

Overflowing Generosity

Learning 2

Overflowing, Spreading Out Over the Whole World!



Word/Witness/Apply

Opening Prayer

Lord, thank you that your Word is true and that your promises never fail us. Help us to understand that “little can become much” when you are involved, that through giving of our time, talents, testimony and treasures we become rich in you! Amen.

“For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God... By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!” (2 Cor 9:12-15 ESV).

God's mission and resources flow through us and out into the whole world, congregation, community, continentally and globally—to use and invest in His purposes and inspire others with hope!

As we think of generosity in terms of spreading out over the whole world, one cannot help but recall the Great Commission. **“And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:17-28).**

We are to go next door or to another continent—to mentor and make disciples. The Great Commission cannot possibly be carried out without tremendous community involvement at all levels of leadership and by pulling together “all” of our unique abilities and financial resources—resources that God gives us in advance to manage and use for His purposes.

The Great Commission is an external testimony, a visible sign of God's generosity flowing through us, as we confess that Jesus is Lord of our lives and Lord of our resources, thus, putting our faith in action.

Generosity is contagious! Giving has a ripple effect! When you give, you're blessed and others are blessed, and Jesus is made known. Generous giving loves people towards Jesus. We know this basic biblical principle. We get it. We have experienced it! And yet, often times it is still so difficult for us to let go of our time, energy and money. Contagious generosity is what changes the world. It is open-handed and not tight fisted. The greatest major benefit of giving is freedom!

Think about this: During Jesus' ministry, the area he covered was quite small. In fact, Jesus never left Palestine. He had little money or possessions. Paul points this out in 2 Cor 8:9 “You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich.” Jesus was generous! Look at what Jesus accomplished in a very short time—three years! In His death and resurrection, His message of hope and salvation reached an entire world! **Isaiah 55:11, “...so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”** N. T. Wright said, “The kingdom work He did in a very short time, in a very small place—has leavened the loaf of the whole world.”

2 Cor 9:1-2, Paul describes the Corinthian's enthusiasm and incites the Macedonians to give. Paul in effect was prodding the Corinthians to rekindle their enthusiasm for giving. The start and end of a marathon or any project are much more thrilling than the miles in

between. Year-round stewardship keeps the opportunities for giving out in front of the congregation, not only in fall stewardship campaigns but all year long.

A steward doesn't own; he or she holds in trust and uses what he/she has been given for the one who owns it. God holds all the rights of the ownership—the deed—and in baptism God entrusts all these things to us, to care for and to insure faith multiplies and produces good fruit.

“The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” Ps 24:1



Stewardship 100% all the time.

Stewardship flows from the Gospel Into every aspect of life, faith, ministry and mission!

Our worship and praise of God never stops. There is the stewardship of the gospel, worship, congregation, pastors and staff, family, finance, teaching, outreach, property...to manage, to care for and to value these as both *gifts and privileges*. It is right to say, that we are stewards of the Great Commission!

Generosity is one of several forms of evangelism (sharing the Good News)!

Annual stewardship campaigns and capital campaigns are all faith-raising

experiences. Resources of time, talents and money are all the byproducts of true discipleship. Rather than approach finances and human resources reactively—in fear that there is not enough—Year-Round Stewardship, by its very nature, is proactive and trusts in advance that God has, is, and will always provide. People of faith have a need to give, to be generous. Year-Round Stewardship gives believers new and creative opportunities to excel and grow in their giving. As believers witness the work of the Holy Spirit overflowing in their own lives and through the life of their congregations, the Good News is made visible and the excitement of giving spreads!

Eph. 1:3-14 The word Paul uses for “plan” is a word that translates to “stewardship” in Eph. 1:10. “God’s stewardship for the fullness of time is the redemption—evangelism of the world. While the evangelistic and relationship building efforts of a congregation need financial undergirding, the most important ingredient to an evangelizing church is the commitment of its members to tell the story of Christ’s love. Evangelism involves the commitment of every believer to use his or her time, abilities and money to glorify God”

(Grimm, 31). Please refer to *Generous People*, by Rev., Dr. Eugene Grimm for more specifics on Year-Round Stewardship.

