

Stewardship Nuggets

Discussion Starters for Children on Generosity & Giving

This resource is a compilation of discussion starters, activities, and stories related to living a life of generosity. Originally published on the GBOD website from 2004 – 2007, these “nuggets” have been updated and republished here for use in the local church.

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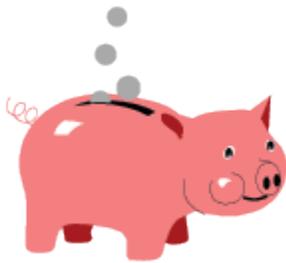
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The Value of Planning Ahead

"That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine" (Genesis 41:36, NRSV)



January is a great time to help our children establish new habits such as saving. Small children love placing coins in unbreakable piggy banks. Start savings accounts for older children, encouraging them to add a portion of their allowance periodically. Also encourage your children to save a portion of monetary gifts received from family and friends. You may want to have three banks — one for saving, one for giving, and one for spending.

Because your children's savings probably won't be needed for a famine, allow them to spend some of their savings occasionally on special items that fall outside the family budget. Such expenditures might include spending money for school field trips or vacations, charities, a toy they must have, or an outing to a zoo or an amusement park. Knowing how to manage money to God's glory and to our benefit is one of the greatest blessings any parent can give a child.

Questions for Discussion:

- Why do we save money for a rainy day?
- How do we know how God wants us to use our savings?
- What is a good portion of total income for the child (and for parents) to save?

Written by Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2003)

New Year, New You!

*"Even children make themselves known by their acts, by whether what they do is pure and right."
(Proverbs 20:11)*



The start of a new year is a good time for each of us to review our lives and to determine some area of needed personal growth. Speak with the children about making New Year's resolutions. Share with the children one way that you would like to grow personally in the New Year.

Often people do not persist with their resolutions because they have not established a plan or set goals to reach these resolutions. We all need help; and help is available with God!

Ask the children if they have ever planted a young tree. When our family planted one in our front yard, it was initially duct taped to a wooden stake. The stake helped the tree grow straight. The stake kept the tree from bending in the wind and provided some additional strength in stormy weather. The tree might not have survived or may have grown crooked without the stake. (You may want to invite a gardener to speak with the children about this process.)

Just as the young tree was attached to the stake to help it grow properly, children need to be attached to "stakes." Children will grow strong physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually if they are attached to some good "stakes" during their formative years. These stakes include the Word of God, communities of faith, and spiritually strong adults.

Ask the children to draw a picture of themselves as trees. Then ask them to draw several stakes that are attached to the tree. These "stakes" can represent actions that they can take to help them grow physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually in ways that would be pleasing to God. Here are some possible "stakes":

- **Physical Stakes** — Proper eating, physical exercise, proper sleep
- **Mental Stakes** — Reading books, completing homework, listening to teachers, critical thinking
- **Emotional Stakes** — Conversations with parents, trusted friends, and church staff; prayer; remembering God's blessings; good deeds
- **Spiritual Stakes** — Reading the Bible, prayer, Sunday school, worship, giving money regularly to church, service projects

Encourage the children to set one growth goal for 2005. Invite the children to share their growth goals and the stakes that will help them achieve the growth. Remind the children that you will be praying for them and ask them to pray for you as all of you seek to reach your growth goals.

Prayer:

Dear God, help me to grow strong in all areas of my life. Teach me to follow you, to make good decisions, and to help others in this new year. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- What are some "stakes" that will help you succeed in keeping your resolution?
- Why might making your growth goal be challenging?
- What can others do to help you succeed?
- God wants us to be good stewards of our bodies, our minds, our emotions, and our spiritual life, not just our money and possessions. Why is it important to God that we seek to grow in these areas?

Written by Janet Zimmerman, Canton, Ohio. (2005)

Praying for Our Leaders

"Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." (Hebrews 13:7)



Presidents' Day is a good reminder that we need to be in prayer for our leaders. You can go to the library or conduct an Internet search to find out more about the religious faith of our presidents and other world leaders. You may even discover how their faith had an impact on their lives. Encourage children to pray for our current president, other national and local leaders, and leaders throughout the global community.

As you talk with children about the importance of praying for leaders, remind them to pray for those leaders who consistently share the word of God with them. You can prepare a fun survey form that children can give to their pastors, Sunday school teachers, and other church leaders. You can even e-mail the survey to missionaries. On the survey, ask questions that will help the children become better acquainted with their church leaders. The survey might include questions seeking general information, such as birthdates, the names and types of family pets, favorite foods, and most memorable childhood activities. Encourage the children to come up with additional questions. Make sure that they ask questions that are similar to the following:

1. When and how did God call you into ministry?
2. In what ways are you a stewardship leader?
3. How can I pray for you?

Collect the surveys, and encourage children to pray for a different person each day. Attach each leader's picture to his or her survey.

The projects above will help children realize the importance of Christian leaders and our need to pray for them.

Questions for Discussion:

- What surprised you about your church leaders?
- What responsibilities do church leaders have for stewardship within the church and the larger community?
- In what ways might the president and other leaders be stewardship leaders for our country and for the world?
- What do you admire about these leaders and why?
- What did you learn that will help you pray for these individuals?

Written by Janet Zimmerman, Canton, Ohio. (2004)

Showing God's Love

*"Truly I tell you,
just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family,
you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40)*



February is the month for Valentine's Day! Children excitedly choose Valentine's Day cards for their classmates and other special people. They look forward to receiving cards and candy from their family and friends. School classes often hold parties. It is a fun-filled time.

Valentine's Day offers a great opportunity to focus on the love of God. In particular, we can show our love for God as we express our love for our family and friends. Encourage your children to adopt a group of people who may be forgotten on Valentine's Day. Your children can make cards, bake cookies, prepare bags of candy, or accomplish some other project for the group.

To find a potential group, contact a local nursing home, a children's home, a ministry that serves meals to homebound persons, a community-based organization, or even your own church. Encourage the children to express in their cards that they will be praying for the recipients and that God loves them.

This project will be fun for the children and will help them learn what it means to reach out to "one of the least of these."

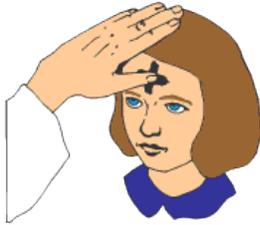
Questions for Discussion:

- What are the needs of your selected group? How can you best pray for them?
- What does Jesus mean by the phrase "the least of these"? How is ministry to the "least of these" really serving Jesus Christ?
- Are there times in most people's lives when they could be considered among "the least of these"?
- What are some future projects that the children could complete for this group?

Written by Janet Zimmerman, Canton, Ohio. (2004)

Serving Christ by Sharing With Others

"For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me ... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:35, 40)



Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, is a day for us to examine our lives and to ask for God's forgiveness for our sins. Lent is a season to prepare our hearts for celebrating Easter. Through the centuries, common Lenten disciplines have included:

- Fasting -- Denying oneself food or restricting the amount of food eaten.
- Abstinence — Denying oneself specific types of food during Lent.
- Almsgiving — The practice of giving money sacrificially.

Choose a ministry that could benefit from financial assistance. The children could select a local mission project or some international concern, such as the recent tsunami in Southeast Asia.

Ask the children to decide individually ways in which they can gather money to help support the chosen ministry. Remember that the focus for attaining money should be on the Lenten practice of denial. For example, if the children ask their parent(s) to buy potato chips and soda each week, they could ask their parents to set aside money for the chosen ministry instead of purchasing chips and soda. If older children regularly attend movies or rent videos each weekend, encourage them to set the money aside for the chosen mission instead of spending their money on movies or videos. If the children have access to additional income through an allowance, challenge them to consider giving part of their allowance too.

How much money could be raised if the children denied themselves some things during Lent? Discuss the ways in which they could raise money for a ministry by giving up some thing or some activity. Guide the children in selecting those practices that they are willing to abandon during Lent. Make it clear that they do not need to stop doing everything they enjoy. Let them know that it pleases God when we voluntarily deny ourselves so that God's work can prosper.

Provide the children with individual containers for their contributions. Invite the children to bring their contributions to church on Easter Sunday. Plan to have a special celebration after the money is collected and counted. Be sure to share the good news with the congregation through a verbal announcement and an article in the church newsletter.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for the many blessings you have given us. Help us to deny some things and to save our money for others. We thank you for this season of Lent. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

- What does denying ourselves and sharing our resources teach us about being good stewards?
- Is it easy to deny ourselves some things? Why would God want us to deny ourselves some things during Lent?
- What might you learn about yourself during Lent this year?

Written by Janet Zimmerman , Canton, Ohio. (2005)

Family Lenten Offering

*"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."
(Matthew 6:21)*



Every family has at least two kinds of treasures. One is money and another is time. During the forty days of Lent from Ash Wednesday to Easter, take the time each day to share regular family devotions with your children. That will be "valuable" time. Also, plan a special family offering with them.

There is a tradition during the forty days of Lent for Christians to "give up" something. Families have chosen a wide variety of things: from television viewing (a time commitment) to chocolate (a money and health commitment). A distraction is set intentionally aside so that one's attention is on our relationship with Christ. Money is set aside for a purpose that brings higher satisfaction.

For instance, your family may choose to do without a weekly visit to a fast food restaurant. A simple meal at home can become a special meal. Have each member of the family participate in some way. Talk together about the amount of money that was saved by eating the simple meal at home. Then place the savings in a jar or other container. Plan a brief, age-appropriate devotional that connects the simple meal to the Lenten theme. On Easter Sunday, this money becomes a special family offering. If your church designates a special Easter offering, talk together about what the money will do specifically for others.

Other things to "sacrifice" could include weekly trips to the zoo or ice cream parlor, an hour of television or video games each day, or a Saturday movie outing or video rental. Working together toward a common goal and spending time together in God's presence will far outweigh anything your family chooses to "give up" during Lent.

Questions for Discussion:

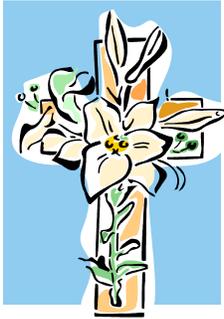
- How does giving up something help us draw closer to God? How does giving up become gaining?
- Jesus often ate with people. What do suppose they talked about when they ate together?
- Why do we prepare for Easter and why is it so important to us?

Written by Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2006)

Easter Is Coming!

"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)



Easter egg hunts. Getting a picture taken with the Easter bunny. Getting ready for chocolate candy. Buying new spring clothes. Chances are these are the responses most children would give if asked how they were preparing for Easter.

Remind the children that Easter is really about the sacrifice Jesus made for each one of us. His resurrection breaks the power of death. Explain that the month of March is part of the season of Lent, according to the Christian calendar. Lent is a time when we Christians are to examine our lives and to pray for the forgiveness of our sins. Ask the children what they can give up as a way of thanking Jesus for giving up his life for us. Perhaps they will set aside all or part of their allowance and contribute it to a local mission. Maybe they will prefer to go through their clothes and toys, choose some items that are in good condition but no longer needed, and donate them to a family outreach center. Children might decide to give up some of their personal time and use this time to volunteer at a soup kitchen or a nursing home. Perhaps they will choose to give up watching a TV show and instead spend that time praying for others.

Remind the children to pray for God's help as they participate in this project. Check with the children throughout Lent to ask what they are learning from their experience. Encourage children to journal or to draw pictures that will help them remember what they are learning. Tell them that it is impossible to out give God and that God will bless their efforts.

Use this activity to remind the children how very blessed they are. God is pleased when we share our blessings with others.

Questions for Discussion:

- What did you learn from your experience?
- What are other ways you can thank Jesus for his sacrifice?
- God has blessed us with so much. Can you think of a particular blessing in your life for which you are thankful?
- What blessings can you share with others?

Written by Janet Zimmerman, Canton, Ohio. (2004)

Blessing Others with Easter Baskets

"In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"
(Acts 20:35)



Ask the children how they would feel if they did not receive an Easter basket on Easter morning. Most children would be very disappointed. Ask the children how they think children who do not normally receive baskets would feel if this Easter they DID receive an Easter basket. The children can be a part of making this happen!

A few years ago, we made Easter baskets for teen residents of a children's home. Rather than putting items in a traditional basket, we used baseball caps. We filled the caps with common items used by teens (for example, batteries, combs, hair products, fast food restaurant gift certificates, CDs, phone cards, and, of course, candy). Our "baskets" were a big hit with the recipients! We included a note with the "baskets" informing the teens that we were praying for them.

This project can be adapted to people of any age. Choose a group and develop a list of items that the people would enjoy receiving. You can make this a churchwide project and ask for donations from the congregation. (*Note: If you are working with a specific community organization, be sure to ask if there are items that should not be placed in the baskets for safety or health-related reasons.*)

We delivered our "baskets" as a group to the children's home and then participated in a tour of the facility. The tour guide shared the various issues and concerns facing the recipients. This was an eye-opening experience for our group. They learned a lot about the needs of the residents. This experience also helped them distinguish between our real "needs" and our perceived "wants."

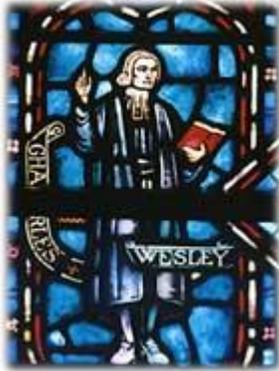
Questions for Discussion:

- In what ways were you blessed by participating in this project?
- How is your life different from and/or similar to the lives of the recipients?
- What are some specific ways you can keep these people in prayer? In what other ways can you help them?
- What are your real needs as opposed to your wants?

Janet Zimmerman, Canton, Ohio. (2004)

Celebrate All Saints' Day!

