

FIRST

PUTTING GOD FIRST IN LIVING AND GIVING

Connect 7 Daily Devotions

Sermon Series September 30-October 21



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FIRST

PUTTING GOD FIRST IN LIVING AND GIVING

During the next four weeks, our church will hear about God's generosity and our response as we experience our stewardship program, "**first: putting GOD first in living and giving.**"

We are made in God's image and are meant to be creators of life and hope, not the consumers of our culture's shiny gods. We have the ability to change the world and create a legacy that will live forever in the lives of generations to follow. That legacy starts when each of us takes the hard steps of financial discipline and fulfilling the call to generosity that God has placed in all of us.

The goal of this stewardship program is not to make you feel guilty, nor is it to say that you have to be exactly like this or that person. The goal is for all of us to ask questions of ourselves and be open to the possibility that God will lead us in new directions in our lives.

During the four-week program, we'll be challenged in a number of different ways. We'll be asked to look for the idols in our own lives (Hint: Most of them aren't animals made of gold) and name the ways these idols enslave us, holding us back from living in the true freedom that God desires for us.

We'll be challenged to consider the place that money, work, and debt have in our own lives. What are our common understandings of these, and might the witness of Scripture lead us to some different understandings?

We'll be challenged to ask ourselves what it means for us to be faithful, to save, and to give. How do we balance all the competing interests in our lives? What priorities does God want us to have?

Finally, we'll be challenged to give with our hearts, not out of obligation or a sense of duty and not just when we think the recipient deserves our gift. Instead, we'll be challenged to give the way God gives—freely, fully, with no favorites or expectations of repayment.

It is our prayer that, at the end of these four weeks, we will have begun to grow into the individuals and the church that God knows we can be. Please join us in **first: putting GOD first in living and giving.**

September 30

Theme: *Naming Our Idols*, Deuteronomy 5:6-10

Readings: Matthew 6:19-24, Psalm 135:15-18

October 7

Theme: *Money, Work, and Debt*, Deuteronomy 28:12-14

Readings: Proverbs 22:1,7,26-27, Luke 10:25-37

October 14

Theme: *Be Faithful, Save, and Give* 2 Corinthians 9:6-12

Readings: Genesis 41:28-36, Mark 6:34-43

October 21

Theme: *Heart Giving*, 2 Corinthians 9:11-13

Readings: Malachi 3:8-10, Matthew 7:7-12

Connecting to Worship: September 30

Theme: Naming Our Idols, Deuteronomy 5:6-10 ⁶“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” ⁷“You shall have no other gods before me.

Readings: Matthew 6:19-24, Psalm 135:15-18

Monday, September 24

Kossi's Courage

You shall have no other gods before me...You shall not bow down to them or worship them.
Exodus 20: 3,5

As he awaited his baptism in Togo's Mono River, Kossi stooped to pick up a worn wooden carving. His family had worshiped the object for generations. Now they watched as he tossed the grotesque figure into a fire prepared for the occasion. In the West, most Christians think of idols as metaphors for what they put in place of God. In Togo, West Africa, idols represent literal gods that must be appeased with sacrifice. Idol burning and baptism make a courageous statement about a new believer's allegiance to the one true God. As an eight-year-old, King Josiah came to power in an idol-worshiping, sex-obsessed culture. His father and grandfather had been two of the worst kings in all of Judah's sordid history. Then the high priest discovered the book of the law. When the young king heard its words, he took them to heart. Josiah destroyed the pagan altars, burned the vile items dedicated to the goddess Asherah, and stopped the ritual prostitution (ch. 23). In place of these practices, he celebrated the Passover (23:21-23). Whenever we look for answers apart from God—consciously or subconsciously—we pursue a false god. It would be wise to ask ourselves: What idols, literal or figurative, do we need to throw on the fire?

Lord, forgive us for those things we turn to that show our hearts are not focused on You. Show us what we need to give up, and replace it with the presence of Your Holy Spirit.

