



RENEW

EPIPHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

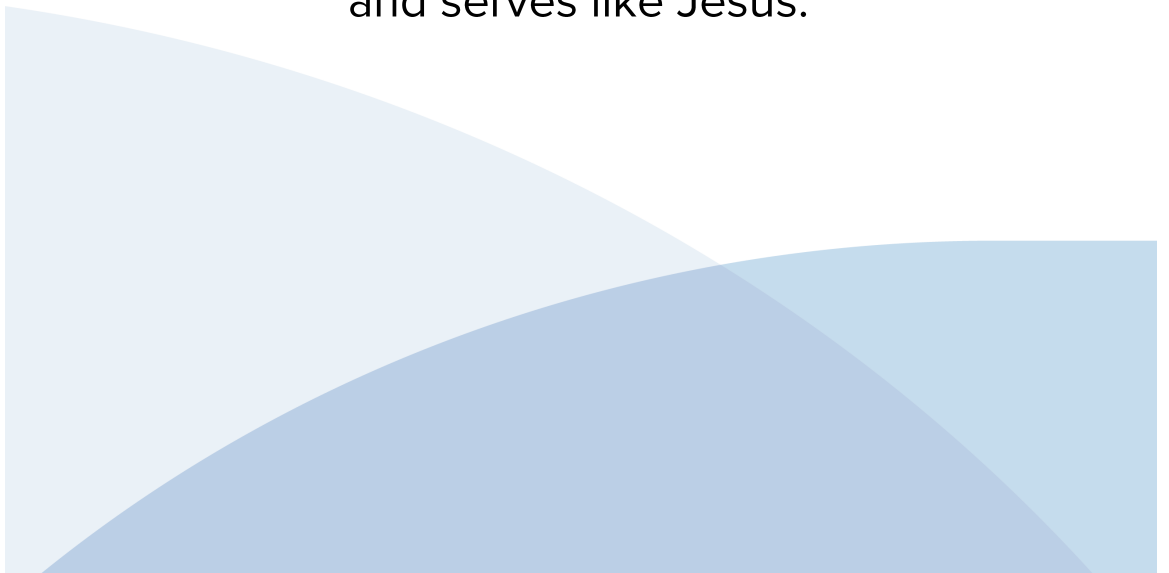
Devotions

*Therefore **we do not lose heart.** Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly **we are being renewed day by day.***

1 CORINTHIANS 4:16

We hope this devotional booklet will provide another opportunity for you to spend time in God's Word to be renewed day by day.

May God teach and train us to be people who live generously like our Savior so that His generosity shines through our lives, our families, and our congregation. We pray that we will become a renewed community that lives, gives and serves like Jesus.



God's Generosity is Stamped on His Creation

Read Psalm 24:1-2

Wow! God's generosity towards us is seen even from the very beginning! For, God made the world and all that is in it!

Have you noticed that we look at a house and we ask, "Who owns that house?" We see a new car parked in a driveway and we ask, "Whose car is that?" When someone buys a house and takes out a mortgage, he or she will often joke, "The bank and I own this house."

The language that we use leads us to believe that we are the ultimate owners of the things that are in our control. Too often, we look at our finances and possessions as if they are "mine".

Scripture says, "No. God made it all and God owns it all." This radical claim is the starting point of all the Bible has to say about the world in which we live.

God warns His people, "Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth". (Deuteronomy 8:17-18)

Whenever we use the resources of the world, we use the resources of God's world. Everything belongs to Him. We are the stewards. The treasures we enjoy have not been earned because of our own abilities.

Everything is His - Everything is built and designed for Him - We simply respond to His generosity.

How might living as if God owns everything change:

- the way we shop?
- the presents we put under the Christmas tree?
- the vacations we plan?
- our giving to the needy?

Prayer: O God, You have created the heaven and the earth and declared all things very good. Cause my heart to be thankful for all that You provide and for Your continued loving care. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Generosity is a Gift

Read 1 Peter 4:10-11

Imagine that you buy a gift for your son. After you buy that gift, it belongs to you. You have paid for it. It is yours. Then on his birthday, you wrap that gift and you will give it to your son. He unwraps it, and at that point, it belongs to him. You have given up any claim to it. What he does with the gift from that point on is not in your control - it is in his control. You hope that he will choose to use his possession in a responsible way. However, your son is not bound in any way to do this. The gift is his. He owns it.