*"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us."
(Hebrews 12:1)*



All Saints' Day, observed on November 1, is a day set aside by the Christian church to remember all Christians who served God faithfully throughout life and are now with God in eternity. Some of these Christians were famous. Some were ordinary, everyday people. Realistically, most of these Christians are unknown to us.

Plan an All Saints' Day party for the children. Encourage each child to learn about a deceased Christian who made a difference in the world. The children could prepare a short report or skit about that person. Suggest that the children consider well-known Methodists (such as John, Charles, or Susanna Wesley, Francis Asbury, or Phillip Otterbein), more contemporary Christians (such as Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., or Henri Nouwen), or a biblical person (such as Naomi, Paul, or Luke). Do not overlook deceased Christians from your own church who made an impact on children over the years. If a deceased church member is chosen, invite that person's family members to the party.

Most of the research can be conducted in the church library. If you do not have a church library, then a public librarian, a conference communications or media staff person, and your local pastor are good resource people for this project. Ask the children to obtain a picture of their saint. Encourage the children to tell about this person's life and to explain how his or her faith made a difference in the world. Ask the children to share the person's legacy and to describe how this legacy can continue to help us grow in our faith.

The children may come to the party dressed as their chosen person. After the presentations, play some games and serve refreshments. Introduce the children to a game that might have been played by children living in the time period of one or more of the chosen saints. Share snacks that represent those time periods, as well. Close the party with prayer.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for all these saints we remember today. Each was deeply committed to you. As a result of their faith, they influenced many people in their day and in our day, too. Remind us that we have a unique purpose in this world. Help us be an example of Christian living. Thank you for the "great cloud of witnesses"! Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- What did you learn about your chosen person that might influence your own faith?
- What are some common characteristics that these people shared? In what ways were they different?
- What difference would it make in our world if these people had never been born?
- In what ways were these people good stewards of their God-given gifts, talents, and resources?
- What are some ways that you can use your gifts, talents, and resources to make a difference in the world?

Janet Zimmerman, Canton, Ohio. (2004)

Note: The stained glass image of Charles Wesley is from The Upper Room Chapel's World Christian Fellowship Window.

Share the Joy of Giving

*"Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full."
(Proverbs 19:17)*



When shopping with your children this holiday season, ask them to take some of their money along to donate to the charities whose representatives are ringing bells outside stores. As you make a donation, allow your children to put their own money in the kettle and experience the joy of giving to others.

Questions for Discussion:

- Who are the poor? Do we know anyone who is poor?
- How does the money we give help the poor?
- How can our family help the poor throughout the year?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2002)

Life Lessons from St. Nicholas

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35)



As Christmas approaches, expectant children are making lists of presents that they hope to receive. Advent is an appropriate time to teach them about the life of St. Nicholas and to remind them, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Nicholas was born during the third century in a village that is located in modern-day Turkey. His wealthy parents raised him to be a devout Christian. Sadly, they died in an epidemic while he was still young.

Nicholas obeyed Jesus' words to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor." He used his whole inheritance to help the needy, the sick, and the suffering. The church recognized his total dedication to God and declared him Bishop of Myra while he was still a young man. Nicholas was known across the region for his generosity to people in need, for his love of children, and for his concern for sailors. You can find many legends about his life on the Internet and in library books. In Europe, St. Nicholas' Feast Day is held on December 6. This special day celebrates the stories of his generosity and goodness. Our current images of Santa Claus have little in common with this devout bishop! The life of St. Nicholas has much to teach us.

Encourage the children to approach the Christmas season by focusing on what they can give, not on what they can receive. In addition to money, a person can give time, talents, and possessions to help others. Brainstorm with the children ways in which they can give their time, talents, and possessions to others. Here are some suggestions:

- Help an elderly neighbor address Christmas cards or wrap presents.
- Provide childcare for the children of a single parent, allowing the parent time to purchase gifts.
- Ring bells at one of the many Salvation Army kettles.
- Shovel snow from a neighbor's sidewalk or driveway or help with some yard work.
- Assist a family who has a parent overseas serving in the military.
- Be a friend to a new student at school.

Help the children see the needs of those around them and guide them in choosing a need that they can meet. Children can work independently or together on a project.

Prayer:

Dear God, teach us that it is truly more blessed to give than to receive. Help us to see the needs of others, to reach out to them, and to offer them the love of Jesus. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- Ask the children to think of a meaningful, non-material gift that they received (for example, a compliment, a word of encouragement, a helping hand, etc.). Ask: "Who gave you this gift? What made this gift so special? How can you give this kind of gift to others?"
- What does the Scripture lesson, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," mean? What does giving do for the giver?
- After Christmas, ask the children what they have learned about giving that they did not know before this lesson.

Janet Zimmerman, Canton, Ohio. (2004)

Celebrate the Season of Giving

*"Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys."
(Luke 12:33)*



During the holiday season, many charities ask donors to "adopt" less fortunate children by providing Christmas gifts. Include your children in this process by choosing recipients who are the same sex and age as your children. Shop with your children for gifts, purchasing essentials such as clothing and school supplies, as well as toys, crafts, and games. Many charities supply purchasing guidelines. If age-appropriate, have your children choose the paper and bows and wrap the gifts. If the charity allows it, include a homemade Christmas card from your child.

After delivering the gifts, include these adopted children in your family's prayers throughout the holiday season.

Questions for Discussion:

- How does God want us to treat the poor?
- How would we feel about receiving Christmas gifts from other families if we were poor?
- Why is Christmas a wonderful time to share with those in need?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2002)

A Gift to Remember

*"For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved
and among those who are perishing."*

(2 Corinthians 2:15)

*"On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother;
and they knelt down and paid him homage.*

*Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of
gold, frankincense, and myrrh."*

(Matthew 2:11)



As we enter another busy holiday season, help your children follow the wise men's lead in giving a "fragrant" and lasting gift. Consider donating to a charity in honor of your children's teachers, coaches, or other hard-to-buy-for individuals. After making the donation, send the recipients a small bag of potpourri, with a card attached notifying them of your donation. You may also want to ask them to remember the charity in prayer each time they smell the aroma of the potpourri. While you may choose any fragrance of potpourri, a Christmas scent is a great holiday treat. Your children can help wrap the gifts and, if appropriate, make and attach the cards.

Questions for Discussion:

- Why is Christmas a great time to remember and help the needy?
- Was Jesus' family poor? How do you know?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2006)

A Wise Gift

"Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh."

(Matthew 2:11)



This year, use the holiday shopping season to teach your children to be wise gift givers. Although we cannot all be as extravagant as the wise men in selecting gifts for family and friends, a considerate, well-planned gift has more value than an expensive one.

After explaining your family's Christmas budget to your children, ask for their assistance in planning the shopping list. Invite them to use their imaginations. For instance, ask them: "If you were Aunt Rosie, what would you want for Christmas?" You may be surprised by the incredible insight children possess and use in gift selection.

As your children participate in the planning, shopping, and wrapping of Christmas gifts, the holiday will truly become more about giving than receiving.

Questions for Discussion:

- What are gold, frankincense, and myrrh? Why did the wise men choose these gifts?
- What sorts of things would be considered a special way to honor someone today?
- How can we give that would bring joy to Christ this year? to our family and friends?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2002)

Making the Most of It: A Year-End Evaluation

"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'"

(Matthew 25:23)



The end of the year is a great time to evaluate what our children have learned about good stewardship. Please consider the following:

- Evaluate and increase allowances based on the your children's ages and skills. If you have not given allowances, consider this as a first step in teaching money management.
- Decide if allowances will be given based on merit (for chores, responsibilities) or for simply being members of the family.
- Determine ways you will reward good money management and methods to encourage your children in their weak areas regarding money.
- Encourage savings either by starting a savings account for your child or by giving smaller children a piggy bank.
- Encourage giving tithes and offerings to your church and explain their purpose and uses.
- If you do not have a college savings plan for your child, consider starting one. Encourage your child to contribute to it.
- Pray as a family about financial decisions.

Questions for Discussion:

- Are there any ways we use our money that may not make God happy?
- Other than supporting our church, what are some other ways we can be good stewards of God's gifts?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2003)

The School Year

*"Love your neighbor as yourself.
Love does no wrong to a neighbor;
therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law."
(Romans 13:9b-10)*

Christian stewardship calls us to conduct ourselves with concern for others before self. Each age of development has a "me" attitude that parents sometimes overlook. Initially, this "me" attitude is an appropriate developmental stage. However, this self-focus is a driving force throughout our lives, especially in the "tween" and teenage years. This attitude is heightened by our hyper-consumer culture. (Note: When you are shopping at the local mall, notice the abundance of marketing efforts with a "me" focus.) This self-focus can be tempered with a strong emphasis on teaching tweens and teens compassion towards others.



Our local schools publish a handbook at the beginning of each new academic year. The handbook begins with a greeting followed by the mission statement and attendance guidelines. The body of the handbook focuses on the student code of conduct. It outlines the administration's expectations of students. It defines various infractions of this code and the minimum and maximum consequences for each infraction. Some of the guidelines are written with wording such as "The Good Neighbor Policy" or "The Golden Rule." Parents and children are expected to read the handbook and, in some instances, sign a form stating that they have discussed the student code with each other. Such are the expectations and the laws of the school.

The beginning of the school year is a great time to discuss the various expectations of the school, the church, and parents. Parents may choose to review their children's responsibilities at home (for example, cleaning a bedroom, emptying the trash, cutting the grass, loading the dishwasher) and the consequences for not fulfilling these expectations. If The Good Neighbor Policy is referred to in the school handbook, read Luke 10:29-37 with your children. Ask the children to describe the ways in which this Scripture reading relates to The Good Neighbor Policy. If the school handbook refers to The Golden Rule, then complete a similar exercise by reading Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for new beginnings, such as the beginning of this new school year. We pray that we might develop close relationships with our neighbors from home, school, and church. Enable us to always show love and compassion to others. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who seeks to develop an ever-closer relationship with us. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- Why is the principle stated in Romans 13:9b-10 so important to Christian formation and discipleship?
- Who are your neighbors at home, at school, at church?
- How do you display Christian love toward some of these neighbors?
- How could you be more compassionate toward some neighbors?

Ruth M. Blum, Glendale, Arizona. (2005)

School Supplies

"Some give freely, yet grow all the richer; others withhold what is due, and only suffer want. A generous person will be enriched ..."
(Proverbs 11:24-25a)



Obtain a packet of seeds. Ask the children what will happen if just one seed is planted. Explain to them that It may or may not grow, but one seed will not produce very much. Then ask the children what will happen if the whole packet of seeds is planted. Tell them that many of the seeds will grow, and the yield will increase dramatically. Now read Proverbs 11:24-25a. Tell the children that giving is like planting seeds. If you give a little, you will not receive much in return. However, if you give a lot, you will experience great joy. God increases our capacity to give as we give more. When we give money to God, we will not necessarily be blessed with monetary riches, but we might be blessed in other ways. Ask the children to describe some of the potential

blessings that people who give generously of their time, money, or possessions may receive. Some answers include:

- They will have more friends.
- Other people will be more likely to help them when they have a need.
- These givers will experience joy in knowing that they have helped others.
- They will have a Christian perspective on money and possessions.
- They will realize that God's blessings, not things, bring true happiness.

In most areas of the United States, children are returning to school after a summer vacation. Ask the children to list the many items that children need when they return to school. Ask the children to choose one school item that they will provide for a needy child. They can either purchase a new item or donate one of their own items in good condition. Encourage the children to share Proverbs 11:24-25a and this lesson with others. Perhaps an entire congregation will want to join the efforts of providing school supplies to children in need. Help the children choose a donation site or contact a local school principal or your pastor to find out the needs of children in the church or local community. Remind the children that they are making God happy by focusing on someone other than themselves. God will bless them for their generosity!

Prayer: Dear God, too often I take your blessings for granted. Thank you for everything that you have given me. I have so much compared to most children. Help me to share generously with others. I want to be a generous giver of my time, my money, and my things. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Questions for Discussion

- How do you feel when you know you have helped others? How do you feel when someone else helps you?
- Talk about a time when you have been blessed by helping someone else. Talk about a time when you have been blessed when someone has helped you.
- How does sharing with others show God that we appreciate our blessings?

Janet Zimmerman, Canton, Ohio. (2004)

Routine Joy

*"Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song,
His praise in the assembly of the faithful."
(Psalm 149:1)*



The school year often creates a period of routine for many families. Children often return to the routine of an earlier bedtime. Homework and early mornings become part of the routine. Parents return to the routine of carpooling children to and from school and an array of other activities. Psalm 149 reminds us that we are to sing a new song, even in the midst of routine. Although returning to routine may feel like "the same old thing," we are encouraged by the Psalmist to engage in the routine with an attitude of joy. It is not "the same thing, different day." Rather, it is "the same thing, let's celebrate a new way."

One of the picture perfect moments for parents is the first day of school — a new outfit, new backpack, new shoes, a new year filled with possibilities. As parents, we encourage our children to be excited about a new school year. After all, educational development is a key for success. Parents often establish a tradition of picture taking on the first day of school. If this is a child's first year at school, start a new tradition. Set apart a time to look at the first day of school pictures of your child from previous years. Talk about the changes from year to year:

- "Look how much taller you are now."
- "Do you remember? This picture shows your favorite backpack."
- "Do you remember your teacher from last year?"

Have you started the same tradition for Sunday school? If not, start this year! It is important to place as much emphasis and excitement on spiritual growth as academic enrichment.

Remember that God calls us to be good stewards of our bodies, including our minds and our physical bodies. When parents review "first day" pictures with their children, it is an appropriate time to discuss the ways in which children's bodies have grown or changed in the past year. Likewise, parents can also ask their children to think of some of the greatest lessons that they have learned over the past year. For us to be good stewards in the world, we must first begin by being good stewards of ourselves. God calls us to be faithful followers.

