

“Community of Prayer is not a resource someone thought they ought to write. It is a sacrificial gift to the Church from Bruce Barkhauer, who has chosen to give his full heart, soul, mind, and strength to the work of generosity by God’s people. He reminds us that stewardship is a spiritual discipline. As such it deserves a season of prayer and reflection, and listening to the voice of God in our lives.”

—George Bullard, President of The Columbia Partnership and FaithSoaring Churches Learning Community

“Divine love, human generosity, flourishing earth, healthy communities, God’s realm, rest. Through daily meditations and weekly deeper dives, Bruce Barkhauer connects the stewardship dots. In so doing, he weaves a tapestry picturing God and God’s people in mutual giving that blesses the world.”

—Sharon Watkins, General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, author of *Whole*

“So often the planners of the annual financial campaign do little more than slap a bunch of financial figures in front of the congregation and beg for money. Small wonder that congregations sometimes struggle financially. Bruce Barkhauer puts a well-written, easy-to-read, practical resource in the hands of churches to bring theological depth to the annual financial campaign. On each of 29 days, the book offers a theologically provocative meditation and a prayer around themes of generosity, stewardship, and transformation. A bonus: a ‘going deeper’ section for each week that an individual can pursue or that can spark a small group discussion. A congregation whose members use these materials will deepen spiritually, feel more connected, and become more generous.”

—Ronald J. Allen, Christian Theological Seminary

“For some congregations and their leaders, the anticipation of a financial stewardship emphasis is unfortunately not always the upbeat kind. In *Community of Prayer*, Bruce Barkhauer encourages making a financial commitment to the ministry of the church as an essential, transformative, and yes, celebratory moment! Daily meditations lead into four weekly emphases suitable for individual or group study. By engaging with Scripture and story, readers will gain a deeper understanding of stewardship that will lead to joyful and faithful generosity.”

—Marcia Shetler, Executive Director/CEO, Ecumenical Stewardship Center

“Bruce Barkhauer has written a devotional guide that is a great gift to the church. These 29 devotionals will challenge us to ask, ‘Who and what do we really worship?’ They are not words to simply affirm that God loves us, but to wrestle with how much we love Him. The lure of this world is that stuff will save us and that possessing is the solution to our most pressing needs. How false!”

—J. Clif Christopher, President of Horizons Stewardship Company

“*Community of Prayer* offers daily reminders of the abundant love that calls us to live with hope — an especially powerful message in a popular culture warped by the fear of scarcity. Bruce Barkhauer’s inspiring meditations and prayers ground the life of stewardship in a vision of God’s gracious care that frees us to live each day with generosity, compassion, and a burning passion for justice. ... I am moved by this series of meditations. I believe you will be too.”

—Richard Lowery, Christian Theological Seminary

Community *of* **PRAYER**

Stewardship Devotional

BRUCE A. BARKHAUER



ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

Copyright ©2016 by Bruce A. Barkhauer.

All rights reserved. For permission to reuse content, please contact Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, www.copyright.com.

Bible quotations marked NRSV are from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Quotations marked MSG are from *The Message* by Eugene H. Peterson, copyright (c) 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

Quotations designated (NET) are from the NET Bible® copyright ©1996-2016 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. <http://netbible.com> Quoted by permission. All rights reserved.

CBPBooks.com

Print: 9780827205444

EPUB: 9780827205451

EPDF: 9780827205468

Contents

Week One – Creation as a Blueprint for Generosity 1

The creation poem of Genesis 1 tells us that generosity is in our DNA, as those created in the image of a generous God. The seventh day as Sabbath rest indicates that God can be trusted to provide (even on a day absent of labor), so we can exercise that generosity with confidence.

Week Two – Self-Care and the Gospel as Building Blocks for Stewardship 10

Important aspects of stewardship include the care of ourselves (beyond treasure) so that we may more fully express our talents and abilities for the benefit of others. Further, we have been entrusted with the Gospel and its final word of God's triumph over the powers and principalities of this world. God's love is unstoppable and we are charged with sharing that Good News.

Week Three – Understanding Our Relationship with Money 19

The biblical witness challenges us to look at how we feel about what we have. While relatively neutral about wealth conceptually, the concern is how having or not having resources impacts our encounter with the world around us and our reliance on God. Do we fear losing our stuff (and thus hoard) or do we see having assets as a way of participating in the Realm of God (and thus share)?