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. 1

John 5:

Tuesday, September 25

Golden Gods

You shall have no other gods before Me. —Exodus 20:3

God had seized the attention of Pharaoh and the Egyptians with a series of plagues. Now they were dying to be rid of their Hebrew slaves. But God didn't want the Israelites to leave Egypt empty-handed. After all, they had 400 years of wages due them. So they asked their former masters for articles of silver, gold, and clothing, and they got them. Exodus 12:36 says that the Israelites “plundered the Egyptians.”

It wasn't long, however, until God's people fell into idolatry. They used their gold to make a golden calf, which they worshiped while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving God's law (32:1-4).

This tragic experience highlights the tension that Christians are required to maintain regarding their possessions. There is much in our society that we enjoy, but material things also pose grave dangers when we use them thoughtlessly. Os Guinness says that we are “free to utilize” but “forbidden to idolize.” We are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13), and we must not become so enamored with “the riches of Egypt” that we grow complacent and forget our true calling.

Are we using our material blessings to serve the Lord? Or have we become slaves to them?

*I have an old nature that noisily clamors
To satisfy empty desire;*

*But God in His goodness has sent me a Helper
Who whispers, "Your calling is higher." —*

Gustafson

Gold can be a helpful servant but a cruel master.

Wednesday, September 26

Worship Only God

You shall have no other gods before Me. —Exodus 20:3

British statesman W. E. Gladstone (1809-98) visited Christ Church College and spoke optimistically about the betterment of English society during his lifetime. His outlook was so positive that a student challenged him: “Sir, are there no adverse signs?” Gladstone reflected, “Yes, there is one thing that frightens me—the fear that God seems to be dying out of the minds of men.”

Obeying the first commandment would prevent this from happening. Yet man attempts to make gods out of money, material possessions, pleasure, knowledge, people, and in so doing forgets the true God. But no created thing can ever fill the place in our heart God intends for Himself.

A child was asked, “How many gods are there?” “Only one,” he replied. “How do you know?” “Because,” he said, “God fills heaven and earth, so there’s room for only one.”

Our worship of God becomes focused when we receive Jesus as our personal Savior, for He is God in the flesh (Jn. 1:14). But why does God command us to love and worship Him alone? Because in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28), and from Him we receive eternal life (Col. 1:13-18). He has every right to say, “No other gods!” because He alone is the living and true God, who created us and redeemed us.

For Further Study and Reflection

Matthew 10:34-39; Matthew 22:34-40;

Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28

Only God who fills the universe can fill the human heart.

Thursday, September 27

Ice Fishing

You shall have no other gods before Me. — Exodus 20:3

Two Texans went to Minnesota one winter to do some ice fishing. After setting up their tent, they pulled the cord on their chain saw to cut a hole in the ice. Then they heard a mysterious voice from above saying, “There are no fish under the ice.” “Is that You, God?” they asked in awe. “No,” came the reply, “but I know that there are no fish under the ice. I’m the owner of this ice-skating rink.” People who worship gods other than the one true God resemble fishermen ice fishing in a skating rink. The idolaters of Isaiah’s day worked hard at practicing their religion. They spent exorbitant sums of money overlaying their professionally carved idols with gold and crafting silver chains for them (Isa. 40:19-20). They bowed down and worshiped what they had constructed with their own hands (Ps. 115:4-7). Yet, there was nothing there. They appeared to be worshipping God, but their worship was as futile as fishing in an ice-skating rink.

Our great God can never be reduced to an image of man’s own making. He is “the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth” (Isa. 40:28). And He wants us to worship Him in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:24).

Their mouths can't speak, their eyes can't see,
Their ears can't hear us call;

The world's gods are powerless—

Our Lord rules over all. —Sper

How foolish to worship the creature rather than the Creator!

Friday, September 28

Who is on the Throne?

You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve. —Luke 4:8

According to English poet Oliver Reynolds, an old man had a family altar where he burned incense to an engraving of Napoleon. When asked why he worshiped the picture as a god, the man replied that he would worship anything. Imagine venerating a picture of that French general! Imagine burning incense to the portrait of a human being who has no meaningful relationship to his worshipers! That's idolatry at its worst! We don't think of ourselves as idolaters, of course, but are we in subtle ways disobeying God's commandment: "You shall have no other gods before Me"? (Exodus 20:3). We would never dream of bowing down to the picture of any mortal, however famous or powerful. But who is on the throne of our hearts? Are we giving a loved one first place in our lives? Is that person number one in our affections? Maybe we're worshiping money. Or perhaps our job is our top priority. Jesus said, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve" (Luke 4:8). Are we worshiping and serving only Him?

