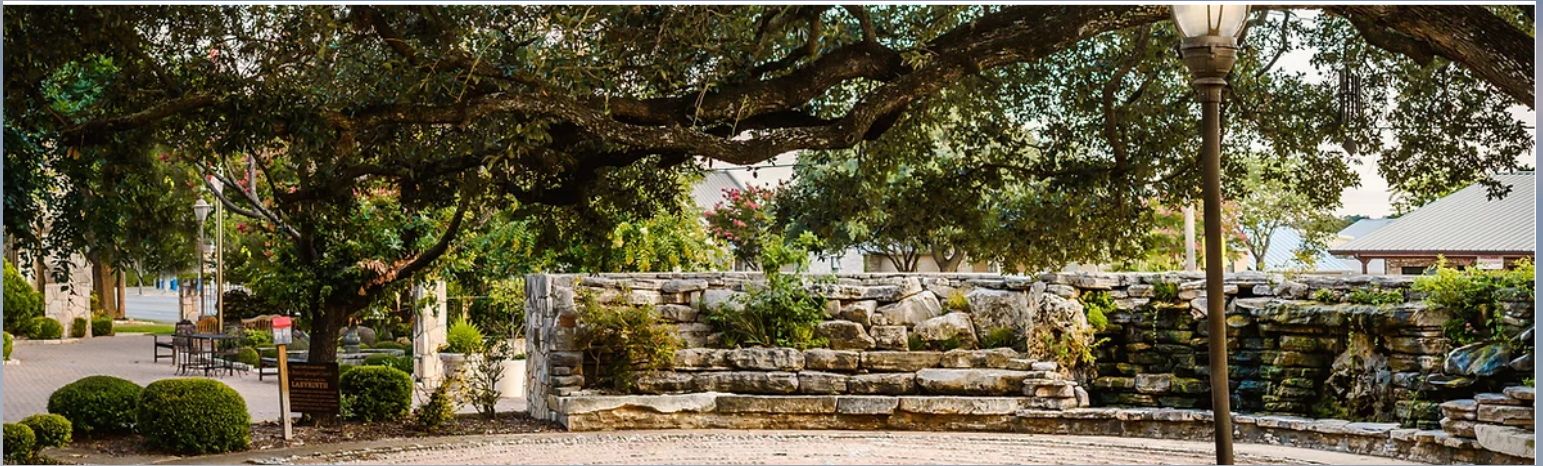


# Stewardship

Inspiring a deeper understanding of true giving

A photograph of a single tree standing in a field of yellow flowers. The tree is a small, rounded deciduous tree with green leaves. The field is a dense, flat expanse of bright yellow flowers, likely rapeseed. The sky above is a clear, pale blue.

**Transformed by  
Grace, Faith and Love**  
Devotional Meditations

# *Transformed by Grace, Faith and Love*



*“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”*

2 Corinthians 9:8

## Devotional Meditations

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## Transformed by Grace

### *God's Grace Shapes His Stewards*

**Theme verse:** *"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."* 1 Corinthians 15:10

When sin entered the world, our perfect knowledge of God and our relationship with him was shattered. The unregenerate person may know about God but doesn't truly know him personally. The Apostle Paul tells us that God's divine nature has *"been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God..."* (Romans 1:20-21). We may know some things about God from creation, but it is impossible to know God in and of ourselves. To know God is a great gift of the grace of God. *"Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God"* (1 Corinthians 2:12).

Because of God's grace, we are enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament to know God as our heavenly Father, Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and the Spirit as our Comforter. By grace, we know that we are redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus and that God seeks a relationship with us. By grace, we know that God has adopted us as his children and given us his Spirit that we might be his stewards of all that he entrusts to us.

Because we know that we have a God who loves us, has adopted us as his children, and wants the best for us, we are energized to be about his work. Out of gratitude for who God is and what he has done and continues to do for us, we respond by using our lives and blessings in ways that give honor and praise to our Lord. Acknowledging God as our creator and sustainer of all things, we understand our role as God's stewards. As God's stewards, we seek to manage our time, talents, and money faithfully and according to his will, which we discover in his Word. We become God's instruments through which he works to further his kingdom and help those in need. What a blessing and great honor it is that God has chosen us to be his stewards! May we remain faithful to our calling as his faithful stewards who have been shaped by his grace.

**Prayer:** *Dear heavenly Father, shape and make me into a person who is zealous to do your will and boldly share the Good News of Jesus' love and grace with others. In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen.*



## Strengthened by Grace

**Theme verse:** “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” 2 Corinthians 12:9

If you’ve done some carpentry, you’ve probably needed to pull out some very stubborn nails. The strength of a hammer may not be sufficient so you’ve had to bring in a pinch bar, that two- or three-foot metal rod with claws on the end. With the power from the pinch bar, you could wrench the nails out.

