



DAILY DEVOTIONAL

The Wealth of Love

A Daily Devotional on Generosity, Stewardship, and the Life and Music of Dolly Parton

Week 1: Coat of Many Colors: The Wealth of Love

September 20-26, 2026

Theme Scripture: *"Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."* Luke 12:15

Week's Big Idea: Stewardship begins when we stop measuring abundance by how much we possess.

Dolly Parton grew up in a large family in the mountains of East Tennessee where money was scarce, but love was abundant. One of the defining stories of her childhood became the inspiration for *Coat of Many Colors*. Her mother stitched together scraps of fabric to make young Dolly a coat. Others might have seen poverty. Dolly saw the hands and love of her mother. That childhood memory gives us a question that will guide us this week: **Who gets to define wealth?** Jesus asked essentially the same question.

Sunday, September 20

Who Gets to Define Wealth?

Scripture: Luke 12:13-21

Reflection

Jesus tells the story of a man who appears to have succeeded at everything. His land produces abundantly. His barns are overflowing. He has accumulated so much that he has nowhere to put it all. By almost every economic measurement, this man is wealthy. So he decides to build bigger barns. Then he says to himself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." There is only one problem. Jesus calls him a fool.

Jesus does not call him foolish because he is successful, because he owns property, or because he has accumulated resources. His foolishness is that everything in his world revolves around himself. My crops. My barns. My grain. My goods. My future. There is no neighbor in his vision. There is no struggling family, hungry child, community, gratitude, or generosity. There is only himself. Then Jesus turns everything upside down by asking what it means to be "rich toward God."

Dolly Parton's childhood offers an interesting contrast. Her family had very little materially. Yet when Dolly has described those years, she has repeatedly spoken about

the richness of family, faith, music, humor, and love. Her *Coat of Many Colors* became a symbol of that truth. The coat had little monetary value. It was made from scraps. But its value could never have been measured by its price. It had been made by someone who loved her.

That is the strange arithmetic of the Kingdom of God. Something inexpensive can be priceless. Someone with very little can be extraordinarily rich. Someone possessing almost everything can still be desperately poor. Jesus asks us to reconsider the measurements we use for our lives. Perhaps wealth is not simply what we have accumulated. Perhaps wealth is what we have loved, what we have shared, who we have helped, and whose lives are better because we were here.

Dolly once said, **“If you see someone without a smile, give them yours.”** That is stewardship too. You may not have a barn filled with grain, but you have something to give.

Prayer

Generous God, forgive me when I measure my life by what I possess rather than by how deeply I love. Teach me to recognize the abundance already surrounding me. Make me rich in compassion, rich in generosity, rich in friendship, and rich toward You. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Make two lists today. On the first, write five things you own that you value. On the second, write five things money could never buy that make your life rich. Spend more time thanking God for the second list.

Monday, September 21

A Coat Made From Scraps

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 13

Reflection

The story behind Dolly Parton’s *Coat of Many Colors* begins with scraps. Her mother took pieces of cloth and lovingly stitched them together into a coat for her daughter. Materially, it was not much. Emotionally, it was everything. Dolly went to school proud of that coat because she understood something her classmates did not. They saw scraps, but she saw love. They saw poverty, but she saw her mother. They measured the coat by what it cost. Dolly measured it by what it meant.

We make the same mistake all the time. We confuse price with value. A child’s handmade card may be worth pennies in materials and yet become something a parent

treasures for decades. A meal delivered to someone grieving may not cost much, but its value cannot be calculated. An hour spent sitting beside someone in the hospital does not appear on a financial statement, but it may be one of the greatest gifts that person receives.

Paul tells us that without love, even our most impressive accomplishments become empty. We can possess knowledge, faith, eloquence, and generosity itself, but if love is absent, something essential is missing. Stewardship therefore begins deeper than money. It begins with love.

Why do we give? Why do we serve? Why do we volunteer? Why do we support the ministries of the church? We do these things because we love. We love God. We love our neighbors. We love children we may never meet. We love people who are hungry. We love people who are lonely. We love people who are searching for a place where they will be welcomed, included, and cherished.

Dolly's coat was stitched together with scraps, but love transformed those scraps into treasure. Imagine what God can do with the pieces of our lives when they are offered in love.

Prayer

God of love, take the ordinary pieces of my life and use them for something beautiful. Teach me that the greatest value of anything I possess is found in how it can be used to love You and love others. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Give something today whose primary value is not financial. Give your attention, encouragement, time, patience, or presence to someone who needs it.

Tuesday, September 22

Poor and Yet Rich

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

Reflection

One of the most surprising passages about generosity in Scripture concerns people who did not have much to give. Paul describes the churches in Macedonia as experiencing "extreme poverty." Yet he also describes them as overflowing with generosity. Those two things do not seem to belong together. Poverty and generosity. Scarcity and abundance. Yet Paul had discovered that generosity is not determined solely by what people possess. It is shaped by the heart.

Dolly Parton has frequently spoken about growing up poor. She was one of twelve children, and the family lived simply in rural Tennessee. Yet her memories are not simply stories of deprivation. They are filled with music, faith, family, storytelling, laughter, and love. She has often expressed the idea that although her family was poor, they did not understand themselves primarily through what they lacked.

That distinction matters. Our culture constantly tells us that we need more. A larger house. A newer car. Better clothes. More savings. More status. More. There is nothing wrong with enjoying good things. But there is something spiritually dangerous about believing that abundance always exists somewhere beyond what we currently possess. Eventually “more” becomes enough only until we discover something else we want.

Christian gratitude interrupts that cycle. Gratitude says, “Look at what God has already given.” Generosity takes the next step. Generosity says, “Because I have received, I can share.”

Dolly once said, **“You can be rich in spirit, kindness, love and all those things that you can’t put a dollar sign on.”** That sounds remarkably close to Jesus. There are forms of wealth the world cannot measure, and sometimes the richest people in the room are the ones who understand that best.

Prayer

God of abundance, open my eyes to the riches I overlook. Deliver me from constantly comparing what I have with what someone else possesses. Give me a grateful heart and a generous spirit. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Before purchasing anything unnecessary today, pause and ask yourself, “Do I need more, or do I need to appreciate what I already have?”