Spend some time alone with God to examine your heart. Make sure that you haven't become an idolater. —VCG

*Unless we worship only God
Our lives cannot be truly free;
For we were made for Him alone—
All else is but idolatry. —D. De Haan*

An idol is anything that takes the place of God.

Connecting to Worship, September 30

Theme: *Naming Our Idols, Deuteronomy 5:6-10*

⁶"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.⁷"You shall have no other gods before me.

Readings: Matthew 6:19-24, Psalm 135:15-18

Connecting to Worship: October 7

Theme: *Money, Work, and Debt, Deuteronomy 28:12-14* The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none.

Readings: Proverbs 22:1,7,26-27, Luke 10:25-37

Monday, October 1 *The Money*

You cannot serve both God and money. Matthew 6:24

Early in my career while doing work that I saw as more of a mission than a job, another company offered me a position that would give a significant increase in pay. Our family could surely have benefited financially from such a move. There was one problem. I hadn't been looking for another job because I loved my current role, which was growing into a calling. But the *money* . . .

I called my father, then in his seventies, and explained the situation. Though his once-sharp mind had been slowed by strokes and the strain of years, his answer was crisp and clear: "Don't even think about the money. What would you do?"

In an instant, my mind was made up. The money would have been my only reason for leaving the job I loved! Thanks, Dad.

Jesus devoted a substantial section of His Sermon on the Mount to money and our fondness for it. He taught us to pray not for an accumulation of riches but for "our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). He warned against storing up treasures on earth and pointed to the birds and flowers as evidence that God cares deeply about His creation (vv. 19–31). "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness," Jesus said, "and all these things will be given to you as well" (v. 33). Money matters. But money shouldn't rule our decision-making process. Tough times and big decisions are opportunities to grow our faith in new ways. Our heavenly Father cares for us.

Never confuse temptation with opportunity.

Tuesday, October 2 *Best Deal Ever*

As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owners? Ecclesiastes 5:11

How much is enough? We might ask this simple question on a day that many developed countries increasingly devote to shopping. I speak of Black Friday, the day after the US Thanksgiving holiday, in which many stores open early and offer cut-price deals; a day that has spread from the States to other nations. Some shoppers have limited resources and are trying to purchase something at a price they can afford. But sadly, for others greed is the motivation, and violence erupts as they fight for bargains. The wisdom of the Old Testament writer known as "the Teacher" (Eccl. 1:1) provides an antidote to the frenzy of consumerism we may face in the shops—and in our hearts. He points out that those who love money never will have enough and will be ruled by their possessions. And yet, they will die with nothing: "As everyone comes, so they depart" (5:15). The apostle Paul echoes the Teacher in his letter to Timothy, when he says that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and that we should strive for "godliness with contentment" (1 Tim. 6:6–10). Whether we live in a place of plenty or not, we all can seek unhealthy ways of filling the God-shaped hole in our hearts. But when we look to the Lord for our sense of peace and well-being, He will fill us with His goodness and love.

*"You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in You." Augustine,
The Confessions*

True contentment does not depend on anything in this world.

Wednesday, October 3

Trust Me

Do not worry about tomorrow. Matthew 6:34

After graduation from college, I had a low-paying job. Money was tight, and sometimes I didn't even have enough for my next meal. I learned to trust God for my *daily* provision.

It reminded me of the prophet Elijah's experience. During his prophetic ministry, he learned to trust God to meet his daily needs. Shortly after Elijah pronounced God's judgment of a drought in Israel, God sent him to a deserted place, Kerith Ravine, where He used the ravens to bring Elijah his daily meals and refresh him with water from the brook (1 Kings 17:1-4).

But a drought occurred. The brook shrank to a tiny stream, and slowly became a mere trickle. It was only when the brook had dried up that God said: "Go at once to Zarephath . . . I have directed a widow there to supply you with food" (v. 9). Zarephath was in Phoenicia, whose inhabitants were enemies of the Israelites. Would anyone offer Elijah shelter? And would a poor widow have food to share?