As helpless as the carpenter is with just a hammer, we are even more helpless without God. Although it’s a weak analogy, we may say that, as the pinch bar helps us with nails, God helps us in life. God enables us to understand that all we are, have, and do are the result of God’s grace in Christ. God’s grace not only brings us salvation; it trains “us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and Godly lives in the present age” (Titus 2:11-12). Knowing that our lives are gifts from God’s grace, we live our lives in gratitude for who God is and what he has done for us. God’s purpose becomes our purpose. Strengthened by grace, we seek to do God’s will leading to productive and abundant lives.

Even though we are sinful and undeserving, God loves us and wants only the best for us. Being in a relationship with God through his Son, Jesus, our lives have purpose, and we are changed from being self-centered, selfish people to people who serve God by loving and serving others. As we call upon the “*strength of his might*” (Ephesians 6:10), we are empowered by his grace to be Godly stewards.

Through Word and Sacrament, we are equipped and energized to do our best. The Apostle Paul tells us to “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Colossians 3:10). Being renewed by God grace, we live the Godly lives he calls us to live. We live new lives marked by the mysterious union with Jesus described by Paul in these words: “*It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me*” (Galatians 2:20). God directs us to areas and activities he wants us to pursue. God takes ordinary people like us and does some extraordinary things through us. We become his hands, feet, and mouth. We just need to be willing to be tools in God’s hands.

**Prayer:** Dear Father, fill me with your faith and grace so I can do your will and be your faithful steward. *Amen.*



## *Hope in God*

**Theme verse:** “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Romans 15:4

**I**t is wise to plan for our current and future financial needs, but listen to the words of Paul as recorded in 1 Timothy 6:17: “As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.” Paul reminds us that worldly wealth is still uncertain. He boldly states that, if we’re trusting in worldly wealth, we are acting arrogantly. The only thing that is certain is God’s love for us. His grace and love enable us to make our livings. He loves us so much that he “richly provides us with everything” ... and here’s the surprising part ... for our enjoyment!

How do you plan to “enjoy” God’s rich blessings to you? Take cruises or buy a new luxury car every year? God has blessed us, not so that we can enjoy his gifts by hoarding them, but so that his purposes in the world can be fulfilled. In verse 18, Paul tells us how to enjoy the gifts God gives us: “[We] are to do good, to be rich in good works, and to be generous and ready to share.”

When our hope is in God, we have no need to amass worldly wealth. By grace, we can place our hope in God and trust him to provide for us all we need and even more so that we’ll always have something to share. By his grace, God calls us to be his stewards. His grace enables us to carry out his will. And there’s another bonus! Not only will we receive enjoyment from sharing God’s gifts, we will be storing up treasures in heaven (1 Timothy 6:19). Put your hope in God.

**Prayer:** *Lord, thank you for your grace that enables me to place my trust and hope in you. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.*



## *God's Grip Doesn't Slip*

**Theme verse:** *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* Hebrews 13:5

Isn't it amazing that birds go to sleep on their perches and never fall off? This is because God has created them so that, when their legs are bent, the claws contract and grip like a steel trap. The claws will not let go until the knees are unbent. The bended knee enables the bird to hold tightly to its perch.

As strong as this grip is, it is not as strong as the hold God has on us. Think about Daniel, a young man in a pagan environment. With all the temptations and threats around him, he was safe because of God's grace which kept an everlasting grip on him. On his bended knees before his open window, he prayed every day ... three times a day ... giving thanks for God's grace and protection, and God didn't let go of him, even in the lions' den (Daniel 6:10-22).

We might also consider Joseph who, through all the twists and turns of his lifetime, found one constant: *"The Lord was with him"* (Genesis 39:3, 21, 23). Taken away from his family at a young age, immersed in an idolatrous culture, tempted by Pharaoh's wife, he was, by God's grace, safe in God's everlasting grip.

Like both Daniel and Joseph, we live in a sinful world. We may not be facing false accusations and a den of lions, but we, too, face temptations and threats. We, too, earnestly pray for God's grace, protection, and safekeeping of our souls, and his Word assures us that we can rest secure and have hope in his everlasting grip. May God grant us faith to put our hope in him who promises to keep his grip on us always.

**Prayer:** *Lord, you are so gracious to me. Thank you for your protecting grace. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*



## *Giving Is an Act of Grace*

**Theme verse:** *And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.*” 2 Corinthians 9:8

**A**s Christians, we understand that all we are and have are by God’s grace. Life is a gift. “*And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace*” (John 1:16). By the grace of God, we have life now and the life to come. God has lavished us with his love and grace. As the acronym for grace so aptly states, we have “God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.” We receive God’s “*abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness through the one man Jesus Christ*” (Romans 5:17). God graciously sent his Son to live among us and to suffer and die for us. “*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich*” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Knowing that God has graciously given us our physical and spiritual lives, we seek to show our gratitude by how we live and what we do with our lives. An important way we show our thanksgiving to him is through giving. Giving provides evidence to God’s grace and faith at work in our lives as we give to others and extend God’s Church. Giving is a fruit of grace and faith. Without God’s grace, we are not able to give up our resources generously, and it is only through faith that our giving pleases God (Hebrews 11:6). Believers are empowered by the working of the Holy Spirit to give willingly to fellow believers who need support. As Paul urged, “*Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality*” (Romans 12:13). In writing to the Church in Corinth, Paul referenced the example of the Macedonians who gave so generously to the needy Christians in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:1-9). They were empowered to give because of God’s grace and generosity to them. Even though they lived in poverty, the Macedonians gave generously and sacrificially. Paul referred to their giving as an “act of grace” (vs. 6). By grace, the Macedonians in their extreme poverty gave “beyond their means” (vs. 3). They were so eager to give that they pleaded for the privilege of sharing with the needy in Jerusalem. Their giving, while they were in such a difficult economic position, gave witness to God’s grace in their lives.