Wednesday, September 23

Enough

Scripture: Philippians 4:10-13

Reflection

Paul writes something extraordinary from prison: “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.” Notice the word “learned.” Contentment did not come naturally to Paul. It does not come naturally to most of us either. We learn it.

Our culture trains us in the opposite direction. Advertising survives by convincing us that something is missing. You need this. You deserve that. Your life would be better if only

you owned something newer, bigger, faster, or more impressive. Then along comes the Gospel with one wonderfully disruptive word: enough.

Dolly Parton's life contains an interesting tension. She became enormously successful after growing up with very little. She enjoys the theatricality, clothes, rhinestones, wigs, and larger than life image that became part of her public persona. She can laugh about it. One of her most famous lines is, **"It costs a lot of money to look this cheap."**

There is wisdom hidden inside the joke. Dolly knows the difference between the image and the person. The rhinestones are fun. They are not the source of her worth. That distinction matters for us. Possessions are not evil. Enjoying beautiful things is not sinful. The problem begins when we ask possessions to tell us who we are.

Your house cannot tell you your worth. Your bank account cannot tell you your worth. Your clothes cannot tell you your worth. God already has. You are beloved. When we finally believe that, something remarkable happens. We become free. We are free to enjoy what we have, free to share what we have, free to stop proving ourselves, and free to say, "Enough."

Prayer

God of grace, teach me the freedom of contentment. Help me enjoy the blessings You have given without allowing them to define me. Remind me that my deepest worth comes from being Your beloved child. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Choose one thing today that you usually take for granted and intentionally enjoy it with gratitude.

Thursday, September 24

The Riches We Leave Behind

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-21

Reflection

Jesus asks us to think about treasure. Not whether we will have treasure, but where we will place it. "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Eventually everything we accumulate will belong to someone else. Someone else will live in our house. Someone else will own our furniture. Someone else may drive our car. Someone will eventually sort through the possessions we spent a lifetime collecting. That realization is not meant to make life depressing. It is meant to make life clear.

What survives us? Love does. Generosity does. The lives we touched do. The people we encouraged do. The children we helped do. The communities we strengthened do.

Dolly Parton once said, **“If you see somebody without a smile, give ’em yours!”** It sounds simple, but perhaps eternity is built from simple acts of love. A smile, a meal, a book, a scholarship, a hospital visit, a listening ear, or a church that tells someone who has been rejected elsewhere, “There is a place for you here.” Those things may never appear on a balance sheet, but Jesus calls them treasure.

We spend much of life accumulating things we cannot keep. Stewardship invites us to invest in things we cannot lose.

Prayer

Eternal God, help me invest my life in what lasts. Teach me to treasure people more than possessions and love more than status. May the legacy I leave behind be measured by lives touched through Your grace. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Ask yourself this question: “If people remembered only one thing about the way I lived, what would I hope they remembered?”

Friday, September 25

Gratitude Turns What We Have Into Abundance

Scripture: John 6:5-13

Reflection

Five loaves. Two fish. Thousands of hungry people. It does not look like enough. The disciples immediately begin calculating the shortage. Jesus begins with gratitude. He takes the bread and gives thanks. Then somehow, in the hands of Christ, what seemed insufficient becomes abundance.

There is something deeply important here for stewardship. We usually begin with what we lack. We do it personally, and we do it as churches. We say we do not have enough money, enough volunteers, enough young people, enough time, or enough resources. Jesus asks another question: “What do you have?”

That question can change everything.

Dolly Parton’s story began in a small cabin in the mountains of Tennessee. She did not begin with wealth or connections. She had a voice. She had stories. She had determination. She had faith. She had a family that filled her imagination with music.

She used what she had. Eventually, what she had became something she could use to bless millions of others.

That is stewardship. We stop obsessing over what we lack and begin offering what we have. God can do remarkable things with five loaves and two fish. God can do remarkable things with a small church. God can do remarkable things with one generous person.

The miracle begins when what we have is placed into the hands of Christ.

Prayer

Jesus, forgive me when I focus so much on what I lack that I fail to recognize what You have already placed in my hands. Take my gifts, resources, time, and abilities and multiply them for Your purposes. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Make a list titled "What I Have to Give." Do not limit it to money. Include your abilities, experiences, relationships, time, compassion, knowledge, and faith.

Saturday, September 26

The Wealth of Love

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Reflection

At the end of the week, we return to our original question: Who gets to define wealth?

Our culture has an answer. Jesus has another.

Paul tells Timothy to teach people who possess material wealth not to place their hope in wealth, which is uncertain, but in God. Then he tells them how to become truly rich. Be rich in good deeds. Be generous. Be willing to share. There it is. The Christian definition of wealth.

Dolly Parton's life moved from poverty in the mountains of Tennessee to extraordinary success. But one of the most compelling parts of her story is what she chose to do with that success. She gave back. She invested in children. She supported communities. She helped people affected by disasters. She used what she had gained to create opportunities for others.

Dolly once said, **"You can give what you've got. It doesn't have to be money. You can give your time. You can give your talent."** That is stewardship.

Some can give money. Some can give time. Some can teach. Some can sing. Some can cook. Some can repair things. Some can organize. Some can encourage. Some can pray. Everyone has something.

Perhaps that is the great spiritual lesson hidden inside a little coat sewn together from scraps. The world saw something cheap. A child saw something priceless because love had transformed it.

That is what God does with our lives. We bring our scraps, our gifts, our time, our resources, and our imperfect selves, and we place them in God's hands. Love stitches them together. Grace transforms them. Somehow God makes something beautiful.

We discover that we were richer than we ever realized, not because of what we possessed, but because we had something to give.

Prayer

Generous God, thank You for every gift You have placed in my life. Teach me to measure abundance differently. Make me rich in love, compassion, kindness, justice, and generosity. Take everything I have and everything I am and use it to bless others. May my life become a testimony that the greatest treasures are the ones we share. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Complete these sentences in your journal: **"I am richer than I realized because..."** and **"This week I can share that abundance by..."** Carry your answers with you into worship tomorrow.

Week 2: What Would Dolly Do?

September 27-October 3, 2026

Theme Scripture: *"But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him."* Luke 10:33

Week's Big Idea: Generosity begins when another person's need matters enough to interrupt our lives.