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord, for first days of school. Help us to remember that every day is a first day. We give thanks for your love that allows us to start each day anew. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- Does the excitement of the first day remind us of the way we are to worship God? (When we praise God, we are to be excited.)
- What are some of your other first-time experiences in the past year or in your lifetime?
- Are there any other activities that will be first-time experiences for you this year? If so, what? Will you be excited to experience them for the first time? Why or why not?

Ruth M. Blum, Glendale, Arizona. (2005)

Be a Good Student

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15)



Ask the children what a school teacher would say if he or she were asked to describe a good student. What phrases would the teacher use? Why do teachers and parents say that it is important to be a good student?

Read the Bible verse to the children. Ask if they have ever thought of themselves as students of God's word. Explain that God desires for us to spend time studying the Bible so that we will be able to understand and to apply its message to our lives. As Christians, we are also called to explain the Bible to others so that they will grow in their relationship with God.

Invite the children to ponder the outcome of someone not studying math or not learning to read. List the consequences of not studying these subjects on newsprint or a chalkboard. Be sensitive to children who may have a math or reading learning difficulty. The primary point to this portion of the activity is for the children to realize that consequences exist for not applying themselves in school and for not learning the fundamentals. For example, if someone cannot count money, then he or she cannot calculate whether or not he or she has received the correct amount of change when making a purchase. If someone cannot read, then he or she will not be able to search the Internet.

In the same way, there are consequences when we do not study the Bible. Ask the children to consider what might happen if someone has not studied the Bible and has a very hard decision to make. The result may be that the person does not know to pray for wisdom or to read an applicable Scripture passage. Thus, the consequence may be that the person makes an improper decision. What might happen if a person has not read the Bible and is tempted to take something that does not belong to him or her? The person may take it, disobey God, and perhaps disobey the law.

How many years of school does it take for a person to know everything? Of course, a person never knows everything. We learn throughout our lives. Just as the possibility for our academic learning is unlimited, so too we will never know everything about the Bible. It is important to study the Bible throughout life. You may share examples of classes within your church where adults are continuing to learn more about the Bible and God. When we study the Bible, we are more confident in making daily decisions and in teaching others about the love of Jesus Christ. In fact, we become good stewards of God's word.

Prayer:

Dear God, help me to spend time regularly studying your word. Help me to more fully understand the Bible and to know how to make decisions based on its teaching. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- Is there a time of day that is best for you to study your Bible?
- What changes might you need to make in your daily schedule to include Bible study?
- What are some benefits to studying the Bible?
- Why does our study of the Bible please God?

Janet Zimmerman, Canton, Ohio. (2004)

Back to School: Play Fair and Share

"I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance." (2 Corinthians 8:13-14)



As your family prepares for a new school year, remember those less fortunate. While shopping with your children, buy extra school supplies and backpacks for children whose families are experiencing difficult economic times. Many churches hold school supply drives as summer ends. Ask your school counselor about the best way to help needy students in your area.

All children love to wear new clothes on the first day of school. If your budget allows, as your child selects his or her new clothes, purchase a duplicate set to give away. If finances are tight, donate last year's outgrown clothes and shoes to charity. They will be a welcome addition to a needy child's wardrobe.

Questions for Discussion

- Is it fair to give to others in need? Why?
- Why do we get excited about new clothes and school supplies?
- Is God more important to us than the good things he gives us?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2003)

Stargazing

*"Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually,
Remember the wonderful works God has done." (Psalm 105: 4-5a)*



Since family schedules allow for most children to stay up later during the summer, participate in stargazing as a family activity. Families may even decide to tour a local planetarium for a more detailed, educational experience or [search the Internet](#) for information. Stargazing provides a wonderful opportunity for parents to teach children about God's created world and our responsibility to be faithful stewards of the global environment. Prior to inviting children to participate in stargazing, bake some sugar cookies cut out in the shape of stars. In addition, read the children's book [The Dreamer](#) by Cynthia Rylant with them.

The best place to stargaze is an area that is void of city lights and trees. You should be able to find an adequate location close to home, if not your own backyard. Spread out a large blanket. Based on the information from the planetarium or the Internet, locate and point out to the children constellations such as the Big Dipper, the North Star, and Orion. A telescope may add another dimension to the stargazing experience. Remind yourself and your children about the great distance between the Earth and the stars. Notice the brightness of the lights shining in the nighttime sky. Discuss the vastness of God's universe and God's strength and power to create the planets and stars. God made the heavens and the earth! On a clear night, the stars are an awesome sight.

Spend some quiet time gazing at the stars; then draw attention to all the sounds. Share the cookies while you enjoy this quiet time. Read Psalm 105:4-5a while the family sits on the blanket together. (If necessary, use a flashlight to read the words.) Invite your family to recite the Scripture passage with you. Offer a closing prayer.

Prayer: O God of all Creation, we are amazed at the vastness of this universe. We seem so tiny in comparison to all the stars of the sky. Yet you love each of us. Thank you for your love. Remind us in these moments that you call us to be stewards of this beautiful world. Watch over us this night. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- How many stars were you able to see? Why are you able to see just a few of the multitudes of stars that actually exist in the universe?
- How would you describe the nighttime sky to someone?
- What does the nighttime sky reveal about God?
- What sounds did you hear while you were spending quiet time looking at the stars?

Ruth M. Blum, Glendale, Arizona. (2005)

A Steward of Joyful Worship

"Clap your hands, all you peoples. Shout to God with loud sounds of joy." (Psalm 47:1)

"Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises." (Psalm 47:6)



We often equate stewardship with money, but Christian stewardship involves all of life. We are called to be stewards of relationships and stewards of God's Word. As Jesus' stewards, we are committed to giving God thanks for all of Jesus' blessings. One of those blessings is Jesus' ascension into heaven. How do we celebrate the blessing of Jesus Christ's ascension into heaven? The Bible suggests that we celebrate "with joy continually worshipping Him." (Read Luke 24:50-55

for more background.)

As a way to practice this joyful worship, families may plan to worship Jesus in their homes in addition to attending weekly worship services. One practical method of facilitating this worship is to create a home worship center.

Cover a TV table or an end table with a special cloth. The special aspect of the cloth is the joy that this cloth brings someone. For instance, your family is reminded of grandma's homemade cookies when you see her special shawl. Or a security blanket may remind parents of some special parenting years or may remind a child of a special feeling of comfort. The children should help select the special cloth. Place a candle or small oil lamp on the covered table.

Print Psalm 47:1 and Psalm 47:6 on separate, brightly colored index cards. Make two copies of each Scripture verse. Place one set of the two scripture verses on the worship table and the other set on the refrigerator.

Light the candle as you begin your daily family worship time. A battery operated candle or lantern may be a safe substitute for the real candle or oil lamp.

Read Psalm 47:1 and practice memorizing it during the daily worship time for one week. Recite the verse together by memory during the second week. During the third week, read Psalm 47:6 and practice memorizing it. Recite the verse together by memory during the following week. Young children may clap the rhythm of the words as the family recites the Scripture verse. Families may add additional worship components, such as praying the Lord's Prayer or singing a favorite hymn or Christian song, to this basic worship. Conclude the daily worship time by taking turns completing the following prayer and blowing out or turning off the candle or lamp.

Prayer:

Joyful God, today you gave me joy when *(Finish the sentence. Examples: a friend played with me; I received a good grade; a parent cooked a special meal; a parent helped with a homework assignment; a grandparent called me.)* Thank you, God, for all your blessings. Thank you, God, for Jesus. Amen.

Questions for Reflection:

- How did it feel to create a home worship center?
- Was it difficult or easy to take time each day for home worship? Why?
- How can you be a good steward of relationships?
- What are some other blessings that Jesus offers us in addition to his ascension into heaven?

Ruth M. Blum, Glendale, Arizona. (2006)

Share Your Blessings

*"Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers."
(Romans 12:13)*



Thanksgiving is an excellent time to help children focus on sharing blessings and time with those in need. One of the significant reasons that the New Testament church grew rapidly was the realization that Christians loved and served others — both people of faith and non-believers.

Explain to the children that the Bible uses the term "saints" to refer to other Christians and the word "strangers" to refer to people who were not Christian believers.

Encourage the children to participate in a project for Thanksgiving that will be a blessing to people of all faith traditions and to non-believers. It is usually quite easy to learn about various local community needs during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. Often local food pantries and outreach centers are in desperate need of certain items to meet the holiday rush. Consider asking one of these community outreach ministries for a list of items that are not normally contributed during this season. For instance, most food pantries have an adequate supply of traditional Thanksgiving menu items, but may have a shortage of infant formula or baby food. If you are unable to discover a local community need, then consider contacting the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and assisting with the recovery from the Florida hurricanes. The UMCOR website (<http://gbgm-umc.org/umcor>) shares many needs, including a list of specific items included in "flood buckets." Obtain real life stories and pictures from survivors who have been affected by the hurricanes. Share those stories with the children.

Photograph the children as they participate in these mission efforts and publish them in your church newsletter, on the church website, and in the local community newspaper. (Be sure to obtain written permission from the parent[s] or legal guardian before publishing a child's photograph.) Close in prayer, asking God to help the children help others as good stewards of their blessings. Also pray for the people the children are helping.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you for the many blessings you have given us. Help us to be a blessing to the survivors of the recent hurricanes (*substitute other suitable words for a local mission project*). We thank you that you love these people and that you will watch over them and help them. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- What did you learn about the effects of the hurricanes on the survivors? (Substitute other suitable words for a local mission project.)
- What are some of your blessings that you can share with these people?
- How do you think that you would respond if you lost your home and items that were important to your family? (Substitute other suitable words for a local mission project.)
- What are some ways in the future that we can help them?

Janet Zimmerman , Canton, Ohio. (2004)

Thanksgiving Every Day

"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." (Philippians 4:6)

"Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me; to those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God." (Psalm 50:23)



Most of us consider Thanksgiving Day as an opportunity to visit with family, watch parades and football games, and eat a traditional meal that includes turkey and pumpkin pie. We tend to have fond memories of this holiday. As Christians, we must remember that each day is a thanksgiving day. We are blessed with God's abundant love every day.

Create a thanksgiving box with your family during the first few days of November. Ask your children to decorate the outside of a shoebox with typical Thanksgiving symbols: turkeys, pilgrims, and so on. Keep this box in a conspicuous place, such as your kitchen table or the coffee table in the den. Each day during family time, ask family members to reflect on their day by recalling one aspect of the day for which they are thankful. Family members may write this one recollection on a slip of paper. Family members then share what they have written with the family and place the slips of paper in the thanksgiving box. Close your time together with a family prayer, and thank God specifically for those recollections.

On Thanksgiving Day, open the box with your family and review these slips of paper. Count your blessings!

Questions for Discussion:

- For what are you most thankful?
- Is being thankful a choice or just a feeling?
- Do you remember any stories from the Bible about thankful people?
- How will you continue to give thanks to God each day?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2006)

Gifts From God

*"Honor the Lord with your substance
and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns."
Proverbs 13:9-10)*



Challenge the children to make a list of all the blessings that they have received from God. Children can work as a group or independently to compile the list. Review the list together and add any additional thoughts.

Now ask the children to make a list of everything that they can give to others. *(Note: the children's temptation will be to make a list of material things that they can give away as gifts. Encourage them to focus more on inward gifts that they possess, not material items.)* Compare the two lists to see which one is longer. If the list of God's blessings is not the longest list, ask the children to review their giving list.

With their input, you may transfer the giving items that are really blessings that they have received from God to the blessings list. For instance, if they wrote "giving love to a parent" on their giving list, then you would transfer it to the blessings list. Why? God first loved us. God has given us the ability to love others. So, in fact, the ability to offer love is really a gift that we have received from God. Are there any items remaining on their giving list after you have transferred these instances? Can we ever give more than God has given to us?

Ask the children what they can do to thank God for the blessings that they have received. Ask what it means to honor God with "your substance." (It means everything they have; everything they are.) Discuss some ways that Christians can honor God with their substance. For example, what is a way children can honor God with their toys? *(Share them with others; give them away to others; etc.)* How can they honor God with their clothing? *(Dress modestly; offer them to the needy; hold a garage sale and give the proceeds to the church; etc.)* Encourage children to name individually some of the blessings that they have listed. Discuss how they can honor God with those blessings.

Point out that the Scriptures say the result of honoring God is receiving even more of what we need so that we may share more with others. God wants us to be good stewards of everything that we have received — our talents, our knowledge, and our possessions. We are called to help others. Close in prayer by thanking God for our many blessings.

Prayer:

Thank you, God for all of the blessings that you have given me. Help me not to take them for granted, but to use these blessings in ways that honor you. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- What does the word *blessing* mean?
- What does it mean to honor God?
- Why is it important for Christians to honor God?
- Is there a blessing that you have received from God that you have not been using? How can you begin to use this blessing and bring God honor?
- What actions can you take to help others understand that God blesses us so that we may use those blessings to help others?

Janet Zimmerman , Canton, Ohio. (2004)

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Count Your Blessings

*"As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."
(1 Timothy 6:17)*



A healthy financial exercise we can teach our children is to count their blessings. Counting the blessings of family, home, church, relationships, clothing, food and God's other gifts instantly places money where it belongs — far down the list. When we take the time to examine carefully and meditate on the extent of God's care and nurture, our desire for money falls into a healthier perspective.

Ask older children to list their blessings. (Parents, this is healthy for you, too!) Young children can draw or paint pictures of their blessings. Then share the lists or pictures with the entire family.

Questions for Discussion:

- What is your favorite blessing?
- Is your list of blessings different from or the same as the others in your family?
- Which of the blessings cost money and which have no relationship with money?
- Are you surprised by how God blesses you?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2003)

Danger of Riches

"Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'" (Mark 10:21)



Ask the children if they think that they would be happy if they were rich. Then ask them how much money they would need to be considered rich. Give each child the opportunity to name a dollar amount. Write down the amounts suggested so the children can see these amounts. Inquire how they would feel if another child were richer by comparison. Most likely, they will decide to increase their previous amount to equal or exceed the highest dollar amount. When we make wealth our goal, we can never have enough!