Most of us would rather God provided in abundance long before our resources were depleted rather than just enough for each day. But our loving Father whispers, *Trust Me*. Just as He used ravens and a widow to provide for Elijah, nothing is impossible for Him. We can count on His love and power to meet our daily needs.

Faithful Father, thank You for knowing exactly what we need before we even ask. Help us to trust You for our daily needs.

God supplies all our needs—one day at a time.

Thursday, October 4

Money Talk

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God. —1 Timothy 6:17

Marilyn and Steven had been married just a few years, and money was tight. But as she looked at their threadbare bedspread, she wanted to replace it. So she decided she would buy a new one with a credit card—hoping to somehow find the money to pay it off.

Her devotional reading for the day surprised her when it pointed her to Proverbs 22:27, "If you lack the means to pay, your very bed will be snatched from under you" (NIV). Marilyn decided not to go into debt for a new bedspread that day.

Decisions about the way we spend our money are a personal matter between us and the Lord and can be difficult to make. But God hasn't left us without help. He tells us: "Honor the LORD with your possessions" (Prov. 3:9), and "You cannot serve both God and Money" (Matt. 6:24 NIV).

With such truths in mind, we look further in His Word for help to use money wisely. We find this: "Beware of covetousness" (Luke 12:15).

Another says, "The borrower is servant to the lender" (Prov. 22:7). And in 1 Timothy we read, be "ready to give, willing to share" (6:18).

Money is a big issue. God, who provides for all our needs, can show us how to use it to bring Him honor.

Lord, sometimes money and finances are overwhelming. It's hard to know what decisions to make, so please lead me and give the wisdom to use my finances in a way that pleases You.

Never let gold become your god.

Friday, October 5

Who Am I Working For?

“For whom am I toiling,” he asked, “and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?” Ecclesiastes 4:8

Henry worked 70 hours a week. He loved his job and brought home a sizeable paycheck to provide good things for his family. He always had plans to slow down but he never did. One evening he came home with great news—he had been promoted to the highest position in his company. But no one was home. Over the years, his children had grown up and moved out, his wife had found a career of her own, and now the house was empty. There was no one to share the good news with.

Solomon talked about the need to keep a balance in life with our work. He wrote, “Fools fold their hands and ruin themselves” (Eccl. 4:5). We don’t want to go to the extreme of being lazy, but neither do we want to fall into the trap of being a workaholic. “Better one handful with tranquillity than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind” (v. 6). In other words, it is better to have less and enjoy it more. Sacrificing relationships at the altar of success is unwise. Achievement is fleeting, while relationships are what make our life meaningful, rewarding, and enjoyable (vv. 7-12).

We can learn to work to live and not live to work by choosing to apportion our time wisely. The Lord can give us this wisdom as we seek Him and trust Him to be our Provider.

Lord, show me if my priorities are skewed and where I need to make changes. Thank You for the gift of family and friends.

To spend time wisely, invest it in eternity.

Connecting to Worship: October 7

Theme: *Money, Work, and Debt, Deuteronomy 28:12-14* The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none.

Readings: Proverbs 22:1,7,26-27, Luke 10:25-37

Connecting to Worship: October 14

Theme: *Be Faithful, Save, and Give* 2 Corinthians 9:6-12 Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Readings: Genesis 41:28-36, Mark 6:34-43

Monday, October 8

Fearless Giving

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Malachi 3:10

When my son Xavier was six years old, a friend brought her toddler to visit and Xavier wanted to give him a few toys. I delighted in our little giver's generosity, until he offered a stuffed animal my husband had searched several stores in different cities to find. Recognizing the high-demand toy, my friend tried to politely decline. Still, Xavier placed his gift into her son's hands and said, "My daddy gives me lots of toys to share." Though I'd like to say Xavier learned his confident giving from me, I've often withheld my resources from God and others. But when I remember that my heavenly Father gives me everything I have and need, it's easier to share. In the Old Testament, God commanded the Israelites to trust Him by giving a portion of all He had supplied to the Levite priests, who would in turn help others in need. When the people refused, the prophet Malachi said they were robbing the Lord (Malachi 3:8-9). But if they gave willingly, showing they trusted the Lord's promised provision and protection (vv. 10-11), others would recognize them as God's blessed people (v. 12).