Dolly Parton's generosity has never been limited to writing checks. Again and again, she has used her success, influence, time, and resources to help other people. That makes her life an interesting companion to Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan did not merely feel sorry for the wounded man. He stopped, changed his plans, used his own resources, and became personally involved. This week we will ask a playful question with a serious spiritual purpose: **What would Dolly do?** More importantly, what would Jesus have us do?

Sunday, September 27

Will You Stop?

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37

Reflection

The most important moment in the parable of the Good Samaritan may be the moment when someone finally stops. A man lies wounded beside the road. A priest sees him and passes by. A Levite sees him and passes by. We are not told exactly why they kept going. Perhaps they were afraid. Perhaps they were busy. Perhaps they convinced themselves that someone else would help. Whatever their reasons, the result was the same. They saw suffering and continued with their lives.

Then a Samaritan comes along. Jesus tells us that when he saw the wounded man, he had compassion. But compassion alone did not save the man. The Samaritan stopped. That is where generosity begins.

We often think of stewardship primarily in terms of what we put in an offering plate or give online. Those things matter. Churches cannot minister without resources. But Jesus gives us a much larger picture of stewardship. The Samaritan gives his time, attention, transportation, supplies, and money. He gives up the convenience of continuing his journey uninterrupted. In other words, he gives himself.

Dolly Parton's life offers us a modern illustration of that kind of generosity. As her success grew, she could have simply enjoyed everything she had earned. Instead, she repeatedly looked back toward the communities and people who had shaped her life

and asked what she could do. That instinct is beautifully captured in one of her observations about leadership: **“If your actions create a legacy that inspires others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, then you are an excellent leader.”**

That kind of leadership begins with noticing people. Jesus' parable asks us an uncomfortable question. Is another person's need capable of interrupting my schedule? It is easy to love humanity in general. Loving the person lying beside our particular road is harder. Someone needs a conversation when we are busy. Someone needs transportation when it is inconvenient. Someone needs help when our budget is already tight. Someone needs patience when ours is running out. Someone needs us to stop.

The priest saw. The Levite saw. The Samaritan saw. Only one allowed what he saw to change what he did. Jesus concludes the story with three simple words: “Go and do likewise.”

Prayer

Compassionate God, open my eyes to the people beside the roads I travel every day. Forgive me when I see suffering but remain too busy, distracted, or comfortable to stop. Give me a generous heart that is willing to be interrupted by love. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Pay particular attention to interruptions today. When someone interrupts your plans, pause before becoming frustrated and ask, “Could this be an opportunity to love my neighbor?”

Monday, September 28

Compassion Has Hands

Scripture: James 2:14-17

Reflection

It is possible to care deeply about something and still do nothing about it. We can watch suffering on television and feel terrible. We can read about hunger and feel concerned. We can hear about loneliness and feel sympathetic. We can learn about injustice and feel angry. Those feelings matter because compassion begins in the heart, but biblical compassion never stays there.

James asks what good it does to encounter someone without adequate clothing or food and simply say, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” while doing nothing to meet the person's physical needs. Love eventually has to grow hands.

Dolly Parton's public life offers many examples of that movement from concern to action. She has used the resources produced by her music and business success to support literacy, education, health care, disaster recovery, and communities in need. That is what generosity does. It asks, "What can I actually do?"

Sometimes we cannot solve the entire problem, and that can become an excuse for doing nothing. I cannot end world hunger, so why help one hungry person? I cannot solve homelessness, so why help one family? I cannot fix the education system, so why help one child learn to read? I cannot eliminate loneliness, so why visit one person?

Jesus never asks us to solve every problem. Jesus asks us to love our neighbor. The Good Samaritan could not make the road safe for every traveler, but he could help the wounded person lying in front of him. Sometimes that is where the Kingdom of God begins, with one person, one need, one act of generosity, and one person willing to stop.

Prayer

God of compassion, move my faith from good intentions into loving action. Show me what I can do with the resources, abilities, and opportunities You have placed before me. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Identify one need you have noticed recently. Instead of simply thinking about it, take one practical step today to help.

Tuesday, September 29

Give What You Have

Scripture: Acts 3:1-10

Reflection

Peter and John encounter a man begging outside the temple. He asks them for money, but Peter gives him a surprising answer: "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you." Then Peter offers what he has. That sentence contains an entire theology of stewardship: **What I have, I give you.**

Too often we begin generosity by thinking about what we do not have. We tell ourselves that we do not have enough money, enough time, enough training, enough influence, or enough knowledge. We convince ourselves that someone else could do more. Perhaps they could, but the question is not what someone else possesses. The question is what God has placed in our hands.

Dolly Parton had a voice. She had the ability to write songs. She had an extraordinary gift for connecting with people. Over time, those gifts produced financial resources and influence, and she found ways to use those things too. But it began with using what she had. Dolly once said, **“Find out who you are and do it on purpose.”**

There is a stewardship lesson hidden inside those words. God has made each of us differently. Some people have financial resources while others have time. Some have professional skills while others have enormous compassion. Some can teach, repair, cook, sing, or organize. Some are wonderful listeners. Some have lived through experiences that allow them to understand another person's pain.

The Church becomes powerful when everyone stops worrying about what they cannot contribute and begins offering what they can. You have something. The question is whether you are willing to give it.

Prayer

Generous God, help me recognize the gifts You have placed within me. Keep me from comparing myself with others. Show me how to offer what I have in service to someone who needs it. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Finish this sentence: **“What I have, I can give.”** Then name one specific gift, skill, resource, or experience you can use to help another person this week.

Wednesday, September 30

Generosity Costs Something

Scripture: Luke 10:33-35

Reflection

The Samaritan's compassion had a price. He used his oil and wine. He placed the wounded man on his own animal, which probably meant that he walked. He brought him to an inn, stayed with him, paid the innkeeper, and promised to cover any additional expenses. This was not convenient generosity. It cost something.

We sometimes imagine generosity as giving from whatever is left over. If we have extra time, we will volunteer. If we have extra money, we will give. If we have extra energy, we will help. But Jesus describes generosity differently. Generosity often involves sacrifice.

Dolly Parton's giving is meaningful partly because she could have chosen to use those resources entirely for herself. Instead, she has repeatedly directed substantial

resources toward other people. She once said, **“I think everybody should be allowed to be who they are and to love who they love.”** Generosity begins with recognizing the dignity of another human being. Once we see someone as our neighbor, their suffering can no longer be dismissed as someone else's problem.

