

Stewards Transformed by Grace, Faith, and Love

Week 3: Stewards Transformed by Love

Week 3—Monday “Loving All People”

Scripture: Jesus said, *“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you”* (John 15:12).

Jesus showed His tremendous love for us by going to the cross to suffer and die for us so that we can be reconciled with our heavenly Father. Christ’s love is in us, and He asks us to reflect His love to others. As Christ loved all people, we are called to love all people whether they like us.

Former President Abraham Lincoln exemplified the ability to reach out in love to an enemy. His staff often criticized him for his positive treatment of his sworn enemies. One of the President’s enemies once stated in print that he thought Lincoln was obviously incompetent in the White House. The nature of the critic’s attack on Lincoln even degenerated to the level that Lincoln’s physical features were compared to those of a gorilla. Later, when war broke out between the States, Lincoln asked that critic to serve as his secretary of war.

Lincoln’s advisers were appalled with the President’s actions. When they asked him why he would choose his critic for such an important post, he responded that he thought Stanton was the best man for the job. When they advised him that he should seek to destroy his enemies rather than treat them like friends, he reminded them he was destroying his enemies when he made them his friends. When Lincoln died some years later, Stanton was standing by the President’s bedside. As he watched Lincoln breathe his last breath, he uttered the words, “There dies the greatest ruler of mankind the world has ever seen.” We show our spiritual maturity by how we respond to those who have treated us wrongfully. It is easy to show kindness to friends or people who treat us with kindness. God’s love in us is most evident when we show our love to those who dislike us or mistreat us. It is by God’s grace that we are enabled to show Christian kindness to all people.



Prayer: Lord, You love me so much that You sent Your one and only Son to the cross to atone for my sinful ways. I thank You for Your love. Help me, Lord, to love others as You love me. Amen.

Week 3—Tuesday “Love Makes Us Do It”

Scripture: *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God”* (1 John 4:7).

A young girl was dying. Her only hope lay in a complete blood transfusion, but she had a very rare blood type. Only her brother, even younger than she, had the same type of blood. His parents and doctors explained the situation to him, giving him time to ask questions. He agreed and, without delay, he was laid on a bed, the needle was pushed into his tiny vein, and slowly his blood seeped from his small body into the bag hanging from his bed. He lay quietly as the nurse stood next to him, ready to attend to any need he might have. “How do you feel?” she asked. “Ok,” he answered, “but, Nurse, when do I die?” (*Devotion continues next page*)

What love this little boy had for his sister! What must he have thought when, from his limited knowledge, it seemed that his own parents were willing for him to sacrifice his life to save his sister's.

The boy's love for his sister can help us see how much Jesus loves us. Jesus suffered abuse, torture, persecution, and death for all of us. *"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down His life for His friends"* (John 15:13). He demonstrated His tremendous love not because of our worthiness, but because of His tremendous love. Jesus' love for His heavenly Father and for us changed the world. Through His death and resurrection from that death, we through faith have received the forgiveness of our sins and life eternal. God's love for us in Christ is that power that enables us to love Him. *"We love because He first loved us"* (1 John 4:19).

The love of Jesus empowers us to be His stewards. Because of Jesus' love, we change from people giving what is necessary to supply a need to people responding generously, even sacrificially out of love. Certainly, we give to needs such as our church budget, Christian causes, and people, but our primary reason for giving stems from our love for and commitment to Jesus. When needs arise, Jesus opens our eyes and hearts so we can respond to those needs. However, our primary reason for giving is a desire to express our gratitude and thanksgiving for our Lord and the love that He shows us every day. Because our love for Jesus is our motivation for giving, our giving becomes joyful. Love changes our giving from an obligation to a privilege.

Prayer: *Lord, You fill me with love to share with my family, neighbors, and co-workers. I know that I can love because You first loved me. Place in me the desire to seek out opportunities to share. Amen.*

Week 3—Wednesday "Stewardship Is a Matter of the Heart"

Scripture: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind"* (Matthew 22:37).

God gives us the privilege and opportunity to be His stewards. Even though God gives us all things, He still allows us the freedom to choose whom or what we will serve. Whether we are stewards for the Lord, for ourselves, or for some other master depends on what controls our hearts. What or whom we love, serve, and follow is dictated by what our hearts value as most important. The choices we make reflect what is in our hearts. Satan is doing everything possible to take the love, compassion, and peace from our hearts that only Jesus can place there.

Jesus said, *"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:21). We can paraphrase this by saying, "Show me your treasure, and I will show you your heart." What we treasure the most receives our time, energy, money, and heart. Each of us determines where his treasures lie. What do you love and treasure the most? Unfortunately, some of us may find treasures in our homes, careers, cars, hobbies, or investments. God continually invites us to make Him our treasure. If our hearts are right, our treasures will be right.