Whether we're managing our finances, our schedules, or the gifts God entrusted to us, giving can be an act of worship. Giving freely and fearlessly can show our confidence in the care of our loving Father—the ultimate generous Giver.

Lord, please help us live with full confidence in Your faithful provision, so we can give freely and fearlessly to You and others.

Fearless giving to God and others reveals our trust in the Lord's promises and provision.

Tuesday, October 9

Enough of Everything

God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you . . . may have an abundance for every good work. —2 Corinthians 9:8

Randy, our first child, went off to kindergarten with a 10-cent coin in his pocket to buy a carton of milk to go with his lunch. When he came home that afternoon, his mother asked if he had purchased the milk. "No," he replied, bursting into tears. "The milk was 5 cents and I only had a dime."

How often I have responded to demands placed upon me with the same childish understanding. According to God's Word, I have all the resources I need at my disposal—more than enough to meet my needs—and yet I'm reluctant to act because I fear that I won't have enough. But the Bible assures me that God has provided me with every blessing in abundance. By His grace, I have everything I need (2 Corinthians 9:8). The apostle Paul was not saying that we have enough grace to do anything we want to do. God does not offer us a blank check. No, Paul was giving us the assurance that we have enough grace to do whatever God has called us to do—whether it is to give money for the cause of the gospel, as the Corinthians were doing (v.7), or to give love to a difficult teenager, an indifferent spouse, or an aging parent. Whatever the task, God will make sure we have "an abundance for every good work" (v.8).

*God uses us to do His work
If we will just obey;
He freely gives His love and power
To serve Him every day. —Sper*

God's call to a task includes His strength to complete it.

Wednesday, October 10

Generous Givers

Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. 1 Chronicles 29:14

After reviewing all God had already done throughout our church's history, leaders presented the congregation with a proposal for a new gym to help us better serve our community. The leadership team announced they'd be the first to sign pledge notes to fund the construction. I initially prayed with a heart soured by selfishness, not wanting to offer more money than we had already committed to give. Still, my husband and I agreed to pray for the ongoing project. While considering all God continued providing for us, we eventually decided on a monthly offering. The combined gifts of our church family paid for the entire building.

Grateful for the many ways God's used that gym for community events since we celebrated opening its doors for ministry, I'm reminded of another generous giver—King David. Though the Lord didn't choose him to build His temple, David invested all his resources to the project (1 Chronicles 29:1–5). The leaders under him and the people they served gave generously too (vv. 6–9). The king acknowledged all they'd contributed had first been given to them by God—the Creator, Sustainer, and Owner of everything (vv. 10–16).

When we recognize God owns it all, we can commit to grateful, generous, and faithful giving for the benefit of others. And we can trust the Lord will provide—and may even use the generosity of others to help us when we're in need.

Lord, please help us remember You own it all as we commit to giving You our all, willingly and selflessly.

God gives first, and He always outgives His most generous givers.

Thursday, October 11

The Gift of Giving

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion. 2 Corinthians 9:7

A pastor breathed life into the phrase “He'd give you the shirt off his back” when he gave this unsettling challenge to his church: “What would happen if we took the coats off our backs and gave them to the needy?” Then he took his own coat and laid it at the front of the church. Dozens of others followed his example. This was during the winter, so the trip home was less comfortable that day. But for dozens of people in need, the season warmed up just a bit.

When John the Baptist roamed the Judean wilderness, he had a stern warning for the crowd that came to hear him. “You brood of vipers!” he said. “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (Luke 3:7–8). Startled, they asked him, “What should we do then?” He responded with this advice: “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same” (vv. 10–11). True repentance produces a generous heart.

Because “God loves a person who gives cheerfully” (nlt), giving should never be guilt-based or pressured (2 Cor. 9:7). But when we give freely and generously, we find that it truly is more blessed to give than to receive.