Christian stewardship asks us to consider what we are willing to sacrifice so that someone else can flourish. Maybe it is money. Maybe it is time. Maybe it is convenience. Maybe it is giving up the need to always have our own way. Maybe it is opening our church to people who have been told elsewhere that they do not belong.

Love costs something. The cross makes that unmistakably clear. Yet the strange truth of the Gospel is that what we give in love often becomes the very thing that makes our lives richer.

Prayer

Sacrificial God, teach me generosity that goes beyond convenience. Give me courage to share not simply from my excess, but from my heart. Help me recognize the sacred worth of every person I encounter. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Give up one convenience today for the benefit of someone else. Notice how the experience changes you.

Thursday, October 1

Remember Where You Came From

Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:10-18

Reflection

Moses gives Israel an unusual warning as the people prepare to enter a land of abundance. He tells them not to forget. When their stomachs are full, they must not forget. When their houses become comfortable, they must not forget. When their possessions increase, they must not forget. They are to remember where they came from, remember who sustained them, and remember that what they have is ultimately a gift.

Success creates a peculiar spiritual danger. When we have struggled, we remember how much we need others. When life becomes comfortable, we can begin imagining that we accomplished everything alone.

Dolly Parton has never allowed her public story to become disconnected from the mountains of East Tennessee where it began. Her childhood, family, faith, and

community remain woven through her music and philanthropy. She once said, **“You can never get enough books into the hands of enough children.”** That conviction eventually became one of the defining expressions of her generosity. Her concern for literacy was not abstract. It was personal. She remembered where she came from, including her father's inability to read and write, and used her success to create opportunities for children.

There is something deeply biblical about that. God tells Israel to remember. Remember when you needed help. Remember the people who believed in you. Remember the teachers who encouraged you. Remember the church that loved you. Remember the friend who stayed. Remember the person who gave when you had nothing to give back.

Memory can become a source of generosity. When we remember how much we have received, gratitude begins asking how we might give.

Prayer

Faithful God, keep me from forgetting the people and experiences that helped shape my life. Thank You for every person who encouraged, taught, supported, and loved me. Let gratitude for what I have received become generosity toward others. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Think of one person who helped you become who you are. If possible, contact that person and thank them. If they are no longer living, thank God for their influence and honor them by helping someone else.

Friday, October 2

Be the One Who Helps

Scripture: Proverbs 3:27-28

Reflection

Proverbs tells us, “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act.” Those last words matter: **when it is in your power to act.**

There will always be things beyond our control. We cannot prevent every tragedy, heal every disease, or eliminate every injustice by ourselves. But there are almost always things within our power. We can feed someone. We can encourage someone. We can give. We can listen. We can advocate. We can welcome. We can show up.

One of Dolly Parton's most memorable quotes says, **“The way I see it, if you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain.”** We usually hear that as encouragement to persevere through our own difficulties, but perhaps it can also challenge us to stand in

someone else's rain. When another person is going through the storm, generosity does not merely shout encouragement from somewhere dry. It walks into the rain.

The Good Samaritan did not say, "I hope things get better." He helped make things better. There are times when prayer itself moves us toward action. We pray for hungry people, then God asks what is in our pantry. We pray for lonely people, then God reminds us of someone we have not called. We pray for children, then God asks how we support ministries that nurture them. We pray for justice, then God asks whether we will speak.

Sometimes we discover that we are part of the answer to the prayer we have been praying.

Prayer

God of mercy, show me what is within my power to do. Keep me from becoming overwhelmed by everything I cannot change. Give me courage to do the good that is directly before me. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Ask yourself today, "**What good is within my power to do right now?**" Then do one thing.

Saturday, October 3

Go and Do Likewise

Scripture: Luke 10:36-37

Reflection

Jesus ends the parable with a question: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The answer is obvious: "The one who had mercy on him." Then Jesus says, "Go and do likewise."

Jesus turns neighbor from a noun into a way of living. The question is no longer simply, "Who is my neighbor?" The deeper question becomes, "Will I become a neighbor?"

That brings us back to our playful question for this week: **What would Dolly do?** Dolly Parton's public legacy of generosity gives us plenty of examples. She would use what she had. She would remember where she came from. She would invest in children. She would help communities in crisis. She would use success as an opportunity to open doors for someone else.

But ultimately, our calling is not to become Dolly. Our calling is to follow Jesus. Dolly's example is valuable because it reminds us what generosity can look like when compassion becomes action. The Good Samaritan shows us something even deeper. Love stops. Love notices. Love gets involved. Love shares. Love sacrifices. Love crosses boundaries. Love does not ask whether the wounded person deserves help. Love asks what can be done.

That is stewardship. It is not simply deciding how much of our money belongs to God. It is recognizing that our whole life belongs to God. Our calendars, bank accounts, abilities, homes, voices, influence, compassion, and our very selves are gifts that can be used for God's purposes.

Dolly once said, **“If you don't like the road you're walking, start paving another one.”** Perhaps that is exactly what Christians are called to do. When the road is marked by selfishness, we pave generosity. When the road is marked by exclusion, we pave welcome. When the road is marked by indifference, we pave compassion. When the road is marked by loneliness, we pave community. When the road is marked by suffering, we stop and do what we can.

Jesus still says to us what he said so long ago: “Go and do likewise.”

Prayer

Lord Jesus, make me a neighbor. Give me eyes that notice, a heart that cares, hands that serve, and a spirit willing to be interrupted. Teach me to use everything You have entrusted to me for the good of others. May our church become a community known not simply for what we believe, but for the way we love. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Complete these sentences in your journal: **“This week God interrupted me through...”** and **“God is teaching me to become a neighbor by...”** Then choose one intentional act of generosity to carry into the coming week.

Week 3: Use What You've Got

October 4-10, 2026

Theme Scripture: *"We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us."*
Romans 12:6

Week's Big Idea: Your gifts belong to you, but they are not only for you.