**Prayer:** *Dear heavenly Father, by your grace, please grant me a giving and loving heart. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.*





# Transformed by Faith

## *Love through Faith*

**Theme verse:** *“If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”* Luke 17:6

**W**hat is it that precedes the disciples’ request of Jesus to increase their faith? It is Jesus command to count others so precious as to avoid putting any kind of temptation in their paths.

How is this possible? If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that, in and of ourselves, we cannot follow these commands. Then we, like the disciples, must ask of our Lord, *“Increase our faith”* (Luke 17:5).

How does Jesus respond to their request? He assures them that even faith as small as a mustard seed can accomplish great things. It is God who gives faith, and it is God who gives us the ability to act on it. It is God who gives us love through faith that sacrifices our own desires for the good of others, love through faith that knows no limit, love through faith that serves instead of asking to be served.

It is faith that gives us such love for God and our neighbor that we serve and help and give without thought of reward, so that we *“when [we] have done all that [we] were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’”* (Luke 17:10).

**Prayer:** *Dear heavenly Father, certainly, in order to measure up to your standards, I must ask you to increase my faith. Still I fail, for I do not love you with my entire being, nor do I love my neighbors as myself. Therefore, I thank you for the gift of your Son who has met your standard of perfection and has lived that standard in my place. Forgive me, Lord, for my failures. Teach me to depend on you. Give me grace to be obedient to your command to love others as you love me. Through Christ I pray. Amen.*



## ***Faith Empowers God's Stewards***

**Theme verse:** *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.” John 14:12*

**T**he writer of Hebrews defines faith: *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”* (Hebrews 11:1). Faith enables us to be God-pleasing stewards. *“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him”* (Hebrews 11:6). The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is known as the “Faith Chapter.” From Abel down through the ages, the writer names the heroes of faith, listing their accomplishments, preceding each one with “by faith.”

Through faith, we understand that our stewardship is God working in and through us. It is not what we do, not what we give, not how we serve ... but what God does, what God gives, how God serves, and our response to his love and gifts to us. God has shown us his plan for our lives. *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:10). This is the definition of stewardship: doing the good works which God has prepared for us to do. God empowers and equips us to be faithful stewards. God has chosen us to carry out his work on earth. *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide”* (John 15:16).

It is through faith that our pastor confidently enters the pulpit to speak forth the Word of the Lord. It is God's message, God's gift, and he is only the channel through which it flows. Through faith, the servant humbly steps forward to serve. His only motive is that God may receive the glory as he offers his hands, feet, lips, his whole body, soul, and mind in service. Through faith, the teacher diligently prepares her lessons, seeking the leading of the Holy Spirit, studying the Word of God, and looking into the hearts of her students. God creates the learning; his Spirit creates the faith. As stewards, we are the faithful vessels that God uses. Through faith, we are empowered to be his faithful stewards.

**Prayer:** *Lord, you are the creator and source of all good things. I thank you for the privilege and opportunity to be a steward of your creation. I thank you for faith you give me which enables me to carry out your will. In the name of Christ I pray. Amen.*



## *Being a Faithful Steward*

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

**W**hat if your pastor asked you to give a testimonial about your life as God’s steward? If you were asked to share how you manage and care for God’s property, what would you say? Have you considered what a faithful steward is expected to be and to do?

God-pleasing stewards acknowledge that God is the creator and source of all things, and that, as the creator of all, he owns everything. God’s property is on loan to us. As stewards, we are to manage what he has entrusted to us responsibly and for God’s purposes. As God’s stewards, we are not to be passive managers but active and involved. We are caretakers and managers of God’s gifts, so we are accountable for what we do with his gifts of time, talents, and money. As faithful stewards, we can glorify and honor God with lives of service and faithful use of our gifts.

We stewards live lives expressing gratitude to God for both our created and our redeemed lives. We live lives saying “thank you” to God for his love and mercy. Stewardship is faith in action. Filled with God’s grace, we share our gifts with others.

To answer the question, “Are we being faithful stewards with our lives and gifts?” we may want to check our calendars and check registers. Faithful stewards would have times marked on their calendars for helping others, church meetings, and Bible studies. We would be spending time in prayer and attending worship services. Through faith, we try our best to use our time doing God’s will. Our check book registers would show weekly offerings being made to God through our church, and there would be some checks written to help those in need. Thus, our calendars and check registers will show us what our priorities are and where they lie.

