

## *Greater: Whatever we may give, God gives us more*

Fall 2021 Stewardship Toolkit for the Eastern North Dakota Synod

# GREATER

*whatever we may give, God gives us more*



This four week fall congregational series draws upon the Revised Common Lectionary texts to build a theme of stewardship. We see clearly that the gifts God gives us are greater than all we could ever offer in response. We are called to steward--take good care of--our relationships, the earth, wealth and resources, power, courage, and ultimately the Good News of the Gospel. God entrusts these things to us. We're called to hold what we are given with open hands, ready both to give and receive, in the great equation of faith + life. It may have been a while since you've been in a math class, but let some of the concepts and language be a playful way of accounting for all that Scripture holds for us in these weeks.

In each week's toolkit you will find:

1. The emphasis text
2. A week's theme title
3. Questions for reflection (in conversation or journaling)
4. A "Story Problem" brief case study asking us to imagine showing our work in the potential faith connections we may come across in daily life
5. A "Do the Math" at home giving exercise that offers an interactive opportunity to give a special offering to your congregation each week
6. A ready to go social media post to be used any time during the week to help spread the opportunity for people to engage the theme

## Week One - The Week of Sunday, October 3rd

### *One Plus One Equals More than Two*

#### Mark 10:2 -16

2 Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" 3 He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" 4 They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." 5 But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. 6 But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 7 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, [a] 8 and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

10 Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 11 He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; 12 and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

13 People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. 14 But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. 15 Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." 16 And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Questions for Conversation or Journaling:

What do you give to your prime relationships?

What do you gain from your prime relationships?

When God adds one plus one, it somehow becomes more than two. When have you experienced the miracle of two or more people joining in something together and the whole was greater than the sum of its parts?

When have you noticed that by dividing from someone, something was actually gained?

What does this text help you notice that God has given you?

Story Problem --put the insights of the text to work as you imagine your answer:

Your friend who went through a divorce in the past comes to worship with you this week.

While sharing a meal together after worship, they mention that the Bible reading for today has them feeling a little uncomfortable. How will you respond?

Do the Math:

With those in your household, count the number of children's books or toys in your home.

Plan to give a gift to your congregation in honor of the children who have met Jesus there.

Choose an amount X the number of books/toys. (Example: 100 books X 50 cents each = \$50)

Multiplying the message:

Text for a social media post - "God's love never adds up in a way that makes sense to us. Grace does not compute. What's one thing God has added to your life that has grown goodness for you exponentially?"

Love<sup>∞</sup>

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## Week Two - The Week of Sunday, October 10th

### *A Hundredfold*

#### Mark 10:17-31

17 As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 18 Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19 You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" 20 He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." 21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." 22 When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." 26 They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" 27 Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

28 Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." 29 Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age —houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions —and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

#### Questions for Conversation or Journaling:

What do the people give to God in this text?

What does God give to the people?

What is the difference between these gifts?

What does this text inspire you to give?

What does this text help you notice that God has given you?

#### Story Problem --put the insights of the text to work as you imagine your answer:

This week you find out that you have been named as a benefactor in the will of a distant relation who has passed away. You will be receiving one million dollars! This week's reading comes to mind as you begin to decide what you will do with this inheritance. What kind of decisions will you make?

#### Do the Math:

With those in your household, count the number of people you know who are in Heaven. Choose a simple practice to remember these saints, who made it there by the grace of God through Jesus. Light a candle, write their names, blow bubbles and watch them rise, ring a bell as you say their names, or simply say a prayer. Plan to give a gift to your congregation in honor of all those who have died in the faith.

Multiplying the message:

Text for a social media post -"Jesus calls us to give away what we have generously! What are your favorite ways to share generosity? Tag your favorite extra organizations to support, and share one reason you give to our congregation."



## Week Three - The Week of Sunday, October 17th

### *Subtract to Increase*

#### Mark 10:35 -45

35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." 36 And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" 37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" 39 They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 42 So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

#### Questions for Conversation or Journaling:

What do you long for that you do not have?

How does wanting that which you do not have affect you?

What would you need to subtract from your life in order to be a better follower of Jesus?

Who has served you lately and whom have you served?

What does this text help you notice that God has given you?

#### Story Problem --put the insights of the text to work as you imagine your answer:

Two children you know are arguing with each other about who should be first to do something fun. In exasperation the one losing the argument declares boastfully, "Fine! But remember, Jesus says, 'The last will be first and the first will be last!'" Noticing the way this phrase is being misused as a threat, and in light of this week's text about servanthood, how would you explain to these children what is meant by becoming one another's servants?

#### Do the Math:

With those in your household, count the number of places to sit you have in your home.

Plan to give a gift to your congregation in honor of all of the ways your community of faith serves others. Choose an amount X the number of seats. (Example: 18 seats X \$1 each = \$18)

#### Multiplying the message:

Text for a social media post - “How many places to sit do you have in your home? Just for fun, count them up, and give a dollar per seat to our congregation in thanks for all of the ways our community of faith serves others.”

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## Week Four - The Week of October 24th

### *Exponential Returns*

#### Psalm 126

- 1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dream.
- 2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter,  
and our tongue with shouts of joy;  
then it was said among the nations,  
“The Lord has done great things for them.”
- 3 The Lord has done great things for us,  
and we rejoiced.
- 4 Restore our fortunes, O Lord,  
like the watercourses in the Negeb.
- 5 May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy.
- 6 Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves.

#### Questions for Conversation or Journaling:

What are your dreams: for your self, your family, your community, our world?

What things have added up to cause laughter or shouts of joy this week?

What losses in or around you are causing tears or weeping?

Name some great things that God has done, for you or as witnessed in the Bible.

What does this text help you notice that God has given you?

Story Problem --put the insights of the text to work as you imagine your answer:

At work or school, you notice someone who is hiding tears. You have a moment and the opportunity to spend a little time with them. What would you say or do in order to join them in their sadness and share some hope?

#### Do the Math:

With those in your household, find paper and a writing utensil. Brainstorm a list of the great things the Lord has done for you. In thanks for the good God continually gives, even in seasons of weeping and tears, plan to give a gift to your congregation. God's goodness is immeasurable, but what amount can you give to represent each item on your list?

#### Multiplying the message:

Text for a social media post -

“Psalm 126 (from the Message)

It seemed like a dream, too good to be true,  
when God returned Zion’s exiles.

We laughed, we sang,  
we couldn’t believe our good fortune.

We were the talk of the nations—  
“God was wonderful to them!”

God was wonderful to us;  
we are one happy people.

And now, God, do it again—

bring rains to our drought-stricken lives  
So those who planted their crops in despair  
will shout “Yes!” at the harvest,

So those who went off with heavy hearts  
will come home laughing, with armloads of blessing.

What has you shouting for joy lately? What brings tears and weeping?”

“ And now, God, do it again—  
bring rains to our drought-stricken lives  
So those who planted their crops in despair  
will shout “Yes!” at the harvest,  
So those who went off with heavy hearts  
will come home laughing, with armloads of blessing.”

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