Dolly Parton's story is a wonderful example of what can happen when someone recognizes the gifts they have been given and decides to use them. She began with a voice, an imagination, a gift for storytelling, determination, faith, and a remarkable ability to write songs. Those gifts eventually opened doors to resources and influence she could also use for others. Paul reminds us in Romans 12 that God has given every person gifts, and those gifts are given within community so that we can bless one another. This week, instead of asking what we do not have, we will ask a much more important question: **What has God already placed in my hands?**

Sunday, October 4

Use What You've Got

Scripture: Romans 12:3-8

Reflection

One of the easiest mistakes we make is comparing our gifts with someone else's. We look at another person's abilities and think, "I could never do that." Someone else sings better, speaks better, cooks better, teaches better, understands technology better, has more money, has more time, or seems more talented. Before long, comparison convinces us that what we have to offer does not matter.

Paul gives us a completely different way of thinking. He tells the church that we have different gifts according to the grace God has given us. The point is not that everyone should have the same gift. The beauty of Christian community is that we do not.

Dolly Parton did not become Dolly Parton by trying to become someone else. She recognized the gifts she had and used them. She wrote songs. She sang. She told stories. She developed an unmistakable style. She worked hard. Over time, those gifts created opportunities that allowed her to use other resources for the good of others.

One of Dolly's most familiar sayings captures this wonderfully: **"Find out who you are and do it on purpose."** There is something deeply spiritual in that idea when we understand ourselves as people created by God. We do not need to become someone else in order to serve God. We need to become more fully the people God created us to be.

Paul says that if your gift is serving, serve. If it is teaching, teach. If it is encouraging, encourage. If it is giving, give generously. If it is showing mercy, do it cheerfully. In other words, stop worrying about somebody else's gift and use yours.

Stewardship begins with recognizing that everything we have is a gift. Your voice is a gift. Your experience is a gift. Your education is a gift. Your compassion is a gift. Your creativity is a gift. Your time is a gift. Your financial resources are a gift. Even some of the difficult experiences you have survived may become gifts because they allow you to understand someone else's pain.

The Church does not need everyone to be the same. The Church needs everyone to bring what they have.

You have something God can use.

Use what you've got.

Prayer

Generous God, thank You for creating me with gifts that are uniquely mine. Free me from comparing myself with others and help me recognize what You have placed within me. Show me how to use my gifts faithfully, joyfully, and generously for the good of others. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Write down five gifts God has given you. Do not limit yourself to talents. Include experiences, relationships, resources, personality traits, and things you have learned. Ask God how each one might bless someone else.

Monday, October 5

Your Voice Matters

Scripture: Psalm 96:1-3

Reflection

Dolly Parton's most obvious gift is her voice. Long before there were awards, television appearances, businesses, or worldwide fame, there was a little girl in the mountains of Tennessee who loved to sing.

Imagine if she had decided her voice did not matter.

Imagine if she had believed that because she came from a poor family in rural Tennessee, nobody would ever want to hear what she had to say.

Instead, she used her voice.

There is an important lesson there for all of us, even if we cannot carry a tune in a bucket.

Every person has a voice.

Your voice is the way you communicate your faith, values, compassion, experience, and love to the world. Some people use their voices from pulpits. Some use them in classrooms. Some use them around dinner tables. Some use them in hospital rooms. Some use them when they speak up for someone being treated unfairly. Some use them when they tell a frightened person, “You are not alone.”

Dolly once said, “**I always just thought if you see somebody without a smile, give 'em yours!**” A smile is one kind of voice. Encouragement is another. Advocacy is another. Sometimes simply telling another person, “I see you, and you matter,” can change a life.

Scripture repeatedly shows God using voices that people might have dismissed. Moses thought he could not speak well enough. Jeremiah thought he was too young. Mary was an ordinary young woman from Nazareth. Peter was a fisherman. Yet God used their voices.

Perhaps the question is not whether your voice is important enough. Perhaps the question is whether you are willing to use it.

There are people who need encouragement.

There are injustices that need to be challenged.

There are stories of grace that need to be told.

There are lonely people who need to hear their names spoken with love.

Your voice matters.

Use it well.

Prayer

God of truth and grace, thank You for giving me a voice. Teach me when to speak, when to listen, and how to use my words to encourage, heal, challenge, and love. May my voice reflect the compassion of Christ. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Use your voice intentionally today to encourage someone. Tell them specifically what you appreciate about them or how their life has made a difference.

Tuesday, October 6

Your Story Is a Gift

Scripture: Psalm 107:1-2

Reflection

Dolly Parton has spent much of her career telling stories. Some became songs. Some became movies. Some became stories she told in interviews. Again and again, she returned to the people, places, struggles, humor, faith, and memories that shaped her.

She did not hide where she came from.

She used it.

That is an important spiritual lesson because sometimes we assume that only the impressive parts of our lives are useful to God. We want to tell the stories where we succeeded, overcame, accomplished, or won.

But some of our greatest gifts come from the places where life hurt.

The person who has experienced grief may know how to sit quietly beside someone mourning.

The person who has struggled financially may understand the dignity of someone asking for help.

The person who has experienced rejection may become especially passionate about creating places of welcome.

The person who has failed may become unusually gracious toward someone trying again.

The person who has known loneliness may notice the person sitting alone.

Your story contains gifts.

Even the chapters you would rather erase may become places where grace enters someone else's life.

The psalmist says, “Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story.” That does not mean pretending everything has always been wonderful. Redemption means God can take what has happened and create something life giving from it.

Dolly has said, “**Storms make trees take deeper roots.**” That does not mean storms are pleasant or that suffering is good. It means difficulty can deepen us. What we survive can shape the compassion, wisdom, and strength we eventually offer to others.

Never underestimate what God can do with your story.

Prayer

Redeeming God, thank You for being present in every chapter of my life. Help me see even my difficult experiences as places where Your grace can bring healing and hope. Show me how my story might encourage someone else. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Think about one difficult experience that taught you something important about life, faith, or compassion. Ask God whether there is someone who might benefit from hearing that part of your story.

Wednesday, October 7

Don't Bury Your Gift

Scripture: Matthew 25:14-30

Reflection

Jesus tells a story about a master who entrusts resources to three servants. Two of them use what they have been given. One buries his gift in the ground.

Why?

Fear.

“I was afraid,” he says.

Fear buries a lot of gifts.

We fear failure. We fear criticism. We fear embarrassment. We fear that someone else is better. We fear we are too old, too young, too inexperienced, or too late.

So we bury what God has given us.

One of Dolly Parton's most quoted pieces of advice is, **“If you don't like the road you're walking, start paving another one.”** That kind of thinking requires courage. It recognizes that sometimes we cannot wait until circumstances are perfect. We have to begin with what we have and take the next faithful step.