God has blessed us as stewards with many blessings, and, through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to use our gifts faithfully. May God grant us grace to be the faithful stewards he wants us to be.

**Prayer:** *Lord, I give you praise and thanks for who you are and all that you have done for me through your Son Jesus. Help me to respond as a faithful steward to your love, goodness, and mercy. May all that I do and say give you praise and glory. In Jesus’ precious name I pray. Amen.*



## ***Faithful in All Things***

**Theme verse:** *Jesus said, “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.” Luke 16:10*

**I**n this verse, Jesus is saying that faithful stewards will handle God’s gifts faithfully regardless of whether they have few or many gifts entrusted to them. What we do with what we have shows our faithfulness. A faithful person will do the small things well. One day a young man went to a bank to apply for a job. After his interview, he was leaving the bank and happened to notice some trash on the floor. He picked it up and put it in the waste paper basket. Seconds later, he helped an elderly lady with the door. Unknown to the young man, the man who had interviewed him for the job was observing him. The young man was promptly summoned back and given the job. The employer’s comment: “Anyone who pays attention to the small things as you just did needs to work here.”

Unfortunately, we Christians may incorrectly think that small things aren’t important to God. We may have the attitude that God isn’t concerned with the small amount of money that we have which allows us to give only small contributions or gifts. In the Bible, God spoke mightily through the little that people had. God used the widow and her two mites to teach us a lesson about sacrificial giving. He used the small amount of flour and oil that the widow of Zarephath had to demonstrate that great things can result from faithful obedience. Jesus used the loaves and fish of a young boy to reveal how God can magnify a small gift. God commends our faithfulness with small things, and he doesn’t overlook what faithful people do with small things.

Through God’s Word, we understand that small things do count. Because we understand our need to be faithful with all things, we should ask ourselves how we are handling the seemingly small things in our lives. Are we handling small things well in our homes, jobs, and churches? Can non-Christians see a difference in us? With God’s help, we can be faithful with ALL that we’ve been given. Through our faithfulness, God will be glorified.

**Prayer:** *Lord, please grant me faith to be faithful with small things so you can trust me with more and bigger things. Help me to live a life that gives you honor and glory. In Christ’s name I pray. Amen.*



## ***Faith that Pleases God***

**Theme verse:** *“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”* Hebrews 11:6

**T**he first gifts that we read about in Scripture are the offerings made by Cain and Abel who were the sons of Adam and Eve. In Genesis 4:2-4 we read, “...Now Abel kept was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions.” Cain and Abel brought offerings or gifts for the Lord. Because one worked the land and the other raised animals, their gifts were different. We read that Cain “brought to the Lord an offering,” whereas Abel “brought the firstborn of his flock.”

Between the two brothers there is also an indication of a difference in the attitudes of their hearts. While Cain wasn’t concerned about giving the first or best of his crop, Abel gave the firstborn of his flock. God looked with favor upon Abel’s offering given in faith. God looked into the hearts of both Cain and Abel as he looks into our hearts. He saw Abel’s humble faith. By giving his first and best, Abel showed his sincere gratitude for all that God had done for him.

We need to understand that it’s not the size of our gifts and offerings which makes them acceptable to the Lord, but rather it is the attitude of our hearts and minds toward God. God wants our gifts to be an expression of our love for him. He wants us to give cheerfully rather than grudgingly. He wants us to give our love through faith. We are told by the writer of Hebrews that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

Knowing this story of giving by Cain and Abel will help us examine our attitude toward giving. If we are not giving our first and best out of faith and love to the Lord, God does not look with favor upon our giving. May God grant us all faithful, loving, and giving hearts.

**Prayer:** *Lord, we thank you for giving us the ability and desire to give to you. Make us willing to give our first and best to you. May we always use our lives and resources to give you honor and glory. Amen.*





**All Saints' Day** commemorates all saints, known and unknown, on November 1. All Saints' Day is one of the seven principal feasts of the church year, and one of the four days recommended for the administration of baptism. All Saints' Day may also be celebrated on the Sunday following November 1.

Information about the Saints may be found at:

[St. Francis](#)      [St. Clare](#)      [St. Nicholas](#)      [St. Brigid](#)      [St. Antony](#)

on Wikipedia, and

<https://prayer.forwardmovement.org/calendar>



**FRANCIS OF ASSISI**, Friar and Deacon, 1226      October 4

*“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* Matthew 11:28–30

**F**rancis, the son of a prosperous merchant of Assisi, was born in 1182. His early youth was spent in harmless revelry and fruitless attempts to win military glory. Various encounters with beggars and lepers pricked the young man’s conscience, however, and he decided to embrace a life devoted to Lady Poverty. Despite his father’s intense opposition, Francis totally renounced all material values and devoted himself to serve the poor. In 1210, Pope Innocent III confirmed the simple Rule for the Order of Friars Minor, a name Francis chose to emphasize his desire to be numbered among the “least” of God’s servants.