Share with the children the story of [Rumpelstiltskin](#). You can find this story at the public library or on the Internet. Now read the story of the rich young man from Mark 10:17-31. Compare the rich young man with the king in the children's story.

Ask the children what was most important to both the rich young man in Mark and the king in the *Rumpelstiltskin* story. (Answer: Their wealth.) Could they have shared their wealth and still have had enough money to meet their needs and their family's needs? (Answer: Yes.) The king took advantage of a young girl because of his greed. Greed often keeps people from helping others. But Jesus taught that we will have treasures in heaven if we use our wealth to help others. Wealth is a gift from God to be used to benefit others, not to benefit ourselves alone.

Encourage the children to discuss their own wealth — their money and possessions. Are they using what they have to help others? Encourage the children to participate regularly in the offering.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to remember that everything we have is a gift from you. Help us to use money and possessions in ways that are pleasing to you. Guide us in how to be better Christian stewards of money and things. Amen.

Questions for Discussion

- Why do people usually seem to want more money?
- What does it mean to have "treasure in heaven"?
- What are some ways we could use our money and possessions to help others?
- **For older children** — Can you name ways in which a wealthy company has taken advantage of poor workers because of the company's greed? How could this be corrected?

Janet Zimmerman, Canton, Ohio. (2006)

Learning Money Management

"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'"
(Matthew 25:21)



As our children learn to manage money, let's permit them to make mistakes on occasion. Under our supervision, children's minor money mistakes may prevent future financial catastrophes. A few guided "hard knocks" lessons will provide confidence as they make decisions regarding money.

For instance, if your child asks for a frivolous two-day toy, (the child's interest in it lasts only two days), allow him or her to purchase the toy with his or her own money. First, help your child look for more prudent purchases; but let the child make the final decision. Later, help your child evaluate the purchase. When you talk about the purchase, you may want to acknowledge that you have made some unwise purchases and that you, also, are trying to learn from your mistakes.

The wisdom from this small lesson in money management may become invaluable as children and their purchases grow.

Questions for Discussion:

- What are wise uses of our money?
- Could making wise choices about spending money now allow us to have more money later?
- How do our everyday choices relate to the Matthew 25:21 reading?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2003)

True Value

"Why do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food."

(Isaiah 55:2)



As you encourage your children to spend their money wisely, use familiar examples to teach value. If a child asks to buy a video game, help the child calculate how many cheeseburger meals could be purchased with the game's price. Using this familiar and favorite item makes the cost of the game understandable and relevant and helps the child consider making wise purchasing decisions.

Older children are better able to understand the difference between cost and value. If your children receive an allowance, how long would they need to save their money to buy the item? These questions will also guide them toward wise purchases:

- "How often will I use this?"
- "Will I enjoy this?"
- "Do I really want and need this?"
- "Do I want it just because my friends have it?"
- "Is there something I want more?"

Questions for Discussion:

- Why can't we spend our money on whatever we want when we want it?
- What are some of the hard spending choices parents need to make?
- How can we make wise decisions when spending money?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2002)

Tax Time Is Teaching Time

"... Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21)



If children listen to the news or to conversations between adults as April 15 approaches, they will hear the words "income tax" spoken more and more. Ask them if they think Jesus paid taxes. Share with them the story from Matthew 22:15-22. Explain that the Pharisees tried to get Jesus in trouble with the rulers of his day by asking him if it was right to pay taxes. The Pharisees thought Jesus would refuse to pay taxes, but Jesus taught just the opposite!

Explain that it is the responsibility of Christians to be good citizens. One aspect of being a good citizen is paying taxes. Ask the children if they know why taxes are needed. Tell them some of the positive ways that tax money is spent — to fund schools; to pay the salaries of community helpers (police officers, firefighters, sanitation workers, and so on); to provide various types of assistance for the poor and the unemployed; to purchase library books; to maintain our parks; to construct streets, sidewalks, and highways; to help people living in other countries. Spend some time listing other positive ways that tax dollars are used. Ask the children what would happen if the funds used to support these services and programs were no longer available. What difference would it make?

Now ask the children why we give money to our churches. You could make a pie chart to show the children how the money is used in your local church. You might list how much of the money is spent on salaries, program expenses (be sure to include their favorite church programs), curriculum, missions, utility bills, and so on. Ask the children what difference it would make to them and to the community if the church suddenly had to close its doors because of a lack of money.

Explain that when people volunteer, the government and/or the church does not need to spend money in that area and, thus, can use the money for other needs. Close with a time of prayer for the leaders in our government and churches. Pray that they will be good stewards of the money they manage. Pray, too, that we will be faithful in supporting our government and our local church with our money and our prayers.

Questions for Discussion:

- Who are your local church leaders? (Find pictures of them and/or introduce them to the children.) Who are your government leaders and community helpers? (Find pictures of them and/or visit their respective websites.)
- Can you think of a prayer to say for your government and church leaders and for the community helpers? What are some of the concerns that they might have? How might your prayers encourage them?
- What are some volunteer projects that you could do in the community and in your local church that might help either the government or the church save money?

Janet Zimmerman, Canton, Ohio. (2004)

Who Says So?

"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

(Matthew 22:21, NIV)

"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God."

(Romans 13:1)



Our children not only inherit our attitudes toward money but also our views on authority.

As you file your taxes this year, remind your children of the benefits our tax dollars provide. Much of the money funds schools and recreational facilities, helps the poor, builds and maintains roads, and supports libraries and public services.

Those in authority are human beings. They cannot see everything or know everything. Just as children can help parents consider new options, so all citizens have the responsibility and the opportunity to help authorities consider alternatives they may not have considered. As Christians, we have a responsibility to communicate our values to those in authority.

As parents, we should also set the example in praying for those who are in authority over us and who spend our tax dollars. Pray with your children for your local, state, and national leaders. Ask God to keep them safe and to give them wisdom as they serve in positions of authority.

Questions for Discussion:

- What is authority? Who are our national, state, and local leaders? Why should we pray for them? What specific concern do we have that we want to address in prayer?
- How are the decisions we make about spending funds in our family like the decisions those in political authority make about spending tax money? How are they different? How do faith and values affect each decision?
- Would we (as a family) like to send a letter to our senator, representative, city council representative, or other elected official about a concern we have for our nation, state, city, or area?

(2003)

Counting the Cost

*"For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?"
(Luke 14:28)*



If your child asks to purchase an expensive item, consider helping him or her save toward the goal of purchasing it. Work with your child to establish a saving plan with a portion of his or her allowance or a list of household tasks for which he or she will be paid. Children could also work toward a goal by clipping coupons to help with family expenses or by collecting returnable bottles.

The anticipation, hard work, and accomplishment of saving toward a specific goal can become a rewarding family project.

Questions for Discussion:

- How does waiting for and working for a specific item make me appreciate it more?
- What does it mean to "estimate the cost"?
- What is the relationship between counting the cost of a purchase and counting the cost of other decisions?

(2003)

Make-Believe: Fun or Folly?

*"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe.
The wealth of the rich is their strong city; in their imagination it is like a high wall."
(Proverbs 18:10-11)*



Children enjoy the world of make-believe. They often pretend to be certain people, or they act out certain careers. Ask children what or who they enjoy pretending to be in their imaginations. If children are older, ask what they used to pretend to be. Share one of your own childhood fantasies. Point out that pretending can be a lot of fun — as long as we can distinguish make-believe from reality. Ask what might happen if the children really believed that they were superheroes, princesses, or doctors.

The Bible tells us that some people think gaining wealth is the most important goal in life. These people believe that money will keep them safe and secure. However, the Bible tells us that a belief in the power of money is make-believe. What can happen to people who make gaining wealth their number one goal? Here are some possible answers:

- They may not be happy because they will never have enough money.
- They may worry that their money will be stolen or lost.
- They may be tempted to do anything to get more money — even things that might not be legal or moral.
- They may have a lot of people who pretend to be their friends just to have access to their money.
- They may value gaining money more than spending time with family or friends.

Point out that while money is important to help us take care of life's necessities, there is a danger in focusing on gaining money more than on gaining God's favor. Money is really one of God's gifts to us. God wants us to be good stewards of our wealth and possessions.

The Bible tells us that God is our "strong tower." Children and adults, alike, can run to God and be safe from all of life's problems. God will always take care of us. God will give us what we need, although not necessarily everything we want. Our focus is to be on God, not on money. Only God's protection is real — trusting in money is just make-believe!

Prayer:

Dear God, you are like a strong tower. You always take care of us and meet our needs. Help us to be strong believers in you, to trust in you always, and to be good stewards of money. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- When you have given money or possessions to a person in need or to a worthy organization...how did giving make you feel?
- Spend time pretending you have just been given a lot of money. In what ways could you use that money to help others? (You may want to give children a stack of play money to make this game more fun.)
- Many times, people's needs are satisfied with a response or action that does not require money. Can you think of some of these types of needs? How can you help meet these needs?
- How does sharing and giving money help us grow in Christian faith?

Janet Zimmerman , Canton, Ohio. (2005)

Money, Children, and Parents

Parents: How can you guide your children toward healthy, faith-grounded relationships with money?

Needs vs. Wants

Kids grasp the idea of needs versus wants easily. Talking about the difference is a great tool for making wise purchasing decisions. Your children need food, clothing, shelter, love, and so on. At the same time, children are bombarded with product marketing. Wants are the extras in life. The next time your child says, "I need _____ !" help him or her put that request in perspective.

Needs versus wants also reduces the "Gimme's" — "Give me this. Give me that." Children need the security of knowing their parents will meet their basic needs and provide the extras — sometimes.

Matthew 6:25-33 is a colorful description of God's caring for the birds, lilies, and grass. This passage captures children's imaginations and reassures them of God's love. It is a great passage to share with children while discussing value and God's provision.

Questions for Discussion:

- How does God provide for our family?
- Has there ever been a time you really needed something?
- How can we show God's love to others by meeting their needs?

Start Simply

To form the giving habit in your children, start simply. Give a coin or bill for your church's offering to those too young to receive an allowance. Allow older children to decide what portion of their allowance will go to the church. To make "first fruits" giving easier, distribute allowances on Sunday mornings. Commitment and consistency are the keys to developing any habit, and giving to God will become a lifelong blessing.

In the story of the widow's mite, (Luke 21:2-4), Jesus emphasized the widow's sacrificial offering. However, the widow most certainly had developed her habit of giving long before that day in the temple.

Questions for Discussion

- Why do we give part of our money back to God?
- Does God need our money?
- How can we make giving a habit in our family?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2006)

Where Does It All Go?

" ... Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

(Luke 20:25, NIV)



Most children learn to count money at school. As parents, we can instill financial wisdom in our children by explaining our use of God's monetary blessings.

Always use proportions, not specific amounts, and keep the information age-appropriate. For example, children love coins. Count out several coins, explaining that they represent what the family receives each month from employment. Remove some coins and set them aside to symbolize what the family gives back to God. Next, remove a few more coins, explaining that the government receives some money for roads, schools, post offices, and other services. Then, according to your family budget, set aside coins in proper proportions for savings, allowances, utilities, housing, food, transportation, clothing, and so on. Finally, explain that the remaining money is for whatever the family wants during that month.

Questions for Discussion:

- Where does our family's money come from?
- How do we honor God as we use our money?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2002)

Where Does It All Go? (Part 2)

"But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven."

(Matthew 6:20)



Small children (and many adults) may have no idea how the church uses the money it receives through offerings. Young children may think these gifts are literally "stored in heaven." Before giving your family's next offering, tell your children how the church uses the gifts it receives.

Like many families, most churches have an annual spending plan that they call a budget. The spending plan is a way of setting priorities. In most churches, offerings pay for staff salaries and utility bills, buy educational materials, and cover maintenance expenses. A portion of the money helps the poor locally, nationally, and around the world. In addition, many churches support missionaries or the denominations and organizations sponsoring missionaries. Ask leaders in your congregation how the church reaches out to those in need at home and around the world.

Describe the ways that giving makes a difference in Christ's name. Don't give children a lot of statistics. Tell stories about what the money does. Help your children become informed, faithful, and joyful contributors to God's loving presence in this world. Celebrate with them that the offerings do make a difference for real people.

Questions for Discussion:

- How does our church use the money we give? Do any of these uses surprise you?
- What does it mean to have "treasure in heaven"?
- How does our pastor spend his or her time? What sorts of things do pastors do? [Perhaps have the child ask the pastor and report back to the family table.]

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2003)

With God at Your Right Hand

"I have avoided the ways of the violent. My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped. I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me, hear my words. Wondrously show your steadfast love, O savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand." (Psalm 17:4b-7)

Christian stewardship includes caring for one another. We are all children of God. As faithful disciples, we are called by God to offer one another compassion and mercy. The Psalmist writes this prayer, asking for deliverance from threatening enemies. The phrase "at your right hand" refers to the position of being next to God for protection and survival.

Share the following story with the children:

Once there were three boys: Max, Stan, and Tom. Max and Stan did not really like each other. Max was tall and muscular. Stan was thin and short. Each school year, they were classmates. Max did not like many of his classmates. In fact, he seemed to be angry with everyone. Stan was shy and did not make friends very easily. During their summer vacation from school, Stan was relieved to be away from Max. Stan had seen Max blow up at his one friend, Tom. Max always looked like he was ready to punch someone. Tom and Stan were afraid of Max because of Max's flaring temper. When Max would walk down the hall, Tom and Stan would turn and walk the other way. They were very good at avoiding Max.

