. We hold before you the memory of those who have been murdered because of fear and hate. Open our eyes to see the injustice that is being done and help us to serve so that tears may end and the joy of living be restored.  
You have given to us the gifts and talents to serve others.

**All: Help us to serve with thanksgiving using the gifts you give.**

One: We hold before you those who are harmed by the evils of racism and white privilege, those who, because of their race or the colour of their skin, have been treated as less than human, as less than created in God’s image, those whose lives are less valued than others. Move us beyond wilful denial. Help us to serve so that the ills of racism and white privilege may be healed.  
You have given to us the gifts and talents to serve others.

**All: Help us to serve with thanksgiving using the gifts you give.**

#### The Lord’s Prayer

#### Offering Our Gifts

#### Invitation to the Offering

As an invitation to the offering, let me offer you two very important words: THANK YOU. Thank you for the gifts of money which you are about to make, because I know that they come from your faith in Jesus. Thank you for the ways you live your faith and share yourselves. Now, together, as Christ’s church, let us thank God “for [God’s] indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15) With hearts full of thanksgiving, let us offer our gifts of money for the service of God through our community of faith and the Mission & Service of the United Church.

#### Offering Song

“Creator God You Gave Us Life” (MV 27) v. 1, or “Seek Ye First” (VU 356) v. 1 and refrain

#### Offertory Prayer

Bless, O God, the gifts that we offer. As we offer them, we dedicate ourselves to you and to your service. Help us as your disciples to give, to be committed, to be grateful, to be your witnesses, and to be thankful. In so doing, may the gifts which we give bring glory to you. Amen.

#### An Affirmation

Leader: Let us affirm what we have learned as we journeyed:

**All: We are stewards of the things of God.**

Leader: God has created and continues to create. God has entrusted to us the responsibility to care for the things God has created. God has given to us all that we need for living.

**All: We are accountable to God for the ways we have care for the world.**

Leader: In expressing our faith in Jesus, let us give generously to the work of our congregation and in the wider church through Mission & Service. Let us invite others to give to the work of God and thank God for the work God continues to do.

**All: We thank God for the ways that we participate in the work and mission of God.**

Leader: We are disciples of Jesus. We are called to proclaim Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection in the ways we live.

**All: As stewards, we are called to discipleship.**

Leader: May it be so.

**All: Amen.**

#### Closing Song

“Go, Make a Diff’rence” (MV 209), or “I Danced in the Morning” (VU 352)

### Sending Forth

#### Sending Forth and Blessing

Go now into the world to give and live thankfully.  
Go, offering your gifts and talents to serve God in the world. Go and help the weak and defenseless.  
Go, showing the love of Jesus in all that you do. And may God go with you all your way.  
Amen.

#### Sending Forth Song

“May the God of Hope” (VU 424), or “Sent Out in Jesus’ Name” (MV 212)

## CHILDREN/YOUTH/ALL AGES FAITH FORMATION

### Introduction

Today we will be concluding our journey through this year’s *Called to Be the Church: Discipleship Is Stewardship* materials. Our focus today is on service as a method of giving thanks. We serve because Jesus gave us the example of serving. Service to others is a spiritual discipline and should come from a desire to offer thanks to God for the things God has done and is doing.

Service does not mean that you are subservient; instead, service comes from an abundance of thanks to God.

### Preparation

The reading is from a letter from Paul to siblings in Christ in the place of Corinth. Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to give generously to a collection he is taking for the Christians in Jerusalem. The focus scripture is 2 Corinthians 9:12–15.

Stewardship is the lifestyle of discipleship. Stewardship calls upon us to recognize that everything we have is a gift from God. We are called upon to use these gifts to the best of our ability, to serve God, and to serve each other. The disciple is one who has made a commitment to follow the teachings of Jesus.

***Supplies:*** buttons of various shapes, sizes, and colours; copies of “What, Dude?” (see [Appendix 5-2](#_Appendix_5-2:_Skit―What,)) for each person participating

For the posters: Bristol boards, old magazines, glue, scissors, glitter, markers/crayons

### Gather

#### Light the Christ Candle

#### Check In

Spend some time building community by going around the circle sharing names and inviting each participant (if they wish) to answer the check-in question for the day:

* In one word, how are you feeling today?

For young children, it is helpful to have emoji images showing different feelings. Display the images in the centre of the circle so the children can pick one to share. See [Appendix 5-1](#_Appendix_5-1:_Check-in) at the end of this section for sample check-in cards.