The order grew rapidly all over Europe. But, by 1221, Francis had lost control of it, since his ideal of strict and absolute poverty, both for the individual friars and for the order as a whole, was found to be too difficult to maintain. His last years were spent in much suffering of body and spirit, but

his unconquerable joy never failed. In his later years he was ordained as a deacon, but he resisted all efforts to persuade him to become a priest.

Not long before his death, during a retreat on Mount La Verna, Francis received, on September 14th, Holy Cross Day, the marks of the Lord's wounds, the stigmata, in his own hands and feet and side. Pope Gregory IX, a former patron of the Franciscans, canonized Francis in 1228 and began the erection of the great basilica in Assisi where Francis is buried.

Of all the saints, Francis is perhaps the most popular and admired but probably the least imitated; few have attained to his total identification with the poverty and suffering of Christ. Francis left few writings; but, of these, his spirit of joyous faith comes through most truly in the "Canticle of the Sun," which he composed at Clare's convent of St. Damian's.

The version in The Hymnal **begins**

Most High, omnipotent, good Lord,  
To thee be ceaseless praise outpoured,  
And blessing without measure.

**and ends—**

Let creatures all give thanks to thee  
And serve in great humility.

The Hymnal 1982, #406 and #407

***Prayer:*** *Most high, omnipotent, good Lord, grant your people grace to renounce gladly the vanities of this world; that, following the way of blessed Francis, we may, for love of you, delight in your whole creation with perfectness of joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*



*She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"* John 4: 29

**I**n the latter part of the twelfth century, many Christians felt that the church had fallen on evil days and was weak and spiritually impoverished. It was then that Francis of Assisi renounced his wealth and established the mendicant order of Franciscans. At the first gathering of the order in 1212, Francis preached a sermon that was to make a radical change in the life of an eighteen-year-old young woman named Clare Offreduccio.

The daughter of a wealthy family, Clare was inspired by Francis' words with the desire to serve God and to give her life to the following of Christ's teaching. She sought out Francis and begged that she might become a member of his order, placing her jewelry and rich outer garments on the altar as an offering. Francis could not refuse her pleas. He placed her temporarily in a nearby Benedictine convent. When this action became known, friends and relatives tried to take Clare home again, but she remained adamant. She prevailed, and soon after was taken by Francis to a poor dwelling beside the Church of St. Damian at Assisi. Several other women soon joined her. She became the Superior of the order, which was called the "Poor Ladies of St. Damian," and, after her death, the "Poor Clares" in tribute to her.

The order's practices were austere. They embraced the Franciscan rule of absolute poverty. Their days were given over to begging and to works of mercy for the poor and the neglected. Clare herself was servant, not only to the poor, but to her nuns. Her biographer says that she "radiated a spirit of fervor so strong that it kindled those who but heard her voice."

Clare governed her community for 40 years, and outlived Francis by 27 years. After the death of Francis, the order that he had founded quickly began to relax its discipline of strict poverty, and it was Clare and the other sisters who continually urged the brothers to persevere in the commitment that they had made. She resisted several attempts by successive popes to impose a more traditional Benedictine rule on the sisters, since the discipline followed by her community was considered to be too austere for women. When Pope Gregory IX tried to absolve her from the obligation to follow the strict poverty of her rule, Clare replied: "I need to be absolved from my sins, not from the obligation of following Christ." Ultimately, her community and its rule were recognized by the church as a legitimate expression of religious life for women.

In 1253, her last illness began. Daily she weakened, and daily she was visited by devoted people, by priests, and even by the pope. On her last day, as she saw many weeping by her bedside, she exhorted them to love “holy poverty” and to share their possessions. She was heard to say: “Go forth in peace, for you have followed the good road. Go forth without fear, for he that created you has sanctified you, has always protected you, and loves you as a mother. Blessed be God, for having created me.”

*O God, whose blessed Son became poor that we, through his poverty, might become rich: Deliver us from an inordinate love of this world, that we, inspired by the devotion of your servant Clare, might serve you with singleness of heart and attain to the riches of the age to come; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*



NICHOLAS OF MYRA, Bishop, c.342

December 6

*And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 14-18*

Very little is known about the life of Nicholas, except that he suffered torture and imprisonment during the persecution under the Emperor Diocletian. It is probable that he was one of the bishops attending the Council of Nicaea in 325. According to popular tradition, he famously lost his temper at the council and punched the heretic Arius, but this story dates to more than 1,000 years after his death and is almost certainly apocryphal.

He was honored as a saint in Constantinople in the sixth century by the Emperor Justinian. His veneration also became immensely popular in the West after the supposed removal of his body to Bari, Italy, in the late eleventh century. In England, almost 400 churches were dedicated to him.

Nicholas is famed as the traditional patron of seafarers and sailors, and, more especially, of children. Many of the accounts of Nicholas' life recount his habit of secret gift-giving to those in need, a tradition that many Christians have felt inspired to continue in his honor.