Word/Witness/Apply

“Stewardship is what I do after I say, ‘I believe!’” Clarence C. Stoughton, 1929

One congregation introduced year-round stewardship and it overflowed into their mission and vision, resulting in an increase in giving. The congregation’s average weekly attendance was 80. They had not had a capital campaign in 24 years. The older members feared a capital campaign would decrease annual giving but it did just the opposite! A stewardship consultant was hired. They responded proactively (with enthusiasm and joy) rather than reactively (crisis and shortages). With an annual budget of \$240,000, they raised \$196,000 over three years to fund their new vision. The experience raised faith and confidence, and annual giving increased by 3%. In thanksgiving for what God had done, they also gave 8-10% to the greater church. They decoupled stewardship from finance and mapped out Year-Round Stewardship in the following ways:

1. **Worship.** Once or twice a month, believers share a personal witness of how the Holy Spirit is moving and active in their lives—stories of transformation.
2. **Prayer.** During fall stewardship and capital campaigns, a prayer team is formed and leads a corporate prayer time after services.
3. **Preaching.** The pastor gives a stewardship sermon once a month. During fall stewardship season, pastor gives several stewardship sermons and invites guest preachers.
4. **Biblical Learning.** The fall stewardship campaign is combined with an in-depth congregation-wide Bible study in stewardship focused on a theme and also during the season of Lent (lifestyle changes/consumption, giving and renunciation).
5. **No Secrets.** For the first time, money is talked about openly and with transparency within the leadership and members of congregation.
6. **Leaders Model Generosity.** Council members, members of finance and stewardship were asked to increase their giving (do what you are able) as a *witness*. You cannot lead others where you have not gone first.
7. **Stewardship vs. Finance.** A new stewardship ministry was formed that collaborated with all ministries (including finance) and contributed to newsletter articles about generosity and gratitude.

8. **Spiritual-gifts.** Inventory and assessment workshops, new members explore their giftedness and expectations are discussed, celebration of ministries with luncheon, and preaching on spiritual gifts once a year.
9. **Witness Faith In Action.** Because the congregation witnesses God at work—and understands they are managers, not owners—they are inspired, and annually increase their mission support to the greater church and local benevolence.
10. **Advance Planning.** Fall stewardship is planned and prepared for in June/July.
11. **Money Follows Discipleship.** Capital campaigns and special requests are now the norm—money (giving) always follows discipleship. Prior to Year-Round Stewardship, this congregation wanted an increase in worship attendance and finances with little emphasis on discipleship—faithful living.
12. **First Fruits.** Whatever proceeds are raised, a “first fruits” percentage goes to the greater church in thanksgiving to God!

In this small congregation, faith increased in miraculous ways and hearts grew large!

Word/Witness/Apply

1. **Do you have a stewardship team? If so, please describe how it functions.**

If not, what might be some significance differences between a finance ministry and a stewardship team?

How might the practice of Year-Round Stewardship look in your congregation?

2. **How would you describe your level of enthusiasm in giving each of these resources—time, talent and money—to the needs of both your congregation and to the work of the NALC [low, moderate or high]?**

What would it take to increase your enthusiasm to give, not out of obligation, but out of a heartfelt desire?

3. **Think about the differences between God as owner and you as manager of all your wealth, possession and abilities. Or to think of it another way, what does it mean to see God as manufacturer and see ourselves as His distributors?**

How might this biblical truth change the way you spend or give money?

4. **The Constant Quest.** Luther said, “Whoever has wealth finds his pleasure and delight in it, but everybody is afraid of poverty. Everyone must have a trade, business, job and handicraft; and danger arises when men have acquired and gathered something. For it easily happens that one either places hope and confidence in one’s possessions or is unsettled because of the lack of them. This life hovers between want and wealth, between property and poverty” (W28, 640—E 36). **Discuss.**

5. **Discuss the difference between reactive and proactive giving. How might Year-Round Stewardship help you enjoy giving rather than be consumed by the constant concern “will we have enough”?**

How might trusting God as owner set you free in Christ from the bondage of worry that there is never enough? (Gal. 5:1 & 13-15).

6. Overflowing generosity is a lifestyle! In baptism, God puts generosity into our hearts, it is one of nine fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). God’s generosity is extravagant!

From this lesson: how might your spending, generosity and approach to giving change/grow in your household, towards your congregation and towards the NALC?



Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for the light of your word! Help each of us to faithfully set aside resources, time and energy. Point us in the right direction and show us where to go and the people who need our gifts the most! And change our hearts in the process. Amen.

(The author is Pastor Dona Johnson, pastor of Christ the King Lutheran Church, Centerville, Ohio.)