#### Button Prayers

Make sure there is at least one button for each person praying. Each person chooses a button. All are led in prayer with these instructions:

* Feel the hardness of the button and think about people who are going through hard times. Ask God to help them.
* Buttons are used to fasten clothing, bringing two pieces of a garment together. Ask God to bring together people who have argued and moved apart from one another. Pray that God will bring peace.
* Look at your button and see how many holes it has. Name that number of things for which you would like to say thank you to God and say thank you prayers.
* Look at the colour of the button and thank God for something that is that colour.
* Find someone who has the same coloured button as you. Say thank you to God for families. Ask God to bless them, to help them to live together, and to help them to love one another.
* Find someone who has a different button from you—it could be different in shape, size, or colour. Thank God for making everyone different and giving us all different gifts.
* Pray for the person you have found. Ask them what they would like God to help them with.

#### Song

“This Is the Day” (*More Voices* 122)

#### Story and Wondering

***Skit: What Dude?*** (see [Appendix 5-2](#_Appendix_5-2:_Skit―What,) at the end of this section)

#### Sowing and Reaping

Take some time to consider the seeds that were planted by the class. What has been happening to the seeds? If the plants are still alive, discuss with the class what they might do with them.

Reflect on Jesus washing his disciples’ feet. Ask how the class could “wash the feet of others” with the plants.

Decide how you will use the plants and who will be doing what.

#### Demonstration

(*Have the group form small groups of three or four participants. Give each small group a Bristol board and markers/crayons of a variety of colours. Provide glue and cuttings of magazine pictures.*)

##### The Task

Your group has been asked to devise a plan to encourage your church to find joy in serving others. Your group has been asked to come up with a poster to help to advertise the idea.

Help groups to determine the wording for each poster. Remember that less is more when it comes to words on a poster. Try to help each group determine what message they want to send and how best to convey it.

When the posters are complete, hang them in prominent places around your church.

#### Gifts with Vision Project

The goal was to complete this project by Week Five of this series. Have you met your goal? Make a plan to celebrate with the congregation and thank them and all of the people who helped to raise funds for the gift(s). Consider making and creating thank you cards for those who helped to support this Gifts with Vision project.

### Closing

#### Closing Prayer

Loving God, be with each of us as we leave this place. Help us to remember all the blessings in our life. Help us to remember to share what we have with others and to do so cheerfully. Amen.

## Appendix 5-1: Check-in Cards



## Appendix 5-2: Skit―What, Dude?

(*You will need three readers. Ideally, each person in the group should have a copy of the script so that they can follow the dialogue. Allow the actors to be as creative as they feel comfortable.*)

A Narrator: It is the evening before the special Passover holiday. Usually, the special supper would have been held on the day of the holiday, but for some strange reason Jesus wanted to do it the night before. The disciples are tired after spending the day preparing for the supper. They have just finished the meal and three of the disciples are talking.

Philip: I am so tired, even my hair hurts.

Andrew: How are you tired? You only moved two carpets. It was the rest of us who had to do the work.

Philip: Oh, that is how you are going to feel? Suit yourself. But the meal was wonderful. I am so full I can hardly move.

Andrew: Now that I can agree with. What is Jesus saying now?

Matthew: Not too sure. My belly is full, and I was about to fall asleep.

Philip: Dude! What is he doing? He is not supposed to be doing that.

Matthew: That is the job of a servant, the lowest ranking servant. This is not right. He should not be doing this.

Andrew: (Tries to speak but can say nothing)

Philip: Seriously, dude! He should not be washing our feet. Andrew, tell your brother, Peter, to tell him to stop.

Andrew: Pay attention, will you? Peter just said that. Jesus has told him that if he does not wash his feet, then Peter has no share with him.

Philip: That was cold! (Silence)

Philip: This is getting awkward. Andrew, Matthew, say something! This silence is deafening.

Andrew: He said he has set an example for us. He said we should do as he did. He said that we should wash each other’s feet.

Philip: But that would mean that I would get my hands dirty.

Matthew: Yup, we will get our hands dirty and we will be helping others.

Andrew: Wow.

Philip: When you think about it, serving others by washing their feet makes me feel good within myself.

Matthew: You could say that when we serve others, we get an opportunity to give thanks.