As a bearer of gifts to children, his name was brought to America by the Dutch colonists in New York, from whom he is popularly known as Santa Claus.

*Grant, Almighty God, that your church may be so inspired by the example of your servant Nicholas of Myra, that it may never cease to work for the welfare of children, the safety of sailors, the relief of the poor, and the help of those tossed by tempests of doubt or grief; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*



BRIGID OF KILDARE, Monastic, c. 523

FEBRUARY 1

*Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21*

**A**long with Patrick, Brigid is one of the most beloved Irish saints. She was born into slavery in the middle of the fifth century, the daughter of a local chieftain and his slave. Her father Dubhthach was poet laureate of King Loeghaire, and she was raised in a Druid household, but her mother was a Christian. As she grew older, Brigid was said to have performed miracles, including healing and feeding the poor. According to one tale, as a child, she once gave away her mother's entire store of butter. The butter was then replenished in answer to Brigid's prayers. Around the age of ten, she was returned as a household servant to her father, where her habit of charity led her to donate his belongings to anyone who asked. Even as a young girl, Brigid was notorious for giving away all of the family's food and goods in order to feed and assist the poor. Enraged, her father tried to sell her to the king of Leinster, but even while the two men were negotiating her price, she took the king's jeweled sword and gave it to a beggar so that he could sell it to feed his family. Instead of being angry, the king was impressed with her compassion and resourcefulness, and told Dubhthach to give his daughter her freedom. Gathering a group of women around her, Brigid founded a monastery in 470 at Kildare, a place whose name meant "Church of the Oak." This was the first monastic community for women in Ireland. To secure the sacraments, Brigid persuaded the anchorite Conlaed to receive ordination as a bishop and to bring his community of monks to Kildare, thus establishing a double



monastery of men and women. She founded a renowned scriptorium and center for manuscript illumination at the monastic community as well. Brigid actively participated in leadership and in policy-making decisions not only within her own monastic federation but also within church conventions. She died around 523 at Kildare. Her remains are said to have been re-interred with those of Patrick at Downpatrick in the ninth century.

*O God, whose servant Brigid, kindled with the flame of your love, became a shining light in your Church: Grant that we also may be aflame with the spirit of love and discipline, and walk before you as children of light; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*



ANTONY OF EGYPT, Monastic, 356

JANUARY 17

*Let the believer who is lowly boast in being raised up, and the rich in being brought low, because the rich will disappear like a flower in the field. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the field; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. It is the same way with the rich; in the midst of a busy life, they will wither away. James 1:9–11*

In the third century, many Christians turned away from the corrupt and decadent society of the time and went to live in deserts or on mountains, in solitude, fasting, and prayer. Antony of Egypt was an outstanding example of this movement, but he was not a recluse. He is traditionally regarded as the founder of Christian monasticism because of his role as an inspirational teacher and guide, which spread the popularity of the new monastic movement considerably. Antony's parents were Christians, and he grew up to be quiet, devout, and meditative. When his parents died, he and his younger sister were left to care for a sizable estate. Six months later, while attending church, he heard the reading about the rich young man whom Christ directed to sell all that he had and give to the poor. Hearing his own call from God through this scripture, Antony at once gave his land to the villagers and sold most of his goods, giving the proceeds to the poor. Later, after meditating on Christ's exhortation, "Do not be anxious about tomorrow," he sold what remained of his possessions, placed his sister in a "house of virgins," and became an anchorite (solitary ascetic). Athanasius, whose work *The Life of Antony* quickly spread his fame well beyond Egypt, writes that he spent his days praying,

reading, and doing manual labor. For a time, he was tormented by temptations and demons in various guises, but he resisted, and the demons fled. Moving to the mountains across the Nile from his village, Antony dwelt alone for twenty years. In 305, he left his cave and founded an early form of monastic communal life— a collection of cells inhabited by ascetics living under his guidance. Athanasius writes of such colonies: “Their cells, like tents, were filled with singing, fasting, praying, and working that they might give alms, and having love and peace with one another.” He willed a goat-skin tunic and a cloak to Athanasius, who said of him: “He was like a physician given by God to Egypt. For who met him grieving and did not go away rejoicing? Who came full of anger and was not turned to kindness?... What monk who had grown slack was not strengthened by coming to him? Who came troubled by doubts and failed to gain peace of mind?” Antony died in 356.

*O God, as you by your Holy Spirit enabled your servant Antony to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, so give us grace, with pure hearts and minds, to follow you, the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*



## *Transformed by Grace, Faith and Love*

*Bulletin Message – Third Sunday*

### ***Transformed by Grace, Faith, and Love***

Our focus for the third and final week of our three-week stewardship emphasis, ***Transformed by Grace, Faith, and Love*** is on the virtue of love. In first John 4:7 we read, “*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.*” Jesus tells his followers that God’s will for us is summarized in two commands: love God and love your neighbor. The love we are to give is expressed not only in feelings of love, but, much more important, in acts of love as we show kindness and compassion to those around us. Love seeks the best for others. Jesus told his disciples they were to love not only their neighbors and friends but their enemies as well. God’s love for us has achieved its purpose in us when it causes us to love others.