Jesus spoke about the relationship between the condition of a tree and the fruit that it bears. *"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit"* (Matthew 12:33). Just as the condition of the tree determines its fruit, so will the thoughts of our hearts dictate our words and actions (Matthew 12:34-35). When our hearts are filled with God's presence, we reflect God's love, goodness, and kindness. When our hearts are right with God, our eyes are opened to the opportunities to serve and help others. When God controls our hearts, we willingly use our time, talents, and money in ways that glorify Him. Good hearts produce good fruit. Through time spent in God's Word and through participation in the Sacraments, God changes our hearts, making us into faithful disciples and stewards for Christ. As Solomon wrote, *"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life"* (Proverbs 4:23).

Prayer: *Lord, I thank You for giving me the privilege and the opportunity to be Your steward. Grant me faith to be a God-pleasing steward. Help me to see stewardship as a free and joyous activity. Amen.*

Week 3—Thursday “Giving from the Heart”

Scripture: *“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the people of Israel that they take for Me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for Me’”* (Exodus 25:1-2).

In God’s Word, we find many examples of people who gave in loving and generous ways. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, Paul uses the Macedonians as an example of people who, in their extreme poverty, gave beyond their ability. Because of the famine in Macedonia at the time, they didn’t have a surplus to give from; however, they put God first and trusted Him to provide. Out of overflowing joy, they gave from their hearts.

For another example of giving from the heart, we can look at the Widow’s Offering found in Luke 21:1-4. In this story, Jesus is at the temple in Jerusalem speaking to His disciples. In the verses just preceding Luke 21, Jesus tells His disciples that the Pharisees were roaming around in their long, flowing robes making sure people saw them and oohed and aahed about them. In a gaudy display of vanity, they tossed big gifts into the temple treasury. In contrast, the widow quietly dropped in two small copper coins which was all she had. She gave from the heart, and she placed her total trust in God. She was relying on Him for her future care. Although the Pharisees gave larger gifts than the widow, they were chastised for having hardened hearts from which they gave to the temple. They gave for recognition and praise. Even though the widow gave only a small gift, Jesus praised her for her generosity because He knew she gave from a loving heart.

A third illustration of one giving from the heart is Zacchaeus. Before he met Jesus, his money was his god so he hoarded it. When Jesus changed Zacchaeus’ heart, he cheerfully gave away half of what he had and four times to those from whom he had cheated. With a changed heart, he gave generously.

God wants our giving to come from hearts filled with gratitude for who God is and for all that He has done and continues to do for us. As our faith grows and matures through spending time in God’s Word and participating often in the Lord’s Supper, our attitude toward giving will change from being an obligation to being a privilege. May God change and fill all our hearts so we can experience the joy of giving to our Lord and Savior.

Prayer: *Lord, You are a loving and giving God. I pray that the Holy Spirit will transform me into a loving and giving person. Help me not to grip my money tightly. Grant me a generous heart. Amen.*

As we rejoice in being transformed stewards through God’s gifts of grace, faith and love, if you have not already done so bring your Transformed Commitment Cards to church as a pledge of our giving for the work of the church. What a blessing that Jesus gives us the opportunity to be involved in this noble effort as we continue the mission and ministry of Zion Lutheran Church and School. You received your Transformed Commitment card with the September newsletter and if you need one, they are available at the Welcome Center. Drop off, mail or bring your Transformed Commitment card to church over the next few days.

Week 3—Friday “Loving Our Neighbors”

Scripture: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan found in the tenth chapter of Luke, we read that the Good Samaritan not only helped an injured person, he took him to an inn where he paid for his room and care. The Samaritan sacrificed money, time, and possessions and risked his own health and safety for the wounded person. He fulfilled the Golden Rule. By putting no limits on how far he was willing to go to help this stranger, the Samaritan demonstrated the love we should have for our neighbors. He was the example for Jesus’ command to “Go and do likewise.” Helping others may mean more than calling 911. We may need to get involved, get our hands dirty, and go the extra mile.



Why don't we become more involved in helping others? One explanation could be that we have become so smug and settled in our material luxury that we are blind to the opportunities to reach out to others. We forget about the thousands and thousands around the country and world and next door who may be starving in body and soul. Like the priest and the rabbi who passed by the injured person, we possess the attitude that what is mine is mine and I'm going to keep it.

God will get our attention in many ways. One day someone observed a wonderful lesson from the little birds hopping around in search of bits of food. Some snowbirds were busy picking up the crumbs that had been thrown out the window. One of the birds apparently had a stiff neck. Because of its injury, it could not stoop over to pick up the crumbs, so the other birds assisted by picking them up and dropping them into his open bill.

God has placed in each of us a heart that can be trained to be unselfish. Through the redeeming sacrifice of our Savior Jesus Christ Who faithfully gave His own life, we can show love to others. The love of Jesus, strengthened in us by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament, flows through us so we can show love to people around us.

Prayer: Lord, the Parable of the Good Samaritan gives us a wonderful example of how we can share the love that You have given to us. Help us to be ready and willing to come to the aid of others. Amen.