Lord, thank You for the many ways You bless us. Forgive us for so often taking Your goodness for granted. Show us what we have that we might use to bless someone else today.

Whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.
Proverbs 11:25

Friday, October 12

Cheerful Givers

God loves a cheerful giver. —2 Corinthians 9:7

A pastor wanted to see if a farmer in his congregation was willing to support the Lord's work. So one day he challenged him with some direct questions. "If you had two farms," he asked, "would you be willing to give one to God?" "Why, certainly!" replied the man. "I only wish I were in a position to do so." The minister then asked, "If you had \$10,000, would you give \$5,000 to the Lord?" Without hesitation the man responded, "How I'd love to have that kind of money! I'd enjoy giving generously like that." Then the preacher asked this pointed question: "If you had two pigs, would you give one to the church?" The farmer hesitated for a moment and then blurted out, "That's not fair. You know I've got two pigs!"

Talking about giving generously is easy when you have little to give. When the collection plate is passed, however, some Christians grudgingly drop in as little as they dare.

God certainly doesn't approve of that kind of response! Second Corinthians 9:7 tells us not to give "grudgingly or of necessity." As the Lord has prospered us, let's return a portion to Him—wisely, purposefully, and gladly.

Remember, God loves a cheerful giver!

*Lord, You love the cheerful giver,
Who with open heart and hand
Blesses freely, as a river
That refreshes all the land. —Murray*

**The highest kind of giving comes from the bottom
of the heart.**

Connecting to Worship: October 14

Theme: *Be Faithful, Save, and Give* 2 Corinthians

9:6-12 Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Readings: Genesis 41:28-36, Mark 6:34-43

Connecting to Worship: October 21

Theme: *Heart Giving*, 2 Corinthians 9:11-13 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.

Readings: Malachi 3:8-10, Matthew 7:7-12

Monday, October 15 *Anonymous Kindness*

When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Matthew 6:3

When I first graduated from college, I found myself needing to adopt a strict grocery budget—twenty-five dollars a week, to be exact. One day, while entering the checkout line, I suspected the groceries I'd selected cost slightly more than my remaining money. "Just stop when we reach twenty dollars," I told the cashier, and I was able to purchase everything I'd selected but a bag of peppers.

As I was about to drive home, a man stopped by my car. "Here's your peppers, ma'am," he said, handing the bag to me. Before I had time to thank him, he was already walking away.

Remembering the simple goodness of this act of kindness still warms my heart and brings to mind Jesus's words in Matthew 6. Criticizing those who made a show of giving to the needy (v. 2), Jesus taught His disciples a different way. Instead of making giving all about them and their generosity, He urged that giving should be done so secretly it's like their left hand isn't even aware their right is giving (v. 3)!

As one person's anonymous kindness reminded me, giving should never be about us. We give only because of what our generous God has so lavishly given us (2 Corinthians 9:6–11). As we give quietly and generously, we reflect who He is—and God receives the thanksgiving only He deserves (v. 11).

Have you ever been the recipient of anonymous kindness? Share your story at [Facebook.com/ourdailybread](https://www.facebook.com/ourdailybread).

Giving quietly and generously reflects God's generosity.

Tuesday, October 16 *What Can I Give Him?*

Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Psalm 103:2

One year, those responsible for decorating their church for Christmas decided to use the theme of "Christmas lists." Instead of decorating with the usual shiny gold and silver ornaments, they gave each person a red or green tag. On one side they were to write down the gift they would like from Jesus, and on the other they were to list the gift they would give to the One whose birth they were celebrating.

If you were to do this, what gift would you ask for and what would you offer? The Bible gives us lots of ideas. God promises to supply all our needs, so we might ask for a new job, help with financial problems, physical healing for ourselves or others, or a restored relationship. We might be wondering what our spiritual gift is that equips us for God's service. Many of these are listed in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Or we might long to show more of the fruit of the Holy Spirit: to be more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind and good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled (Gal. 5:22–23).

The most important gift we can ever receive is God's gift of His Son, our Savior, and with Him forgiveness, restoration, and the promise of spiritual life that begins now and lasts forever. And the most important gift we can ever give is to give Jesus our heart.