## STEWARDSHIP@HOME

### Preparation

Decide on a version of the Bible that is most accessible to your family. Have a Bible on hand. There are translations of this week’s scripture from the *Common English Bible* and the *New Revised Standard Version* in [Appendix 5-3](#_Appendix_5-3:_Scripture) at the end of this section.

Have copies of the scripture passage available for each person together with copies of the Word Search in[Appendix 5-4](#_Appendix_5-4:_Word).

You might consider creating a centrepiece in your home for devotions. This can be at the dining or kitchen table, coffee table, fireplace hearth, or wherever your family gathers to share. You can place the centrepiece on a cloth the colour of which complements the liturgical season. Add a candle and any number of symbols of our faith, e.g., a cross, a rock with words of inspiration, flowers, a plant.

### Devotional

1. **Pray:** Invite everyone to take three slow, deep breaths.

Dear God, we give thanks for this day. May we remember you are as close to us as the breath that we breathe. Be with us in our hearts, in our speaking, and in our listening. Amen.

Take a few minutes for each person to name joys and concerns from the day or week.

1. **Listen:** Have one family member read aloud 2 Corinthians 9:12–15, or even better, someone can retell the passage in their own words.
2. **Discuss and Engage:**

* As a family, discuss the passage.
* Discuss as a family the things for which you each can give thanks. Try to be as specific as possible.
* Invite each person to say how they can use what they have to serve others.
* Discuss as a family how serving others can enable thanksgiving.

### Word Search

For the past five weeks we have journeyed through this study. Use the word search (see [Appendix 5-4](#_Appendix_5-4:_Word)) to find some of the words which have been used during our journey. Let us see who can find all the words first.

* Are there any words that catch your attention?
* Why do those words stand out for you?

### Closing Prayer

Loving God, thank you for loving us and taking care of us. You provide us with the things we need and some of the things we want. Help us to cheerfully share from what you have given to us, so that others can have what they need.

Pray for each other; include the joys and concerns of each person.

## Appendix 5-3: Scripture Versions

### 2 Corinthians 9:12–15 *Common English Bible*

Your ministry of this service to God’s people isn’t only fully meeting their needs but it is also multiplying in many expressions of thanksgiving to God. They will give honor to God for your obedience to your confession of Christ’s gospel. They will do this because this service provides evidence of your obedience, and because of your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone. They will also pray for you, and they will care deeply for you because of the outstanding grace that God has given to you. Thank God for [God’s] gift that words can’t describe!

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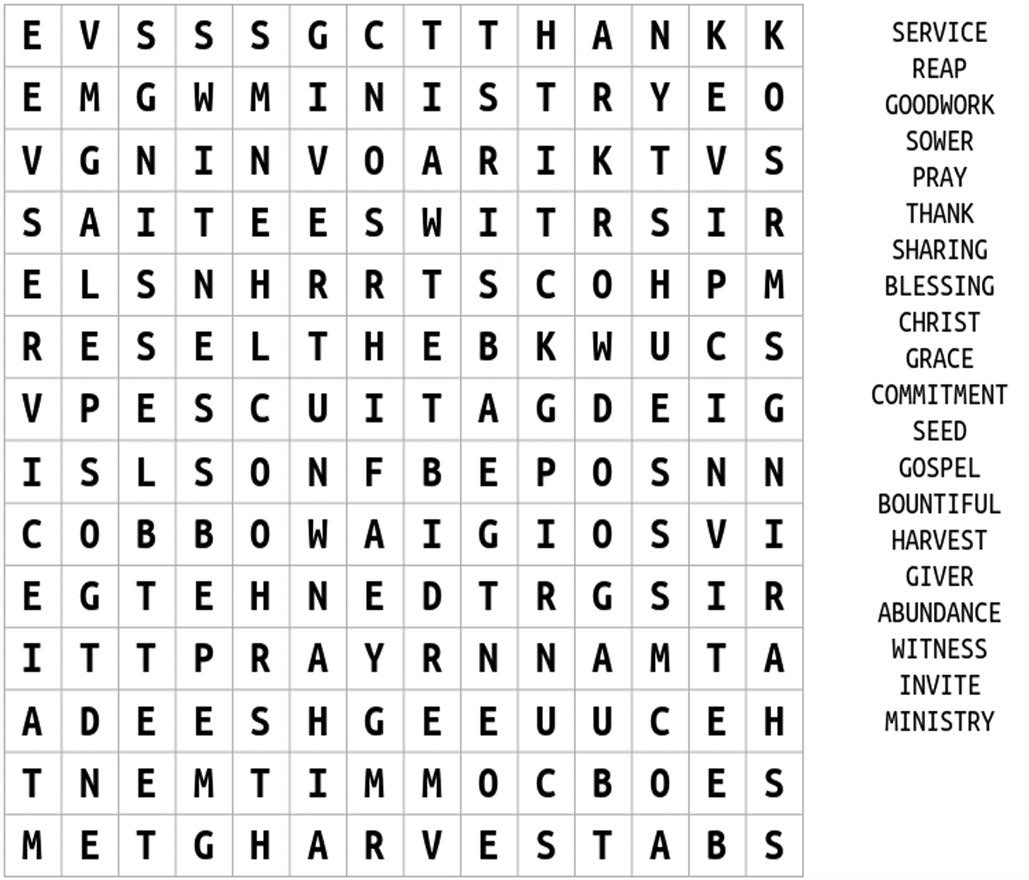
### 2 Corinthians 9:12–15 *New Revised Standard Version*