Then, it happened. It was after school on a Friday evening. Max had stayed for detention. Stan and Tom stayed after school to complete a project. Most of the interior doors were locked at the school, and some of the hallways were gated and closed. As Max departed the detention room, he was mumbling under his breath. His eyes were looking mean. He was looking for a fight. He walked by the room where Tom and Stan were working on their project. Tom had been the brunt of Max's temper before, so he looked quickly for an escape route. However, this time he could not walk the other way. The tension was thick. Fear abounded as Max stood face to face with Tom and Stan. Would it be a stand off? Would Max take his anger out on Tom and Stan?

Ask the children to reflect on the Scripture passage and then invite them to write an ending to the story or to draw a picture depicting the ending of the story.

Prayer: Lord, Help us to look to you in times of fear.

Help us to pray for others instead of ourselves.

Help us to be good listeners and to allow you to take the action needed in our daily life.

Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- How could Max make better choices?
- How could Stan and Tom make a difference?
- With whom do you most closely identify — Max, Stan, or Tom? Why?

Ruth M. Blum, Glendale, Arizona. (2005)

Unveiling the Gospel

"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is in the image of God."

(2 Corinthians 4:3-4)

Background: The Christians living in the time of Paul were known for having unveiled faces. Women were required to wear veils during this time of history. Veils were a status symbol and were used to show modesty and to hide identity. In the Old Testament, Moses reportedly wore a veil to shield the bright light that God had given him on the mountain from the people. During this time, Christians were often persecuted for their faith. This Bible verse reflects the difficulty of "veiling" their faith for protection and lifting the veil of their faith so nonbelievers would see the light of Christ.

Activity: Cover your head and face with a sheer scarf or one yard of sheer, silky material. Only your eyes should be exposed; the remainder of your head should be covered with the scarf.

Say: "I have a special covering on my head today. Why do you think that I am doing this?"

Possible Answers: "You are cold." "Your hair is a mess." "You want to hide something." "I can't see all of your face."

Say: "Those are all good reasons. When we cover something, it is difficult to figure out what is underneath. Think about the Scripture we read earlier. In Jesus' time, people normally covered their faces and heads as a sign of humility, modesty, and respect. Whenever we partially cover something, it can seem more interesting. We wonder, "What might be under the cover?" In 2 Corinthians, Paul writes that Christians are not to cover or hide the gospel. As Christians, we are called to walk openly with head held high and with the light of God shining."

Wrap your face and neck again with the scarf. Dramatically take off the scarf and say: "Don't cover up Christ's light. Let it shine for all to see."

Questions for Discussion:

- What are some ways that people know that you are a Christian?
- How do we show modesty, respect, and humility in today's world?
- How might you show the light and love of Jesus to others?

Prayer: Lord, give me the confidence to share your word with all. Help me to be filled with your joy and love so that the gospel is uncovered and shines light brightly to all. Amen.

Ruth M. Blum, Glendale, Arizona. (2006)

Stewardship of Hospitality

"The Lord appeared to Abraham ... as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men. He ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, "My lord, I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves." (Genesis 18:1-5)

This passage from Genesis is a perfect teaching for families during these months of summer vacation.



Those of us living in particularly hot climates truly understand the "heat of the day." The climate is similar to the heat of the day in Abraham's time. Even in the northern climates, the humidity and heat can be uncomfortable. As families, we look at the summer as a time of less rigid schedules and vacations. Abraham was the head of his household. It was not his usual role to run out in the heat to greet visitors. Summertime is also a period when we expect to see vacationers, extended families, and other guests coming to our houses or our churches. Are we going to run out and meet them?

Encourage the children to practice the stewardship of hospitality this summer. Remind them to be as friendly as Abraham. How can children practice the stewardship of hospitality?

Invite a neighborhood friend to go to Sunday school class. Plan a Saturday night sleepover and attend the worship service as part of your Sunday morning activities. Organize a group of friends (especially boys and girls who do not currently attend a church regularly) to sign-up for vacation Bible school.

The whole family can be involved in teaching summer Sunday school. You will grow closer as a family if you volunteer to teach a class. Assign each family member to help with a section of the Sunday school lesson. Be sure to bring a treat for the class as a gesture of extending Christian hospitality.

If you are on vacation, go to a local church so that you can experience the hospitality of others. Share one particularly meaningful aspect of the worship experience with your own pastor or children's ministry coordinator.

Invite some of your Sunday school friends and their families to your home or the park for a Sunday picnic.

In contrast to what most of us have been taught, stewardship is about more than money! Stewardship is a key aspect of Christian discipleship. Christian stewardship recognizes that everything is a blessing from God. We are called to share some of those blessings with others. One of the greatest gifts that we each possess is the ability to extend love and care to others.

Practicing the stewardship of Christian hospitality will remind others of the numerous blessings in their own lives.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to practice Christian hospitality. Help us to be like Abraham, even in the heat of the summer. Thank you for the many blessings in our own lives. Help us to share these gifts with friends, neighbors, and our church community in a spirit of faithful stewardship. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- What do you like to do during the "heat of the day?"
- If you were Abraham, would you have met the three people? If so, what would you have taken to them?
- How does it feel to be hospitable to others?
- Describe a time when someone offered Christian hospitality to you. How did you feel?

Ruth M. Blum, Glendale, Arizona. (2005)

Motivation for Giving: Habit of Love

"If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing."

(1 Corinthians 13:3)



As we teach our children *how* to give, we must always emphasize *why* we give. The habit of giving is important, but motivation for giving is key. If our motivation for giving is anything other than love, we're missing God's point.

Guide your children as they examine your family's reasons for giving. Develop a list of questionable motivations, including guilt, pride, peer pressure, pity, and so on. Explain that we give because God loves us and provides for us. As a result, God wants us to bless others. Discuss reasons for giving to certain opportunities — such as the church — regularly, while giving to others occasionally. Pray with your entire family when making giving decisions.

Love-inspired giving might be compared to driving a car. "Driving" habits may get us to our destination the first few times, but to continue the drive, our gas tank must be full. Similarly, giving habits may get us to our destination the first few times, but our "giving" tank must be full of love.

Questions for Discussion:

- How does our giving reflect God's love?
- What if we don't "feel" like giving?
- How do we know if our giving pleases God?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2003)

Money and Friends

"Wealth brings many friends, but the poor are left friendless"

(Proverbs 19:4)



One of the greatest lessons we can teach our children is not to value people based on how much money they have. Very young children are thankfully unaware of wealth as they choose friends. As they grow older, however, children may fall into the trap of choosing friends based on their friends' styles of clothing, the number of toys they own, or the size of their house.

Let's urge our children to select friends because of their good qualities, not because of the amount of money in their pockets. However, the example we (adults) set by how we choose our friends will communicate more to our children than what we say.

Questions for Discussion:

- How do we choose our friends in our family?
- Why do we tend to like or dislike those who have lots of money? Why do you think that is so?
- How would we feel if someone liked us only because of our money?
- Does God value us because of our money (or our lack of it)?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2003)

Family Love

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."
(Ephesians 2:8-10)*



Grace is an unearned gift from God. It is God's forgiveness offered to us through our belief in Jesus Christ. In early Christianity and in pagan cultures, it was understood that one could earn one's way into a better life. Some cultures believed that good works were more important than faith. This Scripture passage reminds us that good works are a result of salvation. One has a desire to do good for others because of one's belief in God through Jesus Christ.

Activity

Hold a family meeting. Discuss some actions beyond the obvious ones that convey love to various family members. Here are some examples:

- Mom says, "When you follow my directions the first time, I feel as though you are showing me respect and love."
- Nathan says, "When you spend time with me, I feel that you really care about me."
- Kaitlyn says, "When you listen to my point of view, you let me know that I'm loved."
- Dad says, "Our older next door neighbors need help with cutting their grass. Let's mow their lawn together. "

We express kindness and love when we show one another respect. Discuss actions that can be taken in each family member's daily life to reflect Jesus' way to offer love and respect. Develop a plan to hold one another accountable for these actions. Jesus reminds us that Christian stewardship involves taking care of others and ourselves. All that we experience in life is a gift from God. God calls us to be good stewards of family relationships.

As an enhancement to this lesson, you may purchase the game [*The New Kid's Choices Board Game*](#) and play it with your family.

Prayer: Help me to see when I can be the hands and feet of Jesus in my school, at home, and at church. Remind me to be a faithful steward by showing love and respect to others. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

Ruth M. Blum, Glendale, Arizona. (2006)

Be a Barnabas

*"There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas. He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet."
(Acts 4:36-37)*

In the early church, all assets were held in common. The focus was on the community of believers and not on the individual. The order and needs of the community were the first priority. Even funds were distributed based on the good of the community. Each community member shared in the chores and cared for the others. Joseph's name was changed to Barnabas because of his great commitment to the church. The name Barnabas means "son of encouragement."

Activity: Be a Barnabas

1. Set aside time each week to encourage each family member. Create a bulletin board (or use the front of the refrigerator) and place notes or achievements for each person in your home. Surprise one another with the actions or achievements that are placed on the board.
2. If you pack your child's lunch on school days, write a note and enclose it in the lunch bag.
3. If a family member travels often, hide notes in different places of the luggage or in clothes so that the surprise of encouragement goes on the road, too. Here are some encouraging Scripture suggestions:
 - "So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9).
 - "This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24).
 - "Nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

Prayer: Thank you, God, for the gift of family. Help me to be a person, like Barnabas, who offers encouragement to my family and sets aside my personal wants for the best interest of our family. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What are some ways that you typically place the needs and interests of your family above your own desires?
2. How does it feel to receive encouragement from a family member?
3. What are some indicators in your own life of God's encouragement to you?

Ruth M. Blum, Glendale, Arizona. (2006)

God's Constant Love

"... the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

(Job 1:21b)



While we teach our children that all we have comes from God, we must emphasize that what we possess or do not possess is not a reflection of God's love for us. God loves constantly and unconditionally. Monetary wealth and prosperity can come and go.

Job understood this well, and his story is easy for children to comprehend. Job had it all — family, friends and wealth. God loved him, and Job loved God. Job lost everything — family, friends, and wealth. God still loved Job, and Job still loved and honored God. Job also trusted God to see him through the bad times as well as the good times.

As loving parents, we provide what our children need and what is best for them. As children of a loving God, we must trust God to do the same and pass this invaluable lesson on to our children.

Questions for Discussion:

- Why doesn't God give us everything we want?
- Does God provide everything we need?
- Why do you think Job trusted God?
- How do you think Job felt when he realized that God always loved him?
- Can you think of good times and bad times when God's love for you has remained constant?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2003)

Virtual Vacation

*"They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor; their righteousness endures forever."
(Psalm 112:9)*



One way that we please God is to share our gifts, prayers, presence, and service with the poor. While we are to help the poor in our neighborhoods, it is important to realize that even the poorest people in the United States are wealthier than many people living in other countries. Encourage your children to take a *virtual vacation* by visiting online a country where The United Methodist Church is involved in ministry and mission. Visit the ["explore our work"](#) section of the [General Board of Global Ministries'](#) website.

Choose a country from the list on this website. You will find three sections for each country (1) quick facts, which includes information such as population, the capital, and the currency; (2) extended information, including a country profile, history, a mission profile, and the General Board of Global Ministries' missionaries who serve the country; and (3) links to other resources about the country. A map of the country is also provided.

As children learn about a country and the mission work, encourage them to think of ways that they could support the missionaries and the country's people. The children could make bookmarks with a map of the country, some basic information about the type of missionary activity in the country, the missionaries' names. The children may distribute the bookmarks in the church or at vacation Bible school. Encourage the children to place the bookmarks in their Bibles and to use them as a reminder to pray for the missionaries and the people. The children might also enjoy preparing a bulletin board. The bulletin board may list information about the country and the mission work being conducted. The children may collect an offering or plan a special fundraiser for the mission work.

Finally, children can learn about several countries this summer. Set a goal of learning about one country each month. *Virtual vacation* will be an excellent way to help children realize the needs of others and God's blessings in their own lives.

Prayer: Dear God, please help the people and the missionaries in (*insert country name*). Help me to remember to pray for them and show me ways that I can support their ministry. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- What did you learn about your chosen country that you found particularly interesting?
- In what ways are children in your chosen country like you? In what ways are they different?
- How do people in your chosen country value money and possessions?
- What are some of the needs of the people who live in your chosen country?
- What are some ways that the missionaries minister to the people?
- How can we support the missionaries and the people of your chosen country?

Janet Zimmerman , Canton, Ohio. (2006)

Spring Challenge

"All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as they had need."

(Acts 2:44-45)



Read Acts 2:44-45 with the children. Explain that God wants to use us to help those who are in need. Help the children choose a local mission or church project that they would like to support.

Challenge the children to undertake various ways to raise money for that agency or project. Set a time frame for their challenge — perhaps a month or six weeks. The children might even enjoy setting a goal for the amount of money that they would like to earn. Ask the children to come up with money-earning activities that they would be willing to do. Some suggestions you could offer include: cleaning out their closets and preparing for a garage sale; setting a jar in the kitchen or family room and encouraging everyone to drop their pocket change in the jar at the end of each day; designating some of their allowance for the challenge; offering to do extra chores at home or for their grandparents and/or neighbors to earn money for their goal. Encourage the children to share with their grandparents and neighbors the reason that they want to earn money.

At the end of the challenge time frame, count the money that has been raised. Take the children to the local mission or the church and invite them to present the money to the person in charge. Encourage the children to share with the leaders the ways they raised the money. If a local mission was chosen instead of a specific project, ask the person in charge how the money will be used.

Spend some time in prayer — both thanking God for helping the children raise the money and praying for those who will benefit from the gift.

