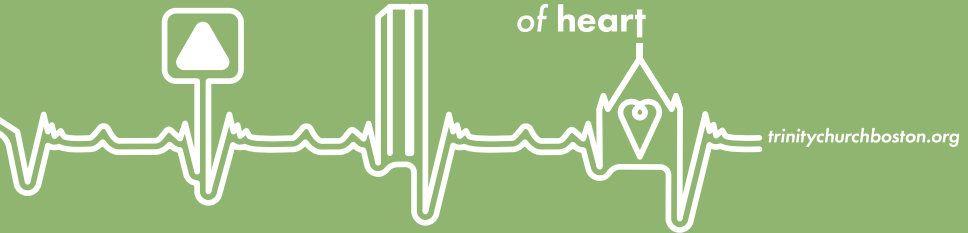


MEDITATION GUIDE

gladness
and singleness
of heart





Introduction

As we prepare in this church stewardship season to make our offerings for the coming year, we rejoice in God's abundant provision and remember that all we have and all we are is a gift. The Bible tells us so, and often! "Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above" (James 1:17), to take one example, is both assurance and invitation. Assurance of God's steadfast love and care for us. Invitation to follow God's generous example.

To guide our hearts and minds in contemplating how we might pattern our own gift-giving after God's generosity, Trinity's stewardship committee offers this four-week Bible study guide. We commend it to you for personal, private prayer. We will also use this resource in community for small group discussion during an autumn stewardship educational forum.

The collect for the Sunday in which we plan to host that stewardship forum says of the holy Scriptures: "Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life" (Proper 28). We take this prayer as our study guide's organizing principle. Each week we offer a selection of scripture to hear and read; an explanatory text to help us mark and learn; and questions to help us inwardly digest God's message to us and all people.



**Together
let us pray,
with gladness
and singleness
of heart.** 

2022-2023 Stewardship Committee:

Josh Fiala, *Co-Chair*

Pam Lassiter, *Co-Chair*

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for leading the development of this resource,
and to Brigitta Patterson for the beautiful design.*

Joyful Generosity

2 CORINTHIANS 9: 5-12

⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion.

⁶ The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. ⁹ As it is written,

‘He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;
his righteousness endures for ever.’

¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; ¹² for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

Joyful Generosity

During Paul's missionary journeys, he collected money from these new churches in order to support the poor of the church in Jerusalem. We see references to this collection in Acts as well as multiple of Paul's letters, and here in Paul's 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians Paul devotes two whole chapters to this, wanting to make sure that the Corinthians will have the money ready when Paul arrives.

This collection is clearly important to Paul. Then as now, money mattered. The church in Jerusalem is in real need. Of course Paul wants to raise enough money to help them. However, Paul seems just as concerned that the Corinthians give in the right way and for the right reasons, as he is with the amount they give. The Church needs this money. That's just reality. But Paul doesn't want it at any cost. Therefore Paul sends some of his partners ahead of him, a first century stewardship team of sorts, so that the gift will be made freely, as an offering, rather than begrudgingly, under compulsion.

God does not invite us into a life of crushing burdens, but of joy and loving community. And so Paul talks about the joys of generosity. God never seeks to extract more than we have to give, and Paul does not want the Church to do that either. Instead, God gives to us abundantly, and we show our trust in God to continue providing for us by sharing with others. When we give, our community life becomes one of abundant generosity and thanksgiving. God gives us everything we need — with the understanding that we share with each other. Sometimes your generosity will meet my needs. Sometimes my generosity will meet your needs. Both the giving and the receiving causes us to give thanks to God.



Are there particular times when you've found joy in giving? What made that special?

Paul sees our generosity as flowing out of our gratitude. Take some time to think about what God has given you. How do you cultivate a sense of, and express, gratitude?

How Much Shall We Give?

LUKE 21: 1-4

¹He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; ²he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. ³He said, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; ⁴for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.'

How Much Shall We Give?