This isn't the way it is with God and us. No such transfer of ownership occurs. God has created all that is and God continues to own all that is. Everything we have still belongs to God.

"It all belongs to God." That's the cornerstone of everything we have to say about generosity. We have the privilege to watch over that which belongs to someone else!

From Luther's Small Catechism:

I believe that God has made me and all creatures... He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life... All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

Describe what it would look like if your response to all that God gives this week is to thank and praise, serve and obey?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, lead me to daily see your gifts and to respond as You desire. Amen.

Generosity is Found in Jesus

Read Romans 5:10-11

Our God is the most generous person who ever lived. Jesus gave up all that His divinity offered to live, suffer, and die, all for us. See God's amazing love for us! He has saved us through the shed blood of His Son. Now, we are His friends instead of His enemies.

The source of our generosity is Jesus. We are generous because He was first generous to us. Our generosity stems from His.

This means that our generous lives are more than an obligation. They are more than following a list of rules handed down from on high. Rather, a generous life is the grateful response to God's indescribable gift in Jesus.

The impulse to "give back" is woven deeply into the human heart. For anyone, giving back - in response to a kind gesture or in response to help in the midst of a dire situation - is both a natural human impulse and a noble gesture.

No aspect of life is a more natural response for God's gifts to us than giving back. Giving is a privilege. It is a grateful response to the lavish gift that we have received in Jesus.

When you receive a lavish gift, do you have the impulse to give back? Why or why not?

How do you typically respond when you receive an unexpected and undeserved gift?

What does "giving back" look like as we respond to Jesus, our greatest gift?

Prayer: Lord God, we give thanks for all that You have accomplished, for us, through Your Son. Give us gratitude for the gifts that we receive and do not deserve. Direct our efforts to respond in love, to others, as You have shown love to us. Amen.

Generosity is Sacrificial

Read 2 Corinthians 8:9-15

Sacrificial generosity is in direct conflict with our American culture. Our culture maintains the myth that we must be independent, provide for ourselves and pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Our culture says that we are responsible for our own success and finds that whatever success we have is ours to keep and to use for our own desires.

Unfortunately, some believe that being generous is a matter of convenience. Others may think that we need to preserve wealth in order to meet our own needs. Many give to God after we have paid for everything else and then give him our leftovers. If our “American independent-ness” or our “discretionary sacrifice” defines our understanding of generosity, we will never experience true abundance in our congregational or individual lives.

But, as followers of Christ, we have a different perspective. We understand that everything we have is not just something we've earned or deserve. Everything we have belongs to God and is intended to be invested in the growth of His Kingdom. Our generosity seeks to be sacrificial in nature and our first fruits. I sacrifice my wants and, even some of the things that I could purchase, for the needs of others.

Each week, in worship, I am invited to be sacrificial. I have the opportunity to give an offering to God. This serves as a tool to help me avoid becoming so attached to this world and its temporary kingdoms of power, influence, and authority. This act of worship helps keep me from forgetting my true purpose: building up the eternal Kingdom of God. I am reminded that I am merely an instrument of God designed to distribute His resources for the abundant advancement of the Kingdom.

Satan seeks to frustrate the plans of God's people. As you anticipate Satan's attacks, how will he seek to hinder sacrificial giving from your life?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, lead me in sacrificing my own wants for the needs of others; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Generosity and Your Heart

Luke 12:32-34

Did you know that there is a great connection between your generosity and your heart? In Luke 12, Jesus shows our heart's role. And it's important!

Over the centuries, many people have misread these words of Jesus and imagined that they say, "For where your heart is, there your treasure will be also." You may have even heard people say, "We have to change people's hearts, and then their money will follow."

Changed hearts could lead to changed actions, but we need to recognize that this is not what Jesus says here. He says that where your treasure is - where you put your money - that is where your heart will be and reflects what we do treasure (what is important to us; what we prioritize).