Questions for Discussion

- The Bible mentions that God loves a cheerful giver and that generosity is a spiritual gift. What does it mean to be a cheerful giver? What do the words "generosity" and "generous" mean? Do you consider your gift to be a "generous" amount of money?
- How does it feel to be used by God to help others?
- What did you learn about the mission or the project that you decided to sponsor? How does this project or mission receive income? (For instance, individual contributions, grants, bequests, fees for service, and other income sources may fund the project.)
- Do you have any ideas for future projects?

Janet Zimmerman, Canton, Ohio. (2004)

Serving Jesus by Giving to Others

*"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."
(Matthew 25:40)*

Several researchers claim that Christians possess sixty-two percent of the world's wealth, yet contribute less than three percent of this wealth to charity. Every day, thousands of children die of starvation and preventable diseases. More than one billion people worldwide live in relentless poverty. Although we know that the causes of global poverty are complex, we are called to address it by contributing more than a mere three percent of our money to charity.

To help children understand the impact of poverty and the importance of sharing resources with others, plan the following activity: Divide the children equally into three groups. Make or obtain \$100 in play money. Give one group \$62— an amount equal to the portion of the world's wealth controlled by Christians. Give the other two groups equal amounts of the remaining \$38 (\$19 for each group) — an amount equal to the portion of the world's wealth controlled by other populations. Next, ask the Christian group to give \$2 to one group and \$1 to the other group — an amount equal to their charitable contribution. Distribute newspaper grocery store advertisements to each group. Invite the children to read the ads and to compose a grocery list. The total cost of the groceries on their list may not exceed the amount of the group's money. The grocery list should contain an adequate food supply to feed the group.

After the groups have created their grocery lists, compare the lists. Then discuss the following questions:

- Are there unneeded items on the "wealthy" group's list?
- Are the other groups able to purchase adequate food to feed their group?
- Would Jesus be pleased with the difference in the amount of each group's money?
- What things do we regularly buy at the grocery store that we really do not need?

Challenge the children to think about how they spend their money and how their family spends money. Is there something that they can forego purchasing and instead give the money to the poor?

Challenge the children to collect money that they really do not need to spend for one month. At the end of the month, count the money. Once again, pass out the grocery store advertisements and ask the children to determine additional food that could be purchased for this amount of money. Donate this money to a local food pantry. Remind the children that Jesus tells us that when we help others, we are really serving God.

Prayer: Dear God, you have blessed us with so much more than we really need. Help us to use what you have given us to help others who are hungry. Teach us to manage money in ways that honor you. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- What did you learn from this activity?
- What outcomes surprised you about this activity?
- What lifestyle choices can you make that will enable you to give money to the poor on a regular basis?

Janet Zimmerman, Canton, Ohio. (2005)

Food Service

*"If any of you want to serve me, then follow me. Then you'll be where I am, ready to serve at a moment's notice. The Father will honor and reward anyone who serves me."
(John 12:26, The Message)*

Just prior to this Scripture passage, the twentieth verse begins, "Now there were some Greeks ..."

These Greeks made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. As non-Jewish people, they were representatives of the Gentile world. They request a meeting with Jesus that is often understood to be a sign of their desire to become disciples. Disciples must be ready to follow, to serve, and to do whatever God requires.

Activity: Arrange to volunteer at a local food pantry. Be sure to verify the age requirements for volunteering.

Begin your time by reading John 12:20-26 together. Plan a tour of the food pantry facility and talk with a regular volunteer or employee who can explain the overall program, requirements, and types of assistance. After completing your volunteer shift, pray and thank God for the many blessings in your life. If the children are too young to volunteer, then perhaps they can just tour the facility and bring some canned goods to donate to the pantry.

Another option is to organize a neighborhood food drive. The local food pantry should be able to indicate the most needed items. While walking around the neighborhood, you can talk about Jesus walking everywhere. Remind the children that one way to follow in Jesus' footsteps" is to serve others. God calls us to be good stewards of our resources, including food. Thousands of children and families die each day throughout the world because they do not have access to nutritious food. By sharing some of the abundance that God has given to us, we become generous givers of God's resources.

Prayer: Lord, stir me from my complacency to notice other people in need. Help me realize that I have been blessed abundantly. I seek to be a good steward of this abundance by sharing it with others. I pray that I may be a true follower of Jesus. Amen.

Ruth M. Blum, Glendale, Arizona. (2006)

Blessing of Perspective

"Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor." (Proverbs 22:9)



Our children tend to believe everyone is as they are — loved by caring parents, fed three square meals each day, and put to bed every evening in comfortable surroundings. Although we never want to depress our children with the plight of others, we can make them aware of their own blessings and of the joy and responsibility of sharing those blessings with others.

Visit the [General Board of Global Ministries website](#) to see options for direct ministry to and with children. Read through the possibilities with your child and select one that captures your child's interest. You can make the contributions through your local church. Another alternative is to ask a missionary for the name of a pen pal in the country where the missionary served. Children in other countries hunger for direct contact with people from the United States.

Include the child or the project in your family's daily prayers. The process will benefit a needy child, expand your child's worldview, and establish a pattern of giving.

Questions for Discussion:

- Do all families live as we do?
- Why do we have more than we really need?
- What can we do about the inequity in the world?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2003)

Cheerful Giving Reaps Great Rewards

"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."

(2 Corinthians 9:6-7)



This is the time of year when farmers and gardeners plant seeds. They plant the seeds expecting to reap a harvest of crops or beautiful flowers.

Ask the children how many seeds they think a farmer or a gardener may need to plant. Any guess is acceptable; the children do not need to give a specific answer. Ask them what would happen if the farmer or gardener was lazy and planted only one seed. The children should understand that the seed may or may not sprout, and that the planter's expectation of a bountiful harvest

would be quite minimal.

Giving our money to God is like planting seeds in God's harvest. God can do amazing things with whatever amount we give to God. The Bible verse above (2 Corinthians 9:6-7) suggests that God cares deeply about our attitude of giving money. God understands that children do not necessarily have a lot of money. However, if they give with a cheerful heart, God is pleased and can do great things with their offering.

Encourage the children to determine an amount of money that they would like to give to God through their church. This money can either be given as part of a regular offering or as a special offering. You may want to convert the money into dimes. Encourage the children to look upon the dimes as seeds that they will be "planting" in the offering plate. Offer a prayer that God will bless their offering and that a bountiful harvest will result to benefit God's kingdom!

Prayer: Dear God, help me remember that one way of serving you is to cheerfully give money to you through the church. Thank you for all that you have given to me. Bless my offering and use it to help change people's lives in our world. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- Why is it important to give money to God?
- What does it mean to be a cheerful giver?
- What are some of the ministries supported by our offerings?
- Can you think of a particular ministry or need that people might have? Would you like to dedicate your offering to this cause? If so, talk with a church staff person who can help you find a United Methodist organization/project that specifically works in this area.

Janet Zimmerman, Canton, Ohio. (2004)

Celebrate With Purpose

"Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."

(Romans 12:13, NIV)



Children's birthday parties can be incredibly complicated and expensive. Combat the greed and selfishness surrounding these events and foster generosity in your child by including a charitable aspect in his or her next party.

Ask party participants to bring only a small gift to your child, along with a charitable donation such as a book for a library drive, canned goods for a homeless shelter, or used clothing for a clothes closet. Have your child select the charity and accompany you to the charity when you deliver the items collected.

Questions for Discussion:

- Why do we celebrate birthdays?
- Is it really better to "give than to receive"?
- Why is God happy when we give to those in need?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2002)

Blessing of Giving

"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)

Obtain a copy of the beautiful children's book, [*The Quiltmaker's Gift*](#), written by Jeff Brumbeau and illustrated by Gail de Marcken. The author, illustrator, and Scholastic, Inc. donate a portion of the proceeds to worldwide projects that illustrate the spirit of generosity as shown by the quiltmaker and the king. Read this story to the children.

If you are unable to find the book, here is a summary: A gifted quiltmaker designs and sews beautiful quilts. She never sells them. Instead, she gives the quilts to the poor. The king of the land was very greedy. He loved presents so much that he had two birthdays a year. The king commanded everyone to bring him birthday presents. Everyone except the quiltmaker brought him presents. He acquired so many gifts that the castle overflowed with gifts. Despite having all of these things, the king was still unhappy. He demanded that the quiltmaker make him a quilt. She refused. The king tried to feed her to a hungry bear, but she was rescued. He then tried to leave her on a tiny island, but again she was rescued because of her kindness.

The quiltmaker then made the king an offer. If the king would give away his possessions, the quiltmaker would make him a quilt. The king agreed. Soon, he was poor, but curiously happier than he had ever been. As the story concludes, the king and the quiltmaker become partners. She continues to sew quilts, and the king gives them away.

Ask the children to consider why the king was so unhappy even though he had so many things that his castle overflowed. Determine the real source of happiness according to this story and the Scripture reading.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we are so much like the king in this story — we have too much stuff. These things really do not create happiness. Teach us to store up treasures in heaven by seeking to serve others. Help us to concentrate on reaching out to others rather than on getting more things. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- What does giving do for the giver according to the Scripture reading and the book?
- What would Jesus say about the behavior of the quiltmaker and the king?
- How does giving help us to live as faithful Christian stewards?
- Why do you think God gives us material things?
- What have you learned from the Scripture and the story that will help you be a more faithful Christian steward

Janet Zimmerman, Canton, Ohio. (2005)

At the Heart of the Matter

"Tell the Israelites to take for me an offering; from all whose hearts prompt them to give you shall receive the offering for me." (Exodus 25:2)

"For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has — not according to what one does not have." (2 Corinthians 8:12)



Encourage and foster a generous nature in your children. As toddlers, reward them when they share food or toys. Explain why we give gifts for birthdays and at Christmas and why we give to meet needs. As they grow, teach them to pray about giving and to listen to God's still, small voice inside them. Take advantage of any giving opportunity, especially those presented by your child. Remind them that the gift's size doesn't matter when given cheerfully and in obedience to God's guidance. Emphasize the blessing they can become to others. Establish giving as a priority in your family. If your church promotes a special funds campaign, pray as a family about your gift, and share the decision-making process with your children. Your generous, obedient nature will become their greatest teacher.

Questions for Discussion:

- What is the greatest gift you've ever received? Why was it so special?
- Why does God love a cheerful giver? How can even small gifts help others?
- Do we give to everyone or only to those people we know?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2003)

Reflective Giving

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is anything worthy of praise think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have ... seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you." (Philippians 4:4-9)

Many churches are in the midst of an annual financial campaign during the fall. Often we overlook the important opportunity to teach children about money and giving during these campaigns. We perceive that children are not very aware of our remarks regarding money. When discussing either the church budget or personal giving, we should remind our children and ourselves of the true meaning of Christian stewardship.

Activity: Have markers and large easel tablet paper to form a list. Call together a family meeting. List all the commendable activities you have experienced as a family in your local church during the past year. Now, think about all of the ways that your local church has changed the lives of other people in the congregation, in the community, and around the world. Add these to your list. Pray together as a family for the mission and vision of your church and for all the people who will be touched by its ministry and outreach.

Sample Prayer

Lord, we have so much to be grateful for in our daily lives. Help us to see and hear where we can be at our best in our church family. Help us to listen carefully to your vision and mission for our lives and for the life of the church community. Amen.

Send a note of thanks to the church treasurer, the finance committee chairperson, the money counters, and other volunteers for the time and effort that they provide in overseeing the financial management of the church. Remind yourself and your family that because of the financial giving of church members, your family benefits from the programs of the church. More importantly, remind one another of God's call on our lives to give a portion of our assets back to God as a response to God's goodness in our own lives. Send a note of thanks to the church staff for their leadership with these various programs.

Invite each family member to discuss his or her financial commitment to the church with the other family members. Break the silence on money discussions — talk about giving in an open, honest family discussion. Celebrate your financial commitment at a family dinner with candles, tablecloth, and even cloth napkins. Add additional ways in which family members intend to give of themselves to the church over the year. \

Examples of responses include:

- Brother Trevor will sing in the children's choir and contribute ten percent of his allowance to the church.
- Sister Amanda will volunteer to serve as an acolyte, will regularly attend a youth program, and will contribute ten percent of her babysitting earnings to the church.
- Mom will read a daily devotion, usher for worship monthly, and serve as a regular liturgist.
- Dad will teach the second grade Sunday School class, volunteer for a mission project, and serve as a confirmation mentor.
- Together, Mom and Dad will share at least ten percent of their monthly income to the regular offering and invest an additional \$3,000 in the capital campaign.

Prayer of Celebration (Example)

O God, it is with great joy that we pray to you. Thank you for Trevor's gift of singing; Amanda's willingness to give; Mom's daily devotion to you, Loving God; and Dad's commitment to teach and to mentor children and youth. We thank you for our financial ability to give generously to the mission of our church. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Ruth M. Blum, Glendale, Arizona. (2005)

Motivation for Giving: Quiet Givers

"But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

(Matthew 6:3-4)

Giving makes us feel good! Children quickly learn this important aspect of stewardship; but as parents, we must keep them from letting this good feeling turn into prideful giving or giving for show.

Encourage your children to be quiet givers. Praying for someone is an excellent quiet gift, but more tangible quiet gifts might include pulling weeds in the neighbors' yard while they're out of town; sending anonymous notes of encouragement; or doing good deeds for family members, such as making the beds. One church volunteer quietly offers to do the jobs no one else wants. As with all stewardship matters, your habits of quiet giving will be your children's greatest teacher.

Questions for Discussion:

- Why does giving make us feel good?
- What reward should we expect from God?
- Why does God love being our only audience when we give?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2003)

Extra Ordinary Giving

*"And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to anyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you."
(Matthew 5:41-42)*



Ask children what their parents would most appreciate receiving for Christmas. Many will mention specific types of gifts. Help the children realize that parents are grateful when their children respond to them in love and obedience. Many parents would welcome this gift of a positive attitude for Christmas! Parents would appreciate a loving, obedient response from their children when they are asked to complete a chore. Encourage the children to make this Christmas season extra special by going the second mile!