The tragedy of the servant in Jesus' story is not that he lacked a gift. He had been given something valuable. The tragedy is that fear prevented him from using it.

Churches can make the same mistake.

We can become so afraid of failure that we stop trying new things. We can protect what we have so carefully that we forget why God gave it to us.

Stewardship requires a certain amount of holy courage.

God has given us resources so they can accomplish something.

God has given us buildings so ministry can happen in them.

God has given us money so it can serve God's purposes.

God has given us voices so truth can be spoken.

God has given us love so someone can receive it.

The greatest tragedy is not having little.

It is burying what we have.

Prayer

Courageous God, forgive me for the gifts I have buried because of fear. Give me courage to use what You have entrusted to me. Help me risk faithfully, love boldly, and serve generously. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Identify one gift, idea, or calling you have been afraid to use. Take one small step today toward bringing it out of hiding.

Thursday, October 8

Make Somebody's Life Better

Scripture: 1 Peter 4:10

Reflection

Peter writes, "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others." That sentence gives us one of the clearest definitions of Christian stewardship in the Bible.

Use what you have to serve someone else.

The purpose of a gift is not simply self fulfillment. Gifts create responsibility.

Dolly Parton's talent brought her success, but her story becomes much more interesting when we consider what she did with that success. Her music generated wealth. Her fame generated influence. Her business ventures generated resources. She could then use those things to create opportunities for others.

This is where Christian stewardship challenges the culture around us. Our culture often asks, "What can my gifts do for me?" The Gospel asks, "What can my gifts do for others?"

Your education can help someone.

Your professional experience can help someone.

Your kitchen can feed someone.

Your car can transport someone.

Your extra bedroom can welcome someone.

Your financial resources can support ministry.

Your compassion can comfort someone.

Your vote can express concern for your neighbors.

Your influence can open a door for someone who has been overlooked.

Your time can remind a lonely person that they matter.

Dolly once said, **"If your actions create a legacy that inspires others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, then you are an excellent leader."**

Perhaps stewardship asks a similar question.

Will the way I use my life help someone else become more?

That is a much richer definition of success.

Prayer

Serving God, teach me to see my gifts as opportunities to love. Show me someone whose life can become a little better because I was willing to share what You have given me. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Choose one resource you possess and intentionally use it for someone else's benefit today.

Friday, October 9

There Is Room for Your Gift

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:14-27

Reflection

Paul imagines the Church as a human body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you." Every part matters because every part contributes something different.

Imagine a church where everyone had the same gift.

Everyone wanted to preach, but nobody wanted to prepare the communion table.

Everyone wanted to sing, but nobody wanted to visit the sick.

Everyone wanted to lead, but nobody wanted to serve.

Everyone wanted recognition, but nobody wanted to clean up afterward.

That would not be a healthy body.

The beauty of the Church is its diversity.

Dolly Parton once said, **"The magic is inside you. There ain't no crystal ball."**

Whatever we think of the playful wording, there is something useful in the reminder that we often overlook what is already within us.

God has placed gifts throughout the congregation.

Some gifts stand behind microphones.

Others stand behind casseroles.

Some gifts appear in committee meetings.

Others appear when someone quietly takes the hand of a grieving person.

Some people give large financial gifts.

Others give countless hours.

Some teach children.

Some repair buildings.

Some organize.

Some pray.

Some welcome.

Some simply notice who has been forgotten.

All of it matters.

There is room for your gift.

More than that, there is a need for it.

Because Paul says we belong to one another.

Your gift is not simply yours.

Someone else may be waiting for you to use it.

Prayer

God of many gifts, thank You for creating a Church filled with different people, abilities, experiences, and perspectives. Help me value the gifts of others and faithfully offer my own. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Thank someone in your church whose service often happens quietly or behind the scenes. Let them know that their gift matters.

Saturday, October 10

What Will You Do With What You've Got?

Scripture: Colossians 3:17, 23-24

Reflection

At the beginning of this week, we asked a simple question: What has God placed in my hands?

Now we ask another.

What will I do with it?

Dolly Parton's life began with gifts that could easily have remained hidden in the mountains of Tennessee. She had a voice, imagination, determination, humor, faith, and the ability to tell stories. She used those gifts. Over time, they became songs heard around the world. Those songs created opportunities. Those opportunities created resources. Those resources allowed her to give in ways she could never have imagined as a child.

But it started with what she had.

That is how stewardship works.

We often wait for more.

When I have more money, I will give.

When I have more time, I will volunteer.

When I know more, I will teach.

When I feel more confident, I will speak.

When life settles down, I will serve.

But God keeps asking, "What do you have now?"

Dolly once said, **"You gotta keep trying to find your niche and trying to fit into whatever slot that's left for you or to make one of your own."**

There is no retirement age from generosity. There is no point when our gifts stop mattering. Our abilities may change. Our resources may change. Our bodies may

change. Our circumstances may change. But as long as we are alive, there is something we can offer.

A prayer.

A phone call.

A story.

A gift.

A meal.

An hour.

A word of encouragement.

An act of courage.

A listening ear.

A generous heart.

God does not ask you to give what you do not have.

God asks you to offer what you do have.

That is the beautiful simplicity of stewardship.

Bring what you've got.

Bring your voice.

Bring your experience.

Bring your creativity.

Bring your resources.

Bring your compassion.

Bring your imperfect, beautiful, complicated self.

Then place it all in the hands of God.

You may be surprised by what God can do with it.

Prayer

Generous God, everything I have ultimately comes from You. My abilities, experiences, resources, relationships, time, and opportunities are gifts of grace. Teach me not to bury them, waste them, or use them only for myself. Take what I have and use it to bring hope, healing, justice, compassion, and love into the lives of others. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Complete these sentences in your journal: **“God has given me...”** and **“I will use what I’ve got to...”** Then choose one concrete way to put that commitment into action this coming week.

Week 4: Enough to Share

October 11-17, 2026

Theme Scripture: *"The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little."* 2 Corinthians 8:15

Week's Big Idea: God's vision of abundance is not that a few people have everything. It is that everyone has enough.