We are talking about a cause-and-effect relationship. As people grow in their giving to Christ's church, they will grow in their relationship with Jesus. Thus, giving to Jesus' work will result in a heart growing close to Jesus. And giving to Jesus' work will result in my whole life being invested in His work.

In today's reading, Jesus shows that generosity begins with our actions not our thoughts. Our actions lead our thinking far more effectively than our thinking leads our actions.

For example, if I wait until I feel like giving, then I may never get to the action. If, on the other hand, I trust in God's promise and simply start giving, I will find that my attitudes toward giving will quickly change. I become invested in Him and His work around me.

What this all means is that what God's people do with their money has a profound impact on their heart and their relationship with the Lord. To put it as directly as possible - you have God's promise that, if you grow in your giving, you will grow in your relationship with Jesus.

There is an intimate connection between our treasure and our heart. Reflect on what this means for you.

At this time, where is your treasure and your heart invested?

Prayer: O God, create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me. Strengthen me, renew my actions and grant me a heart for You. Amen.

Generosity and Trust

Matthew 6:25-34

Our entire life and that of everyone else's depends on God. We receive all of our physical and spiritual blessings from Him. There is no need to be anxious. And no need to be concerned only with ourselves. So don't let the uncertainty of the future stop your generous response to His generosity.

In the Lord's Prayer, we pray that God would "give us this day our daily bread." In light of this prayer request, what does this mean? God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

What is meant by daily bread? Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout or faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.

In the past, when has God not provided for you?

Will He provide for you today? Tomorrow? How do you know?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach us to trust in You even when the future seems uncertain. Grant us contentment and the confidence that the Lord will give us what we need each day. Amen.

Generosity is Not Foolish

Read Luke 12:13-21

Before considering what Jesus has to say about this rich man, we need to recognize that in our society he would be considered a very prudent man. He has taken his wealth, set it aside to provide for his future and then plans to settle back and enjoy the fruits of his labor. He would be held up as a role model of a successful businessman. Many would be jealous of the amount of time he could spend golfing in the summer and traveling south for the winter. We would long to emulate him. Jesus' point, of course, is that this man has placed his trust in the wrong place. His life may appear elegant in the here and now, but the transitory nature of life is such that it can all be gone in a minute.

Trusting in wealth has lots of allure because this world defers to those who have accumulated much. However, we are all just one breath away from leaving this world.

Jesus wants you to have your treasure stored up with Him. Jesus wants you to be His disciple. Jesus wants you to know the eternal importance of serving God and not wealth.

In the parable, how was the rich man foolish?

If our lives do not consist of our possessions, of what do they consist?

When you die, what do you hope people will remember about you?

Prayer: Almighty God, all that we possess is from Your loving hand. Lead us to forsake all covetous desires and the excessive love of riches. Enable us to find our hope and security in You alone. Amen.

Generosity Does Not Stop

Ephesians 5:1-2, 15-21

Have you ever noticed that we learn best by watching others? By watching others, we learn how to do everything from making a grilled cheese sandwich to changing the oil in the car. So, too, with God. God says, “Imitate me, I am the Giver, the One who ‘so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son’”. (John 3:16) Stemming from love, the God who owns infinite wealth gave up the one thing that was irreplaceable, His only Son, Jesus.

Because of Jesus, we are God’s beloved children. Like little children who repeat everything that their parents say and do, we seek to imitate and pattern our lives after our Heavenly Father.

Don’t stop this journey. Imitate His heart and His walk. Let His love motivate you to share the gospel generously, to give generously, to care for others generously, and to serve in His name generously!

What routines and habits could we have that help us see God at work?

As we walk in our heavenly Father’s footsteps, what characteristics and qualities can I seek to imitate?

Looking back, what has been the greatest lesson that you've learned from this devotion?

Pray: Gracious God, bless us as individuals and as a church family. As we are renewed, lead us to rely on You each day. Equip us to share the gospel, to give sacrificially and generously, to care for others, and to serve in Your name. Amen.



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