This concept will probably be a new one for the children. Explain that going the second mile means not only doing what is expected (going the first mile), but also doing *more* than what is expected. For example, setting the dinner table would be going the first mile. Clearing the table and washing the dishes could be going the second mile. Feeding the dog would be going the first mile. Walking the dog or brushing the dog could be going the second mile. Cleaning one's room would be going the first mile. Cleaning an additional room could be the second mile. The key to a true second mile is that the chore has not been requested or expected.

Help the children make a list of chores that their parents normally ask them to do. Then list an idea next to each chore that could be an example of going the second mile. If a parent is leading this exercise, encourage the children to focus on the chores that assist the other parent or a grandparent and decide how to go the second mile for that parent or grandparent.

Set a timeframe for the second-mile giving to be completed. Have a time when the children can share the experience of going the second mile. Encourage the children to look for opportunities throughout the year where they can participate in second-mile giving!

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to serve others joyfully. You have given us so much! We often take your gifts for granted. Help us show our love and our appreciation for you and for others in our lives by going the second mile. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- How did it feel when you completed the second mile for someone?
- How did the person respond when you did more than was expected?
- How does second-mile giving honor God? How does it show that you are being a good steward of your time?
- **Parents:** Have you gone the second mile for your church, your spouse, and/or your neighbors?

Janet Zimmerman , Canton, Ohio. (2004)

True Freedom

"Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

(Hebrews 13:5)



Most of the children are probably familiar with "reality" TV shows in which people do crazy things just to have a chance to win a lot of money. Ask the children if they have watched any of those shows. List the various activities that people tried as they attempted to win money. Ask the children if they would be willing to do those tasks to win money? Why or why not?

Ask the children why they believe that money is so important to many people. Then ask them, "How much money is enough money?" Point out that if money is a person's goal, then that person will never have enough. (In fact, the average American claims that he or she needs an amount equal to an additional ten percent of his or her gross income to meet "needs.")

The Bible passage teaches us to keep free from the love of money. Encourage the children to share examples of behaviors that demonstrate the "love of money." Ask what can happen to a person if she or he loves money. Some ideas to share with the children include:

- The person will be greedy.
- The person will never be satisfied.
- The person will live in fear of losing the money.
- The person may wonder if she or he is liked only because of his or her apparent money.
- The person will depend on money rather than on God.
- The person who loves money and seeks money as a primary goal forgets that she or he is God's steward of money.

God has entrusted us to manage money in God's best interest. God wants Christian stewards to use all our resources to bless others. We are to use money in ways that please and honor God. A lover of money will be controlled by a desire to hoard money rather than by a desire to please God.

Ask the children how they can keep free from the love of money. Point out that one way to keep free from the love of money is to give away money and possessions to those in need. Giving not only frees us from the love of money, but it also pleases God. "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). A cheerful giver is a steward who knows that money truly belongs to God. Another important way to be free from the love of money is to focus on the blessings that God

has already provided. While we may not have everything we want, God will make sure that we have everything we need.

Encourage the children to make a list of ways they can free themselves from the love of money. Invite members of your congregation who are generous givers to talk with the children about the blessings of giving. Close by sharing with the children that God has promised to be with us always and to take care of our needs. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for God's faithfulness, goodness, and protection.

Prayer:

Dear God, I thank you that you will never leave me. You know all my needs, and you will always take care of me. Help me learn to depend on you rather than on money. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- Do you know someone who has learned to be a cheerful giver? What makes that person different from other people?
- How can you develop habits of cheerful giving?
- Since we are stewards (managers) of God's resources, do you think God would be pleased with how you manage money and other possessions?
- In what ways can you change your attitude so that you can become a steward who pleases God?

Janet Zimmerman , Canton, Ohio. (2004)

Contentment Is Contagious!

"Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.'"

(Hebrews 13:5)

When parents trust in a loving, giving God, that trust shows — especially in tough financial times. Let's set a good example for our children by being "content," regardless of our bank balance. When your family has more "month than money," try these contentment-garnering activities. Instead of window-shopping at the mall, clean out your closets and toy chests. You'll be reminded of just how God has blessed you, and you can donate outgrown clothing and toys to charity. If money is really tight, have a yard sale; but remember to tithe the profits.

If you decide to cut up your credit cards, do so in the presence of your children, and explain why you are doing it in simple language. Let them know that it is important to take control of expenses instead of being controlled by expenses.

Instead of going to the theater, pop some popcorn and watch home movies in your living room. Children love watching themselves on tape, and this trip down memory lane is another blessing reminder. If movies are not available, thumb through photo albums. The pictures will stir questions from the children about events in the past. It is a time when you can tell the important family stories because the children ask to hear them.

Forgo dining at a restaurant, and have a picnic at the park. The fresh air and natural surroundings will be another blessing reminder. Be creative and include your entire family in planning activities to draw you closer together as a family and closer to God.

Questions for Discussion:

- Do we need money to have fun?
- What is contentment?
- What family activities cost little or nothing, but are really great?
- If God is always with us, do we ever really need to worry about money?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2003)

Use Your Time Wisely

*"Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil."
(Ephesians 5:15-16)*

(Note: if your child attends a school operating on a balanced, year-round calendar, you may use this activity during any extended school break.)



Now that most schools are in summer recess, some children have a tendency to waste a significant amount of time. Tell the children that God says that wise people make the most of their time. Encourage the children to make a list of activities that they want to do, but never have taken the time to do. They could also make a list of activities or responsibilities that they should have done, but never completed. Some examples might be:

- Join the summer reading program at the local library.
- Learn a new skill, such as planting and tending a garden; or learn carpentry or sewing.
- Teach the family dog some obedience lessons.
- Organize a talent show for children in the neighborhood with donations going to a local mission.
- Adopt a missionary pen pal and learn about the missionary's ministry and country.
- Read the Bible or a large section of it, such as the New Testament.

Encourage the children to choose one goal per month. They will make good use of their time by working toward goals. Children will have fun taking pictures of their experiences and/or keeping a journal of their activities. At the end of the summer, ask the children to share what they have learned from making good use of their time.

Prayer: Dear God, you have given us the gift of time. Teach us not to waste that gift, but to be good stewards of time and to use it wisely. Help us to remember the lessons you have taught us when summer ends. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- What did you learn about yourself by making better use of your time?
- What are you most proud of accomplishing?
- How did your stewardship of time honor God?
- What are some steps that you can take to make better use of your time throughout the year?

Janet Zimmerman , Canton, Ohio. (2004)

It's Not MY Money

*"The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth with gain. This also is vanity."
(Ecclesiastes 5:10)*



Share with the children the following Aesop fable:

A dog with a fine slab of meat in his mouth crossed a bridge over a river and saw his reflection in the water. Thinking it to be another dog with a larger piece of meat, he let go of his own and dived at the other dog to take it. He surfaced with nothing, and his dinner washed away in the current.

Explain that this fable is an example of what happens when we make money or possessions our most important goal — we can wind up losing everything! Ask the children to think of other stories they know in which the desire for wealth ruins a person's life (for example, King Midas).

The Bible reminds us that if we make money our goal, then we will never be satisfied or have enough money. Ask the children how they think God wants us to use money. Explain that God wants us to be good stewards of money. Ask a child to look up the word "steward" in a dictionary and to share its meaning. A steward is a person who manages someone else's money. Explain that our money is truly God's money. God has given us money to manage in God's best interest. Ask the children to talk about ways in which money can be used to please God.

Encourage the children to write their own fables about the godly use of money. Make sure that the children include the moral or the lesson to each fable. Invite the children to share their fables. Consider publishing some of the well-written fables in the church newsletter or on the church website.

Challenge the children to name as many of their blessings as they can. Explain that money, if used wisely, can be a source of blessing; however, money is certainly not our only blessing or even the most important blessing. A cure for greediness is thankfulness!

Prayer: Dear God, help me remember that whatever money I have is not really mine — it is your money. Help me to be a good steward of everything that you have given me. Thank you for my many blessings. I thank you especially for (*insert some specific blessings*). Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- What does it mean to be a good steward?
- What are some ways you can use money to please God?
- Why do so many people think that they can do whatever they want with money?
- What are some things you can do to remind yourself that you are God's steward?

Janet Zimmerman, Canton, Ohio. (2004)

Trust and Obey

"Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing."

(Malachi 3:10)

*"Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it."
(Psalm 119:35)*



How many times have you told your children, "Because I said so"? Although there are many reasons to give back to God, one of our foremost motives should be simple obedience. Obedience in giving reflects our trust in God and our belief that God truly knows what is best for us.

If your family tithes or is stepping up to tithing, use this simple exercise to explain the practice to your children. (It may even serve as a good reminder to you of your Christian responsibility to give back to God!) Place one dollar and ten dimes on a table. Tell your child that the ten dimes equal one whole dollar. (This exercise also helps in explaining fractions!) Show your child one dime and explain that God asks us to give back to him at least one tenth of all the good things that God gives us. We give this tithe or tenth in obedience to God's instruction and out of our love for him.

Be sure to point out that God's love for us isn't dependent on what or how much we give. Also stress that we do not give a tithe based on whether or not we think that we can afford it. God deserves our best effort. We give at least a tenth back to God and place our trust in God's care.

Questions for Discussion:

- How do we know that we can trust God?
- Does only one tenth of what we have belong to God, or does everything belong to God?
- How can we as a family honor God with all that we have?

(2003)

Connected to God's Deep Pockets

"For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills"

(Psalm 50:10)

"And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

(Philippians 4:19)

Teaching our children that everything belongs to God is one of the foundations of fostering good stewardship. As they learn that we are caretakers and stewards of God's gifts, sharing and giving become much easier. Sharing and giving are seen as a privilege. Because we can never "out give" God, we are free to take care of the needs of others and not be consumed by our own needs.

A wise teacher once described God's faithful followers as pipelines. We can find joy in being connected, open, and willing to allow God's blessings to flow through us to others in need.

Questions for Discussion:

- Can you name even one thing that doesn't belong to God?
- What are some good ways to say "thank you" to God for what we are and what we have?
- In what ways is it fun to help others?
- Who needs a gift our family can provide? What would be the best way to pass it on?

Linda Holland, Helena, Alabama. (2003)

Stewardship of Prayer

"I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplications. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live." (Psalm 116:1-2)



In this Scripture, the Psalmist tells of answered prayer. We spend great effort teaching our children how to pray. We spend much effort learning about prayer. Many of us spend a lot of time praying. Children have difficulty understanding answered prayers. Actually, adults have difficulty recognizing answered prayers. Children will be more likely to understand and to recognize answered prayers if we begin teaching them at a young age.

I had a friend who always pointed out, "Well, wasn't that an answer to prayers?" Initially, I was suspicious of this response that was a part of her natural conversation. In fact, it even annoyed me. I was uncomfortable thinking about answered prayer.

In time, I did not mind hearing my friend's comment. I even realized that answered prayers are part of life. I later found myself saying, "I guess that was an answer to prayer." This comment is now a part of my natural conversation! If we start at an early age talking about answered prayers, then our children will recognize them and find them a natural part of Christian experience.

Activity: Construct and decorate a prayer box or can. If you want to be fancy, go to a craft store and purchase a *papier-mché* chest with a clasp, some fast drying paints, jewels, stickers, and glitter glue. For a more basic version, children may decorate a peanut can with a plastic lid.

Each night encourage the children to talk about their prayer requests. Write the prayer requests on a piece of paper. Ask younger children to draw a picture of their prayer request. You may also need to write the prayer requests on the pieces of paper for the children. Do not forget to talk about your own prayer requests with the children. Write your prayer requests on slips of paper and place them inside the box or can, too.

After one month, remove each slip from the container and reread the request. Discuss if the request was or was not answered. For those prayers that were answered, the children may write "ANSWERED" across the papers and place them in another container marked "ANSWERED PRAYERS."

If a request was not answered, return the paper to the prayer box or container and continue praying about it. Revisit the requests next month.

Prayer: Prayerfully recite Psalm 116:1-2 together while holding the container of answered prayers.

Questions for Discussion:

- Does the number of answered prayers surprise you?
- Were all your prayer requests answered in the way that you had anticipated? How were they answered similarly or differently?
- Does God answer all our prayers?

Ruth M. Blum, Glendale, Arizona. (2005)

Tossed Salad

"How very good and pleasant it is

*When kindred live together in unity!
It is like the precious oil on the head,
Running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron,
Running down over the collar of his robes.
It is like the dew of Hermon,
Which falls on the mountains of Zion.
For there the Lord ordained his blessing,
Life forevermore."
(Psalm 133)*

Christian stewardship calls us to be good stewards in all parts of our life. We need to remind our children and ourselves to treat our siblings with the same care as we do our friends. Sibling rivalry is generally tolerated, but it may become a nagging frustration.

When siblings become antagonists, and when the only peace found at home is when one of the siblings is absent, it is time to recite Psalm 133. (Probably an earlier intervention in the rivalry would be an even more appropriate time to recite Psalm 133.)

In Jesus' time, oil was used for anointing a king or a chief priest and for healing wounds. Oil was considered precious. A great deal of time and patience was necessary to extract the oil from the olives. Today, oil is used for a variety of purposes and is extracted in a highly efficient manner.

Type Psalm 133:1 on a card and place it in the center of your kitchen or dining room table.

Gather the following ingredients: vegetable oil, vinegar, and powdered salad dressing mix. Invite each child to dip his or her finger into the separate ingredients and taste them. Discuss the taste of each ingredient with the children. How does each ingredient taste? Typical responses include:

- Vinegar tastes bitter.
- Oil tastes bland.
- Salad dressing powder stings the tongue.

Measure the ingredients in separate containers so they are ready to mix into the dressing. Read each step aloud. Observe the separation of the oil, the vinegar, and the salad dressing powder. Vinegar and oil do not mix easily. These ingredients do not taste exceptional by themselves.