Dolly Parton's generosity offers a wonderful window into this biblical vision. She has never suggested that success itself is something to be ashamed of. She has enjoyed the fruits of her work and has certainly had fun with the rhinestones, homes, businesses, and larger than life persona. Yet her life also asks an important question: What do we do with abundance once we have it? Scripture answers that question by inviting us into a community where blessings circulate, needs matter, and what we have becomes an opportunity to help someone else flourish.

Sunday, October 11

What Is Enough?

Scripture: Exodus 16:1-18

Reflection

The Israelites are hungry. They have left Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and entered the wilderness. Freedom has come, but freedom has not filled their stomachs. Soon they begin remembering Egypt differently. They remember the food and forget the slavery. Hunger can do that. Fear can make yesterday's captivity look safer than tomorrow's uncertainty.

Then God provides manna. Every morning there is enough. Some gather much. Some gather little. Yet Exodus tells us something remarkable: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little." Everyone had enough.

That little word may be one of the most challenging words in our spiritual vocabulary: **enough**.

Our culture teaches us to ask, "How much can I get?" Scripture asks, "How much is enough?" Those are very different questions. One has no natural stopping point. There is always another dollar to earn, another possession to buy, another upgrade to make, another level of security to achieve. Enough requires us to recognize that life cannot finally be secured by accumulation.

Dolly Parton's life makes an interesting illustration because she rose from genuine material poverty to extraordinary financial success. Yet the story did not end with her escaping poverty. She used some of what success gave her to create opportunities for others.

Dolly has said, **“I always count my blessings more than I count my money.”** That sentence gets at something spiritually important. Money can be counted. Blessings have to be noticed.

The manna story teaches Israel that God's abundance is different from endless accumulation. God provides enough for the community. Everyone gathers. Everyone eats. Nobody needs to go hungry.

That is stewardship at its deepest level. The question is not simply whether I have enough. The question is whether **we** have enough.

If I have more than I need while my neighbor has nothing, perhaps God's invitation is not guilt. Perhaps it is generosity.

God has given us enough to share.

Prayer

God of abundance, teach me the meaning of enough. Free me from the fear that constantly tells me I need more. Help me recognize my blessings with gratitude and use what I have so that others may flourish. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Ask yourself honestly today, “What does enough mean for me?” Consider one area where you may already have more than enough and how some of that abundance might bless another person.

Monday, October 12

Don't Hoard the Manna

Scripture: Exodus 16:19-21

Reflection

God gives Israel a strange instruction concerning manna. Gather what you need for the day, but do not hoard it overnight. Some people ignore the instruction. They keep extra manna, perhaps because they are afraid tomorrow will not bring enough. By morning, what they have hoarded has spoiled.

The problem is not simply greed. It is fear.

What if there is no manna tomorrow?

What if God does not provide?

What if I run out?

Scarcity thinking tells us to hold tightly to everything because there may never be enough again. That fear can shape our relationship with money, possessions, time, and even love. We begin protecting ourselves from imaginary tomorrows while missing opportunities to live generously today.

The Israelites had spent generations under Pharaoh, where resources were controlled by those at the top and people were valued according to what they could produce. In the wilderness, God begins teaching them a different economy. God's economy is based on trust. Gather what you need. Share the community's abundance. Trust that tomorrow belongs to God.

Dolly Parton's philanthropy reflects something of that willingness to let resources move outward rather than simply accumulate. Her success created wealth, but wealth became a tool she could use to support education, literacy, health care, disaster recovery, and the community that helped form her.

She once said, **“You can give what you've got. It doesn't have to be money. You can give your time. You can give your talent.”**

Hoarding is not only about money. We can hoard time. We can hoard knowledge. We can hoard our talents. We can hoard our attention. We can even hoard love by withholding it until someone has somehow earned it.

God invites us into something freer.

Open hands.

Open hearts.

Trust.

Enough for today.

And enough to share.

Prayer

Providing God, free me from the fear that makes me hold too tightly to what You have given. Teach me to trust Your provision and to live with open hands. Show me what I am holding that could become a blessing to someone else. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Identify something you have more of than you need. It might be possessions, food, clothing, time, knowledge, or another resource. Find one way to share it this week.

Tuesday, October 13

Nobody Should Be Forgotten

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

Reflection

Paul is raising money.

That may sound surprisingly ordinary for the Bible, but it is exactly what is happening. Christians in Jerusalem are struggling economically, and Paul is encouraging other churches to help them.

Paul does not manipulate people with guilt. Instead, he tells stories of generosity. He describes the Macedonian Christians who gave joyfully even though they themselves did not possess great wealth. Their generosity flowed from grace.

Then Paul points to Jesus.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor.”

Christian generosity begins there.

God gives first.

Grace comes first.

Love comes first.

We give because we have received.

That changes stewardship from obligation into response.

Dolly Parton's generosity has often been rooted in remembering people who might otherwise be forgotten. Her Imagination Library, for example, was born from a concern

about children's literacy and from her own father's inability to read and write. She took something deeply personal and turned it outward.

That is what grace often does.

God blesses us, and eventually we begin asking how that blessing might become someone else's blessing.

Paul's concern is not that everyone possess exactly the same amount. His concern is that no part of the Christian family be abandoned.

That remains a powerful vision for the Church.

Nobody forgotten.

Nobody invisible.

Nobody considered expendable.

Nobody told that their suffering is simply their own problem.

We belong to one another.

And because we belong to one another, another person's need matters to us.

Prayer

God of grace, thank You for giving before I ever learned how to give. Let the grace I have received flow outward toward others. Give me eyes to notice those who are struggling and a heart willing to respond. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Think about someone who may be easily overlooked in your community. Pray for that person or group, then identify one practical way you can help them feel seen and valued.

Wednesday, October 14

Equality Is a Stewardship Word

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:13-15

Reflection

Paul says something remarkably direct about generosity: “Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality.”

Then he returns to the manna story. “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.”

Paul is not interested in making one group suffer so another group can prosper. He imagines a community in which resources move according to need. When one group has abundance, it helps another. Someday circumstances may reverse, and those who once received may become the ones who give.

That is community.

Christian stewardship is therefore larger than private charity. Charity asks, “How can I help this person today?” That is important and deeply Christian. Justice asks another question: “Why are so many people being left without enough in the first place?” We need both questions.

Love feeds the hungry person standing before us. Justice asks why the pantry keeps becoming empty.