### ***Transformed by Grace, Faith, and Love***

***As God’s love resides in us, we love others.***

“Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8).



# Transformed by Love

## *Loving All People*

**Theme verse:** *Jesus said, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” John 15:12*

Jesus showed his tremendous love for us by going to the cross to suffer and die for us so that we can be reconciled with our heavenly Father. Christ’s love is in us, and he asks us to reflect his love to others. As Christ loved all people, we are called to love all people whether or not they like us.

Former President Abraham Lincoln exemplified the ability to reach out in love to an enemy. His staff often criticized him for his positive treatment of his sworn enemies. One of the President’s enemies once stated in print that he thought Lincoln was an obvious incompetent in the White House. The nature of the critic’s attack on Lincoln even degenerated to the level that Lincoln’s physical features were compared to those of a gorilla. Later, when war broke out between the States, Lincoln asked that critic to serve as his secretary of war.

Lincoln’s advisers were appalled with the President’s actions. When they asked him why he would choose his critic for such an important post, he responded that he thought Stanton was the best man for the job. When they advised him that he should seek to destroy his enemies rather than treat them like friends, he reminded them he was destroying his enemies when he made them his friends. When Lincoln died some years later, Stanton was standing by the President’s bedside. As he watched Lincoln breathe his last breath, he uttered the words, “There dies the greatest ruler of mankind the world has ever seen.”

We show our spiritual maturity by how we respond to those who have treated us wrongfully. It is easy to show kindness to friends or people who treat us with kindness. God’s love in us is most evident when we show our love to those who dislike us or mistreat us. It is by God’s grace that we are enabled to show Christian kindness to all people.

**Prayer:** *Lord, you love me so much that you sent your one and only Son to the cross to atone for my sinful ways. I thank you for your love. Help me, Lord, to love others as you love me. Amen.*



## *Love Makes Us Do It*

**Theme verse:** “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.” 1 John 4:7

A young girl was dying. Her only hope lay in a complete blood transfusion, but she had a very rare blood type. Only her brother, even younger than she, had the same type blood. His parents and doctors explained the situation to him, giving him time to ask questions. He agreed and, without delay, he was laid on a bed, the needle was pushed into his tiny vein, and slowly his blood seeped from his small body into the bag hanging from his bed. He lay quietly as the nurse stood next to him, ready to attend to any need he might have. “How do you feel?” she asked. “Ok,” he answered, “but, Nurse, when do I die?”

What love this little boy had for his sister! What must he have thought when, from his limited knowledge, it seemed that his own parents were willing for him to sacrifice his life in order to save his sister’s.

The boy’s love for his sister can help us see how much Jesus loves us. Jesus suffered abuse, torture, persecution, and death for all of us. “*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends*” (John 15:13). He demonstrated his tremendous love not because of our worthiness, but because of his tremendous love. Jesus’ love for his heavenly Father and for us changed the world. Through his death and resurrection from that death, we through faith have received the forgiveness of our sins and life eternal. God’s love for us in Christ is that power that enables us to love him. “*We love because he first loved us*” (1 John 4:19).

The love of Jesus empowers us to be his stewards. Because of Jesus’ love, we change from people giving what is necessary to supply a need to people responding generously, even sacrificially out of love. Certainly, we give to needs such as our church budget, Christian causes, and people, but our primary reason for giving stems from our love for and commitment to Jesus. When needs arise, Jesus opens our eyes and hearts so we can respond to those needs. However, our primary reason for giving is a desire to express our gratitude and thanksgiving for our Lord and the love that he shows us every day. Because our love for Jesus is our motivation for giving, our giving becomes joyful. Love changes our giving from an obligation to a privilege.

**Prayer:** Lord, you fill me with love to share with my family, neighbors, and co-workers. I know that I can love because you first loved me. Place in me the desire to seek out opportunities to share. **Amen.**





## *Stewardship Is a Matter of the Heart*

**Theme verse:** “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Matthew 22:37

God gives us the privilege and opportunity to be his stewards. Even though God gives us all things, he still allows us the freedom to choose whom or what we will serve. Whether we are stewards for the Lord, for ourselves, or for some other master depends on what controls our hearts. What or whom we love, serve, and follow is dictated by what our hearts value as most important. The choices we make reflect what is in our hearts. Satan is doing everything possible to take the love, compassion, and peace from our hearts that only Jesus can place there.

Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). We can paraphrase this by saying, “Show me your treasure, and I will show you your heart.” What we treasure the most receives our time, energy, money, and heart. Each of us determines where his treasures lie. What do you love and treasure the most? Unfortunately, some of us may find treasures in our homes, careers, cars, hobbies, or investments. God continually invites us to make him our treasure. If our hearts are right, our treasures will be right.