…for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that [God] has given you. Thanks be to God for [God’s] indescribable gift!

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## Appendix 5-4: Word Search

### Called to Be the Church



## SERMON GUIDE: In Giving We Show We Are Disciples

### 2 Corinthians 9:13–15

We have been reflecting for the past four weeks on the discipline of giving. If you missed any of those weeks, here is the short version. In Week 1, we highlighted the fact that the spiritual practice of gratitude can make a difference in us and influence how we live differently and reach out to the world. In Week 2, we learned that giving goes beyond simple self-interest; it is a matter of prolonged, patient, trusting commitment to God. In Week 3, we focused on the potential of giving to stir greater generosity when it springs from loving intention. Last week, we looked at how God’s economy of abundance is different from the world’s and what can happen when we root ourselves in God’s economy. Today, we conclude our series, reflecting on giving as a demonstration that we are disciples.

Must you have more than you need before you are able to give? Are we disqualified from giving just because we only have enough for ourselves? What qualifies someone to be a giver? I grew up hearing that “In order to give, you must first have.” In other words, in order to give, you must first be in a position where you have more than enough to give. The thing about that statement is that it seems to say that only a limited group can or should give. It seems to disqualify many of us from giving. Those who can give are the wealthy, or at least those with more than they need. However, those who do not have enough seem to be excused from giving. It’s logical, after all—if you do not have, how can you give?

While this may sound logical, the writing of the Apostle Paul to the church in Corinth seems to be saying something different. Paul places the qualification for giving not on whether we have abundance or excess; instead, the only qualification for giving is in being disciples of Jesus. It is because we are followers of Jesus that we are called upon to give to the work of God. But we need to be clear. Paul is not putting anyone under some sort of guilt trip. You are not a bad follower of Jesus if you cannot give. Neither is the apostle suggesting that we should give in ways that will harm or injure ourselves and others. We are not being called to give what we do not have. Indeed, the quantity of what is given is not considered. Instead, we are reminded that even the little that we can give should not be discounted or taken for granted. Each time we give,

it comes from the reality that we are followers of Jesus. We give because God has given to us. We give because God has given us the gift of Jesus. Our giving, even if it is giving to others, is in response to the gift that God has given to us all.

As we consider this passage, it may be good for us to consider at least two things about the context behind the letter. First, let us remember as we read this passage that Paul is writing to the church in Corinth to encourage them to make a financial gift to the church in Jerusalem. The members of the church in Corinth were not all wealthy people. This was a church that had its own needs and may have needed help themselves. But the needs of the church in Jerusalem was great, and the Apostle Paul was asking other churches to assist the church in Jerusalem. So, the church in Corinth was being encouraged to send an offering of love to the church in Jerusalem.

The other thing that we need to remember is that the church in Corinth was made up of people who were not originally Jewish. The church in Jerusalem was made up largely of persons who were Jewish. There was a cultural and ethnic difference between the two churches. It had only been a short time since the church had agreed to allow non-Jewish persons to become members. The presence of non-Jewish persons was a new thing for the church. When we think about it, the only real connection between the church in Jerusalem and the church in Corinth was their belief that Jesus was the gift of God to the world. They believed that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God had revealed God-self and God’s love to the world. Although these churches were different in many ways, they were connected because in both places people were followers of the Christ, disciples of Jesus.