You overwhelm me with Your gifts, Lord. In return, I want to give You the very best present that I can.

Please show me what You want most from me.

If I were a wise man, I would do my part. Yet what can I give Him—give Him my heart. Christina G.

Rossetti

Wednesday, October 17

Heart Check

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Luke 12:34

When commuting into Chicago on the train, I always followed the “unwritten codes of conduct”—such as, no conversations with people sitting next to you if you don’t know them. That was tough on a guy like me who has never met a stranger. I love talking to new people! Although I kept the code of silence, I realized that you can still learn something about people based on the section of the newspaper they read. So I’d watch to see what they turned to first: The business section? Sports? Politics? Current events? Their choices revealed their interests.

Our choices are always revealing. Of course, God doesn’t need to wait to see our choices in order for Him to know what’s in our hearts. But the things that occupy our time and attention are telling. As Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:34). Regardless of what we want Him to think of us, the true condition of our heart becomes clear based on how we use our time, our money, and our talents. When we invest these resources in the things He cares about, then it reveals that our hearts are in tune with His.

God’s heart is with the needs of people and the advancement of His kingdom. What do your choices tell Him and others about where your heart is?

*Lord, I want my heart to be in tune with Yours.
Forgive me for giving it to things of far less value,
and teach me the joy of investing my time in
opportunities to serve You. Thank You.*

Where is your treasure?

Thursday, October 18

Lavish Expressions of Love

You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion. 2 Corinthians 9:11

On our wedding anniversary, my husband, Alan, gives me a large bouquet of fresh flowers. When he lost his job during a corporate restructure, I didn’t expect this extravagant display of devotion to continue. But on our nineteenth anniversary, the color-splashed blossoms greeted me from their spot on our dining room table. Because he valued continuing this annual tradition, Alan saved some money each month to ensure he’d have enough for this personal show of affection.

My husband’s careful planning exhibited exuberant generosity, similar to what Paul encouraged when he addressed the Corinthian believers. The apostle complimented the church for their intentional and enthusiastic offerings (2 Corinthians 9:2, 5), reminding them that God delights in generous and cheerful givers (vv. 6–7). After all, no one gives more than our loving Provider, who’s always ready to supply all we need (vv. 8–10).

We can be generous in all kinds of giving, caring for one another because the Lord meets all of our material, emotional, and spiritual needs (v. 11). As we give, we can express our gratitude for all God has given us. We can even motivate others to praise the Lord and give from all God has given them (vv. 12–13). Openhanded giving, a lavish expression of love and gratitude, can demonstrate our confidence in God’s provision for all His people.

Lord, please help us trust Your abundant love and generosity, so we can give to others as You so faithfully give to us.

Generous giving displays courageous confidence in God’s loving and faithful provision.

Friday, October 19

Front Porch Relief

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. Philippians 4:12

On a particularly hot day, eight-year-old Carmine McDaniel wanted to make sure his neighborhood mail carrier stayed cool and hydrated. So he left a cooler filled with a sports drink and water bottles on their front step. The family security camera recorded the mail carrier's reaction: "Oh man, water and Gatorade. Thank God; thank you!"

Carmine's mom says, "Carmine feels that it's his 'duty' to supply the mailman with a cool beverage even if we're not home."

This story warms our hearts, but it also reminds us that there is One who will "meet all your needs," as the apostle Paul phrased it. Though Paul was languishing in jail and uncertain about his future, he expressed joy for the Christians in Philippi because God had met his needs through their financial gift to him. The Philippian church was not wealthy, but they were generous, giving to Paul and others out of their poverty (see 2 Corinthians 8:1-4). As the Philippians had met Paul's needs, so God would meet theirs, "according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

God often sends vertical help through horizontal means. Put another way, He sends us what we need through the help of others. When we trust Him for what we need, we learn, as Paul did, the secret of true contentment (vv. 12-13).

How might God be prompting you to meet the needs of others? In what ways and through whom has God met your needs? Spend time thanking God for His provision.

God's provisions are always greater than our problems.

Connecting to Worship: October 21

Theme: *Heart Giving*, 2 Corinthians 9:11-13 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.

Readings: Malachi 3:8-10, Matthew 7:7-12