Jesus spoke about the relationship between the condition of a tree and the fruit that it bears. “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit” (Matthew 12:33). Just as the condition of the tree determines its fruit, so will the thoughts of our hearts dictate our words and actions (Matthew 12:34-35). When our hearts are filled with God’s presence, we reflect God’s love, goodness, and kindness. When our hearts are right with God, our eyes are opened to the opportunities to serve and help others. When God controls our hearts, we willingly use our time, talents, and money in ways that glorify him. Good hearts produce good fruit. Through time spent in God’s Word and through participation in the Sacraments, God changes our hearts, making us into faithful disciples and stewards for Christ. As Solomon wrote, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

**Prayer:** Lord, I thank you that you give me the privilege and the opportunity to be your steward. Grant me faith to be a God-pleasing steward. Help me to see stewardship as a free and joyous activity. **Amen.**



## ***Giving from the Heart***

**Theme verse:** *“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the people of Israel that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me’.” Exodus 25:1-2*

**I**n God’s Word, we find many examples of people who gave in loving and generous ways. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, Paul uses the Macedonians as an example of people who, in their extreme poverty, gave beyond their ability. Because of the famine in Macedonia at the time, they didn’t have a surplus to give from; however, they put God first and trusted him to provide. Out of overflowing joy, they gave from their hearts.

For another example of giving from the heart, we can look at the Widow’s Offering found in Luke 21:1-4. In this story, Jesus is at the temple in Jerusalem speaking to his disciples. In the verses just preceding Luke 21, Jesus tells his disciples that the Pharisees were roaming around in their long, flowing robes making sure people saw them and oohed and aahed about them. In a gaudy display of vanity, they tossed big gifts into the temple treasury. In contrast, the widow quietly dropped in two small copper coins which was all she had. She gave from the heart, and she placed her total trust in God. She was relying on him for her future care. Although the Pharisees gave larger gifts than the widow, they were chastised for having hardened hearts from which they gave to the temple. They gave for recognition and praise. Even though the widow gave only a small gift, Jesus praised her for her generosity because he knew she gave from a loving heart.

A third illustration of one giving from the heart is Zacchaeus. Before he met Jesus, his money was his god so he hoarded it. When Jesus changed Zacchaeus’ heart, he cheerfully gave away half of what he had and four times to those from whom he had cheated. With a changed heart, he gave generously.

God wants our giving to come from hearts filled with gratitude for who God is and for all that he has done and continues to do for us. As our faith grows and matures through spending time in God’s Word and participating often in the Lord’s Supper, our attitude toward giving will change from being an obligation to being a privilege. May God change and fill all our hearts so we can experience the joy of giving to our Lord and Savior.

**Prayer:** *Lord, you are a loving and giving God. I pray that the Holy Spirit will transform me into a loving and giving person. Help me not to grip my money tightly. Grant me a generous heart. Amen.*



## *Loving our Neighbors*

**Theme verse:** “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Galatians 6:10

**I**n the Parable of the Good Samaritan found in the tenth chapter of Luke, we read that the Good Samaritan not only helped an injured person, he took him to an inn where he paid for his room and care. The Samaritan sacrificed money, time, and possessions and risked his own health and safety for the wounded person. He fulfilled the Golden Rule. By putting no limits on how far he was willing to go to help this stranger, the Samaritan demonstrated the love we should have for our neighbors. He was the example for Jesus’ command to “Go, and do likewise.” Helping others may mean more than calling 911. We may need to get involved, get our hands dirty, and go the extra mile.

Why don’t we become more involved in helping others? One explanation could be that we have become so smug and settled in our material luxury that we are blind to the opportunities to reach out to others. We forget about the thousands and thousands around the country and world and next door who may be starving in body and soul. Like the priest and the rabbi who passed by the injured person, we possess the attitude that what is mine is mine and I’m going to keep it.

God will get our attention in many different ways. One day someone observed a wonderful lesson from the little birds hopping around in search of bits of food. Some snowbirds were busy picking up the crumbs that had been thrown out the window. One of the birds apparently had a stiff neck. Because of its injury, it could not stoop over to pick up the crumbs, so the other birds assisted by picking them up and dropping them into his open bill.

God has placed in each of us a heart that can be trained to be unselfish. Through the redeeming sacrifice of our Savior Jesus Christ who faithfully gave his own life, we can show love to others. The love of Jesus, strengthened in us by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament, flows through us so we can show love to people around us.

**Prayer:** Lord, the Parable of the Good Samaritan gives us a wonderful example of how we can share the love that you have given to us. Help us to be ready and willing to come to the aid of others. *Amen.*



## Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

*Grace, faith, and love are the focus for these devotionals. These three spiritual pillars are foundations for the steward who has received these gifts from God. As sinful and selfish people, we have done nothing to deserve or earn God's grace, faith, and love, but we receive them with joy and gratitude. These three pillars transform our hearts so we become "God-centered" rather than "self-centered" people. We have a new direction and purpose for our lives. Through his gifts of grace, faith, and love, God transforms us into responsible stewards who seek to please him. Our faithful stewardship is evidence that we are people transformed by grace, faith, and love.*



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