Last week we thought about how we give joyfully, in gratitude for what God has given to us, and how we participate in God's abundant generosity when we give generously ourselves. Now we get a bit more concrete. How much shall we actually give?

The Old Testament talks about tithing, dedicating a tenth of your goods or income to God. The Abrahamic traditions understand this commitment of "first fruits" to express gratitude and to bring blessings to the whole harvest. Over the centuries, Christians have found the tithe to be a helpful guideline, and those of us who are not yet tithing may want to pray about moving in that direction.

Of course, guidelines are only guidelines and one size does not fit all. Some of us could be giving significantly more than we are. Some of us are giving well more than what might be considered "reasonable." Circumstances change – we may be giving more or less than we did last year, or than what we plan to give in the future. Through it all, God's love and provision for us are constant and never-failing.

Our tradition affirms more than one truth about our generosity: money matters, as we named in week one, and God is not a bill collector and does not ask for more than we have to give. God's first concern is inviting us to share in a life of joyful, abundant generosity.

The story of the Widow's Mite illustrates that this invitation is open to everyone. Though the widow's coins may not make a significant dent in the Temple budget, nevertheless the gift is significant indeed, both to the widow and to God. God's invitation to generosity is an invitation to her too – and to us.



How do you decide how much to give?

How do you think about your own giving over time? Do you sense an invitation to give more generously?

Can you think of a time when you gave in ways that made you uncomfortable? Did God speak to you in the tension between risk and generosity?

How Much Should We Give to Trinity Church?

LUKE 12: 22-34

²² He said to his disciples, ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁶ If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷ Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin: ye; I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. ³⁰ For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

³² ‘Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ 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. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

How Much Should We Give to Trinity Church?

In week two, we considered the wideness of God's invitation to generosity. This invitation is open to all, including those of us who seemingly can afford to give very little. In our prayers and meditations, we wondered if we might hear God speaking to us in the tension of daring to be generous. Now in week three, we hear God speaking very clearly: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

We move now from the general to the particular. We are called to give generously to the work of God. Whatever our resources, we have more than enough to give joyfully in answer to that call. Where, then, should we direct our giving and how should we apportion it?

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Being part of a church means being part of a community with love at its core. We are God's beloved, and we are called to create and be a Beloved Community. Creating and sustaining beloved community means contributing our best to it, with gladness and singleness of heart. We give where we love, and the more we give, the more we love. The more we love, the more loving our whole community becomes, and that is a gift beyond price which we as the church can offer to the whole world.



What place does Trinity Church have in your giving?

What makes you eager to support the gathering of our community?

What are your priorities in sustaining Trinity in stewardship? How does Trinity sustain you?

With Gladness and Singleness of Heart

ACTS 2: 41-47

⁴¹ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. ⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

With Gladness and Singleness of Heart

What should our community life look like? This passage from Acts comes immediately after Pentecost and describes how the early church formed in its first days. While various people had been listening to and following Jesus during his earthly ministry, after Pentecost there was a community of three thousand people (the size of Trinity Church!) and they were figuring out how to live their new common life.

Verse 42 sounds similar to our community life on Sundays. Their worship life, like ours, included the apostles' teaching, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. The rest of the chapter showed that their investment in community life went far beyond weekly worship. They spent time together in the temple, ate meals in each other's homes, and shared their goods so that they provided for everyone in the community. This way of life was compelling and attractive so more people wanted to join.

As we begin a new Program Year, and leave more and more of our pandemic restrictions behind us, this passage can provide a blueprint of how to recreate our church life. We come together as a worshipping community rooted in the Word and Sacrament. Beyond that we share each other's lives. We take care of each other. This lays the foundation for a joy that is compelling and attractive.



What does God dream for the next chapter of our community life at Trinity?

How might your stewardship of God's gifts help realize God's dreams for us?



For more information about
stewardship at Trinity Church,
and to make your pledge, scan
the QR code or visit us online at:

trinitychurchboston.org/2023-annual-pledge

Questions about Stewardship?

Please contact:

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