It is because of their being disciples of Jesus that Paul makes his final appeal to the church in Corinth. He invites them to give based on their discipleship. Notice that this appeal makes the following points:

* in giving we show what we believe
* in giving we are serving God and others
* in giving we are being channels of the grace of God

We can say that we give because a cause is good. Or we can say that we give because we have enough to spare. But these are not the reasons Paul offers. He first suggests to the church that our giving should come from a desire to glorify God by displaying what we believe. You may know this as “putting your money where your mouth is.” This may be what Paul is saying to the church. There are many ways we can show what we believe and in whom we believe. However, it is when we are willing to put our faith in action that we really show others the truth of what we believe. Sometimes we need to show our faith in more ways than just speaking about it. When we are willing to put our faith in action, God is glorified. That is the important thing for the church.

Our giving should come from a desire to glorify God, not just because we want to do good. Yet in seeking to glorify God, we are told that we should give what we can. We are also told that what we do to glorify God is not limited by what we can give. Glorifying God also includes our intentions and our motives in giving.

When we give, we are also serving others! The word in the *Common English Bible* that we see as “service” is *leiturgia* in the original Greek. This word is also translated as “worship.” It is from this word that we get the word “liturgy.” The word means, literally, the service that the wealthy will make to those who are less fortunate. But it also means the service of the priest in the temple.

There is an interesting twinning of worship and service in this word.

If we look at it through that lens, we begin to see that in giving, we are serving others, and through this service we are also worshipping God. In this regard, giving is also a fruit of discipleship; it is ultimately an act of worship. Worship focuses us on God. Yet in giving we are worshipping God through showing our love for our fellow human beings. When we love our neighbours as we love ourselves, we give. When we love our neighbours as we love ourselves, we serve. When we love our neighbours as we love ourselves, we worship God.

When we give, we become channels of the grace of God to others. Grace, remember, is the love of God. It is the unmerited, unearned, and undeserved love of God. In giving, we are allowing ourselves to be a way for the grace of God to reach others. Sometimes, we do not even know just how far the smallest things we do can make an impression. Sometimes, it is not even the one to whom we give that the impression is made upon. Yet in that act of giving, we become, in many ways, a means for others to know that God loves and that God cares.

God has given to us the gift of Jesus. We celebrate this not only at Christmas, but also throughout the year. Because of this gift, we are called to be disciples of Jesus, to commit ourselves to follow the teachings and the example of Jesus’ living. It is because we are disciples that we give. Our giving comes not from a place of plenty or because we have more than enough to spare. We give because we are followers of Christ. Because we are disciples of Jesus, our giving becomes an opportunity to show our faith and to glorify God. Because we are disciples, our giving is an opportunity for us to serve others, and in so doing, worship God. Because we are disciples, our giving offers to us an opportunity to be channels of the grace of God to others. This is a wonderful opportunity for each of us. May our discipleship lead us to give. May God indeed be glorified by our giving. “Thank God for [God’s] gift that words can’t describe!” (2 Corinthians 9:15, *Common English Bible*)

Amen.

## 

# This Indescribable Gift

(based on 2 Corinthians 9) Words and music by David Kai ©2020. Tune: Bay Farm\*

Refrain:

God cares for the poor, shares freely with all, God’s righteousness lives forever.  
God cares for the poor, shares freely with all, God’s righteousness lives forever.

1. We are planting as disciples, knowing that as we sow, we shall reap As we give freely, we receive God’s gift of grace; ours to keep!

Refrain

1. God gives seed to the sower, bread to all those who are hungry for food Supplies and multiplies the gift, increases harvests of good!

Refrain

1. Gifts put gospel into action, by gift of grace our spirits lift Thank God who generously offers this indescribable gift!

Refrain

\*It is the composer’s custom to name his hymn tunes after camps and towns where Canadians and Americans of Japanese descent were interned during the Second World War. In this way he hopes to ensure that these places and injustices will not be forgotten.

## This Indescribable Gift

Accompaniment THIS INDESCRIBABLE GIFT from 2 Corinthians 9  
Words and music by David Kai ©2020 Tune: Bay Farm





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1. See [psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-social-self/201012/giving-really-is-better-receiving](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-social-self/201012/giving-really-is-better-receiving). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 312‒313. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [stgeorgesunited.com/soupkitchen](https://www.stgeorgesunited.com/soupkitchen). Reproduced with permission of St. George’s United Church, Courtenay, BC. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)