Week Four – Generosity as an Agent of Transformation and Pathway to Joy 28

If the world is to know wholeness and transformation, it will be by God working through us. People and communities are the tools by which God blesses, reveals, and changes human circumstance. When we deploy what we have been given on behalf of the Realm with the power of the Holy Spirit, things are different. And we, like God, delight in the change that occurs, including the change that happens within us when we are free to give.

Day 12



Finding Your Heart

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

I confess that for years I understood this text as saying my treasure would naturally follow my heart. It was just the way I had heard it as a child. It was only as an adult that I came to realize the text says exactly the opposite. My heart will follow my treasure, not the other way around.

Jesus dares to say that your checkbook is a theological document. Look at your EFT statement at the end of the month and you will know what matters to you. Your money flows to what you love. Find your money and you will find your heart.

This would even apply to our congregations. The church budget is also a theological document. To what does our money flow? Are we caring for ourselves or are we seeking to impact the lives of others? Does our financial report show that we tithe as a congregation from the resources we receive to causes outside of our own concern?

In a season of stewardship preparation, you have to ask yourself, can you find your heart for God amidst the trail of debit and credit card transactions? Do the ledger entries demonstrate a concern for justice, a desire to bring wholeness, and the hope that no one should be without food, clean water and shelter? Or do they say something else?

In a season of stewardship preparation, you might ask yourself, where is your heart and is it where you hoped you would find it? Would a little more treasure invested in the Realm of God reflect what you would like the answer to be?

For Focus and Reflection: What do my checkbook and credit card statement tell me about my heart?

Prayer: God, I desire my heart and my treasure to be less in conflict and more in line with you. Amen.

Week 1 Going Deeper

Resources for Individual Reflection or Group Discussion

This week's focus was on the relationships between stewardship, creation, and Sabbath keeping. Clearly stewardship is about much more than money. The creation story infers that humans are to be stewards of the earth. We are to care for the earth the way God cares for the cosmos. We understand that this is what it really means to be created in the image of God. God richly provides for us in abundance, and we are to do the same within the web of relationships we share as the ones who have been created.

The creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 also seek to impart trust in God as the sustainer of what has been created. The fabric of the design includes ongoing provision. Sabbath (the seventh day of creation) reinforces this understanding by promising seven days of produce for six days of labor. Observing Sabbath creates the opportunity to exercise trust and to receive renewal by breaking the cycle of work. It is both remembering the power of God (defeating Pharaoh) and remembering that God's investment in us is *relationship*-based, not *commodity*-driven. It is never about what God can gain *from* us or what we can *produce* to satisfy the Divine.

Read Psalm 104. This is a beautiful reflection on the Genesis 1 poem. Can you see the similarities? Focus on verses 13–30. What does God do? What images or phrases captivate your imagination? Did you notice verses 27 and 28? What do they mean to you? How do they impact your understanding of being one who *receives* from God?

Read Leviticus 25:1–7. Notice that even the land gets rest. The land has its own agency within creation, giving it particular value and character of relationship. Numbers 35:34 states: “You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I also dwell” (NRSV). Are we guilty of this? If so, how? In Leviticus 18:28, when urging Israel to keep the Law (of which this command is

a part), the author suggests that the land itself “will vomit you out” (NRSV) if you don’t follow these instructions. Are there places where the land is “vomiting us out” from its overuse or abuse? What can or should we do about that?

How do your choices as a consumer impact the earth? How are both people and resources exploited by certain aspects of our economic system? Should the church be concerned and look for ways to lessen the impact? How is this stewardship?

What are ways you might engage the congregation in this deeper understanding of stewardship as care for the earth? Could we do a better job with water or energy conservation, recycling, or even go so far as eliminating Styrofoam from the church kitchen? Regarding Sabbath, could we build more opportunities for rest and reflection in our common life together rather than just scheduling another meeting? Is it time for a retreat where we might talk less and listen more?

For reading and further study: *Sabbath and Jubilee* by Richard Lowery (Chalice Press); *Sabbath as Resistance* by Walter Brueggemann (Westminster John Knox Press)

Going Deeper Still – Read the Papal Encyclical by Pope Francis on care for the earth, *Laudato Si*.

Check out the “Community of Prayer” section on the Center for Faith and Giving website for additional resources, centerforfaithandgiving.org.