Next, vigorously shake the ingredients together in a bottle. Pour the shaken mixture over a prepared tossed salad. Sample the good taste of the unified mixture of these ingredients. Serve the salad with a meal. Remind each person to shake the salad dressing prior to pouring it over the salad. Shaking the salad dressing helps to maintain its good taste. As each person shakes the salad dressing bottle, the person may offer a positive comment about the next person to whom

she or he will pass the salad dressing bottle. Recite Psalm 133:1 aloud together at the beginning of your meal for the next ten days and offer the following prayer or a similar one. Each person is a unique creation of God. God calls us to be independent, but also to join together as a means of becoming something greater than our own individual uniqueness. Each ingredient in salad dressing may be used for something alone; yet once they are mixed together, they produce even greater taste. Each person is a wonderful individual within the family; but together, we combine and create even larger blessings.

Prayer:

Lord God, we thank you for this time together as a family. We thank you for our food. Help us to remember that we can be wonderful when we are all together. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- What are some unique qualities that you share with your family?
- How do you feel when you have a rivalry with a sibling (or another family member if you do not have siblings)?
- What does the oil represent in this activity?
- How did you feel when you shared a positive comment about the person to whom you passed the salad dressing bottle? How did you feel when another person offered a positive comment about you?

Ruth M. Blum, Glendale, Arizona. (2005)

The Best

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone." (1 Corinthians 12:4)

Share with the children the story that follows. (Note: You may change the story to three girls or a combination of boys and girls, if you wish.)

Three neighborhood boys tried to be the best at everything. Jackson, Corey, and Tom were longtime friends. They rode bikes together, played on the same little league team, and attended the same church. Their parents would say, "Looking for Tom? He is with Corey and Jackson." Or "If you find Jackson, then you will find Corey and Tom." One day something happened. It might have been the day Jackson hit a home run and won the championship game. It might have been the day Corey achieved first place in the school spelling bee. It might have been the day Tom cleaned the newborn calf's stall all by himself. No one, not even their parents, can recall when or why the friends separated.

Ask the children why they think that Jackson, Corey, and Tom did not remain best friends. (Possible answers include jealousy, competitiveness, limited time, and different interests.)

Read I Corinthians 12:4 to the children. Remind the children that we all have different abilities. These different abilities help us accomplish a common good. A common good is beneficial or good for everyone. Working for a common good requires the efficient stewardship of our time and talents.

Jackson, Tom, and Corey had different abilities or gifts. Jackson hit the ball well. Corey was a great speller. Tom cared for the farm animals well. If they had shared their gifts with one another, their friendships could have been the best. Instead, Jackson wanted only to play baseball. Every time he asked Corey to play ball, Corey was writing an article for the school newspaper. Whenever Tom invited Jackson to spend time in the barn, Jackson would wait outside the barn doors and practice throwing a baseball in the air and catching it. Each one wanted to be the best at something. By working hard at being the best ball player, the best writer, or the best animal caretaker, each one forgot to take the time to be a best friend.

Encourage the children to make a plan to share their gifts and abilities with their family and friends.

Prayer: Lord, today I pray for my friends. Thank you for the gifts and the abilities that you have given me. I pray that I will be best at loving you. Help me share my abilities with my family and my friends. Also help me to learn more about my family's and my friends' special abilities. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- What are the special abilities of your best friends?
- What can your best friends teach you?
- What special gifts and abilities has God given to you?
- How can you use these abilities for the common good of your family and your friends?

Ruth M. Blum, Glendale, Arizona. (2005)

“Serving God’s Way” Game

"Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received." (1 Peter 4:10)

Advance preparation: You will need 18 index cards. Write a different fruit of the Spirit on each of nine index cards. (See Galatians 5:22-23.) Write an occupation that would be familiar to the children (for example, teacher, nurse, police officer, construction worker, business person, pastor, and so on) on each of the other nine cards. Place each set of nine cards in a separate container or paper bag.

Read 1 Peter 4:10 to the children. Explain to them that Christians share God's love by serving others. Christians are to serve others in ways that are pleasing to God. One way that Christians are to serve others is by displaying the fruit of the Spirit in their everyday lives. Read Galatians 5:22-23 to the children.

Tell the children that you have written each fruit of the Spirit on an individual index card and that you have placed the cards in a container. Then tell them that you have also written nine occupations, each on individual cards, and have placed those cards in another container. Instruct the children to draw one card that lists a fruit of the Spirit and one card that lists an occupation. Ask the children to talk about how someone in that occupation would use that fruit to show God's love. For example, a teacher could demonstrate kindness by taking time to listen to a child who is having problems at home and by remembering to pray for that child. Children can work individually, in pairs, or in small groups. For a further challenge, children could act out the situations in pantomimes or skits.

Prayer: Dear God, help all Christians to remember that they are serving you in whatever job they have. Help us to show your love today to everyone we meet. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What are some ways that you can show the fruits of the Spirit in your everyday lives at school and at home?
2. How does displaying the fruits of the Spirit to others relate to being a good steward?
3. In what situations is it easy for you to show the fruits of the Spirit? When is it difficult?
4. Can you describe a recent moment when you displayed a fruit of the Spirit to someone else? How did he or she feel? How did you feel when you served another in the name of Jesus Christ?

Janet Zimmerman, Canton, Ohio. (2005)

Grandpa's Garden

"Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!" (Matthew 13:8-9)



Begin this lesson by teaching children the meaning of a parable. Parables are brief allegorical stories that convey a moral lesson, spiritual principle, or universal truth. Jesus used this type of teaching because parables made an impression upon people's minds. The people could easily relate to the imagery of a farmer or gardener working in the fields. It was a job that required time, patience, and diligence.

The following is a modern-day parable about gardening:

My name is Debbie. As a child, I loved summer vacation because I visited Grandpa. One of my most important summer activities was helping Grandpa care for his vegetable garden. Grandpa particularly loved growing tomatoes.

I remember running to the backyard garden as soon as I arrived at Grandpa's home. I checked the growth of the vegetables.

I would ask, "Are the beans growing on the plants yet?"

"No, not yet," Grandpa would say. "Wait awhile. Pretty soon."

"Are there tomatoes on the vines?" I wondered. Yes, small, dark green and round.

Grandpa would say, "We have to watch and see how big they will grow."

Each day, part of my job was to report on the progress of the garden. The ground was rocky. Some days, especially after a rainstorm, I would clear the shale away from the plants and loosen the dirt. The water would not nourish the plants when the ground was too hard.

Occasionally, days and days would pass with no rain. In the evenings, I would help Grandpa carry buckets of water and use a sprinkling can to water these precious plants. I knew not to dump the bucket of water on the plants. Dumping the water would erode the dirt from the plant and leave the roots unprotected. Carefully, I would loosen the dirt around the base of the plant so the water would soak in. I watered the garden using a sprinkling can. It took a long time, but I played in the water. Sometimes I was soaked more than the plants.

The tomatoes became heavy as they ripened to a pale yellow. I helped Grandpa tie his old neckties around the branches and the stakes that he had driven into the ground. This procedure ensured that the branches would not break as the weight of the tomatoes increased.

Finally, one day Grandpa would say, "Debbie, today is the day!" The color of the tomato was not too yellow and not too red — just perfect for picking. It was time to pick the tomatoes. I especially enjoyed picking some of the ripe tomatoes for our lunch. I searched for just the right shade of red. The taste of a fresh picked juicy tomato was the best!

I loved helping Grandpa. I still love the juicy, sweet taste of a fresh-picked tomato.

Prayer:

Thank you God for helping us to listen and to learn. Help us to care for our faith as much as Debbie cared for the garden and the tomato plants. We want our lives to be juicy and sweet too. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- Have you ever been asked to do a job and then complained about doing it?
- Why did Debbie not complain about her job?
- What was really important about the tomatoes?
- To grow the best tomatoes, what did Debbie and Grandpa need to do?
- How does this parable relate to Christian stewardship?

Ruth M. Blum, Glendale, Arizona. (2005)

Take Good Care of Yourself!

"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God with your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)



Obtain a couple of magazines, preferably those with pictures of teen celebrities. Ask the children to look through the magazines and choose pictures of teens they most admire. Ask the children why they chose those specific pictures. Tell the children to close their eyes, to keep them closed for five seconds, and then open them. Tell the children to pretend they are now looking at the pictures through God's eyes. Ask them if they think God is pleased with the teens' appearance and to explain why or why not.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. We are God's representatives in the world. As God's representatives, we are called to be good stewards. Part of being a good steward is taking care of our bodies by eating healthy food, exercising regularly, and dressing appropriately. Ask the children if they are good stewards of their own bodies. One way to help a child know if he or she is a good steward is to ask the child if he or she would need to change in some way if Jesus walked into the room.

If the children feel that they need to make changes, ask them to describe those changes. Encourage the children to make a plan for changing lifestyle practices that do not reflect good stewardship of their bodies (such as eating healthy food, exercising regularly, and dressing appropriately). Be sure to emphasize God's acceptance of and the special value in those parts of their body that make them unique (such as their nose, hair, eyes, height, and so on). God loves each one of us unconditionally. Jesus Christ sacrificed his life for us because we are so valuable to God. God created each person. As Christians, we should honor God by being the best stewards that we can be, including being stewards of the care of our own bodies.

Prayer: Dear God, help these children realize how very much you love them. You made each one of them special. Help these children to be good stewards of their own bodies and to celebrate their own uniqueness. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- Does God care if we always wear the latest fashions or have the latest hairstyles? Why or why not?
- Why is it important to God for us to be good stewards of our own bodies by eating properly and exercising regularly?
- *Challenge:* Would your child benefit from healthier eating habits, more regular exercise, and/or more appropriate clothing styles? If so, choose one area and begin making the necessary adjustments. For example, maybe your child could include more fruit in his or her diet, or set a goal to exercise fifteen minutes daily, or experiment with a more modest clothing style. Be sure to consult with your child's physician before making any significant changes in diet or exercise.

Janet Zimmerman , Canton, Ohio. (2004)

Stewards of God's Creation

*"Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.
Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:4-5)*

The people in Philippi are struggling because Paul has been imprisoned for his beliefs. Paul seeks to encourage and to reassure them that his joy and confidence are undiminished, even under his present circumstances. Paul wants the people to stand fast in their faith by standing together and looking after one another. It is easy for us to focus on ourselves when we feel defeated or inferior to others. It is our humanness that compels us to compare our life with other lives. Paul reminds us that we will find blessings and joy for ourselves by reaching out to others.

Activity

The springtime of the year brings many opportunities to see new life in God's creation. It also reminds us of our responsibility to care for the environment and all of God's creation. Many people in our church families are unable to care for their yards during the spring and summer.

Contact your church office and find those who may be physically unable to care for their garden, trees, or yards. Extend beyond the homebound and the elderly. Remember the single parent, the recently widowed, the person with allergies, the young person with limited gardening ability.

Offer to have your family regularly help people with their outdoor work.

By being a steward of God's creation, you will bring joy to others as they enjoy gazing into their backyard. You can alleviate a burden that is piled on an already overwhelmed single parent. You will sense a closer relationship with people in your church family. You will be drawn closer together as a family by helping others. You will be closer to God by sharing your talent with someone in different circumstances.

Prayer: Lord, help me to see the needs of others. Help me to be aware of the joy that I can share by stepping out in faith to help others. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen

Questions for Discussion:

- What are some ways that you compare yourself to others? How can you overcome making these comparisons?
- Were people surprised by your offer to be a steward of their yards?
- In what ways did helping others bring a blessing to your own personal life?

Ruth M. Blum, Glendale, Arizona. (2006)

Cleaning House

"Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a den of robbers" (Matthew 21:12-13)

"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16)



[Christ Driving the Money Changers out of the Temple \(Valentin de Boulogne, c. 1618\)](#)

Ask the children to name chores that their parents expect them to do at home to help keep the house clean and well-organized. Ask them to consider what would happen if no one cleaned the house, washed the laundry, bought the groceries, or completed home repairs. The children will agree that things would be a mess! Point out that ignoring household projects will cause problems, just like ignoring a family pet or people will result in many problems.

Just before his crucifixion, Jesus visited the Temple in Jerusalem and found that it was not being cared for appropriately. In those days, people had to bring animals to the Temple as sacrifices for their sins. Merchants set up booths near the Temple and sold animals as a convenience to people, especially those individuals who were traveling a considerable distance. However, while these booths began as a good service to people, they became a money-scheming business. The merchants took advantage of people who bought the animals by charging them more than the animals were worth. Jesus called the merchants "robbers," and he "cleaned house" by turning over the tables!

In 1 Corinthians, we are reminded that our bodies are God's temples. Encourage the children to examine their own lives to see if they need to "clean house" as a way to honor God. Are they engaging in activities that are not pleasing to God? Are they praying and reading the Bible regularly? Are they obedient to their parents? Are they eating healthy food and exercising properly? Are they treating others with kindness and respect?

We honor God and express our love for God when we live our lives in ways that are pleasing to God. We need to clean the clutter out of our hearts so that we can be fitting temples for God's Spirit. Encourage the children to choose one area of their life that they would like to "clean." Share with the children something in your life that needs "cleaning." Then invite the children to share their decisions with you. Covenant to pray for one another during the Easter season.

Prayer:

Dear God, help us to live our lives in ways that honor you. We ask for your help in "cleaning" our lives. Thank you for your great love and for never giving up on us! In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Questions for Discussion:

- Where might Jesus begin "turning over the tables" if he were to visit our church or examine our personal lives?
- How can we help others deal with personal problems that keep them from being all that God wants them to be?
- When we take care of ourselves — physically, emotionally, mentally, relationally, and spiritually — how are we demonstrating good stewardship?

Janet Zimmerman , Canton, Ohio. (2005)