Love helps a family pay an emergency bill. Justice asks why working families cannot afford basic necessities.

Love gives a child a book. Justice asks whether every child has access to a good education.

Dolly Parton's philanthropy is especially powerful when it moves beyond temporary assistance toward creating opportunity. A book given to a young child is a small gift with potentially lifelong consequences. It says that generosity is not simply about solving today's problem. It can also invest in tomorrow's possibilities.

Dolly once said, **“We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails.”** Generosity does both compassionate and creative work. It responds to what is happening now while imagining what might become possible.

The Church should never be satisfied simply because some of us have enough.

We keep asking whether our neighbors do too.

Prayer

God of justice and compassion, enlarge my understanding of generosity. Help me care for immediate needs while also seeking a world where fewer people are pushed into needless suffering. Teach Your Church to become a community where everyone can flourish. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Choose one need you care deeply about. Ask two questions today: "How can I help someone experiencing this problem?" and "What might help change the conditions creating this problem?"

Thursday, October 15

When Abundance Becomes Opportunity

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Reflection

Paul does not tell wealthy people that they should feel ashamed for possessing resources. He tells them not to become arrogant and not to place their hope in wealth.

Then he tells them what abundance makes possible.

"Do good, be rich in good deeds, and be generous and willing to share."

That is a beautiful way to think about prosperity.

Abundance creates opportunity.

If you have financial resources, you have opportunities to give.

If you have education, you have opportunities to teach.

If you have influence, you have opportunities to advocate.

If you have a home, you have opportunities to welcome.

If you have experience, you have opportunities to mentor.

If you have time, you have opportunities to serve.

Dolly Parton could have viewed her success simply as proof that she had made it. Instead, success expanded what she could do for others.

She has joked frequently about money, fame, and her extravagant image, but she has also expressed a simple philosophy about helping people: **"If I can help, I help."**

There is something wonderfully uncomplicated about that.

Sometimes we spend too much time asking whether our gift will solve everything. It probably will not.

But can it help?

Can a meal help?

Can a scholarship help?

Can a church ministry help?

Can a phone call help?

Can a financial gift help?

Can an hour of your time help?

If it can, then perhaps generosity begins there.

God does not give abundance merely so we can build bigger barns.

Abundance becomes an opportunity to build a bigger table.

Prayer

Generous God, thank You for every form of abundance in my life. Help me recognize each blessing as an opportunity to do good. Teach me to ask not only what I can keep, but what I can share. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Identify one area of abundance in your life and complete this sentence: **“Because I have this, I have the opportunity to...”** Then act on your answer.

Friday, October 16

Building a Bigger Table

Scripture: Luke 14:12-14

Reflection

Jesus tells his followers to think differently about the table.

When you give a banquet, he says, do not invite only the people who can repay you. Invite people who cannot.

Jesus imagines generosity without calculation.

That is difficult because so much of life operates through exchange. I do something for you, and someday you do something for me. I invite you, and then you invite me. I give you a gift, and eventually you give me one.

Grace operates differently.

Grace gives without demanding repayment.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library offers a wonderful illustration. A young child receives a book. The child cannot repay Dolly. The family may never meet her. Dolly may never know what becomes of that particular child.

And that is precisely the point.

Generosity invests in futures we may never see.

That is profoundly Christian.

We plant trees beneath whose shade we may never sit.

We teach children who will someday lead communities we may never live to see.

We support ministries whose impact may continue long after we are gone.

We maintain churches not simply for ourselves, but for people who have not walked through the doors yet.

Dolly has said, **“You can never get enough books into the hands of enough children.”** That statement is about books, but it also reflects a larger vision of abundance. There is always room at the table for another child, another family, another neighbor, another person who needs hope.

The Church should always be building a bigger table.

Not because everyone is the same.

Not because everyone believes exactly the same thing.

But because grace always seems to find another chair.

Prayer

Welcoming God, enlarge my table and enlarge my heart. Teach me to give without calculating what I will receive in return. Help our church invest in people and possibilities we may never personally benefit from. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Do something generous today for someone who cannot repay you. Let the gift remain anonymous if possible.

Saturday, October 17

There Is Enough When We Share

Scripture: Acts 4:32-35

Reflection

The early Church imagined community in a remarkable way. Acts tells us that believers shared what they had so generously that “there were no needy persons among them.”

Notice what the passage does not say.

It does not say nobody had needs.

It says nobody was left alone with those needs.

That is an enormous difference.

Human beings will always experience seasons of need. Illness comes. Jobs disappear. Families experience crisis. Natural disasters strike. Children need opportunities. Older adults need care. People become lonely. Communities struggle.

The question is whether we face those things alone.

The Church answers no.

We belong to one another.

Dolly Parton's story began in a family where material resources were limited. Yet those childhood stories are filled with people sharing life together. As her own resources increased, her circle of generosity expanded.

That is a beautiful picture of stewardship.

The goal is not to become wealthy enough that we never need anyone.

The goal is to become a community where needing one another is not something to be ashamed of.

Sometimes you will give.

Sometimes you will receive.

Sometimes you will carry someone.

Sometimes someone will carry you.

That is not failure.

That is community.

One of Dolly's simple sayings captures the spirit beautifully: **"If you see someone without a smile, give them yours."**

Maybe you have money to share.

Maybe you have food.

Maybe you have knowledge.

Maybe you have time.

Maybe you have influence.

Maybe today all you have is a smile.

Give what you have.

Because God's vision of abundance was never that a few people would have everything.

God's vision is a table where everyone has enough.

That is why stewardship is ultimately about much more than funding a church budget. It is about becoming the kind of people who believe that what God has placed among us is meant to bless all of us.

There is enough love.

Enough compassion.

Enough grace.

Enough hope.

And when we open our hands to one another, we may discover something astonishing.

There is enough to share.

Prayer

God of abundance, thank You for everything You have entrusted to me. Deliver me from fear, scarcity, and the belief that my security depends upon holding tightly to what I possess. Teach me the freedom of generosity. Make our church a community where people share burdens, resources, gifts, and hope so faithfully that no one is forgotten or abandoned. Help us build a bigger table where everyone has a place and everyone can experience the abundance of Your love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Complete these sentences in your journal: **“God has given me enough of...”** and **“I can share that abundance by...”** Then choose one specific act of generosity for the coming week that will help another person experience what it means to have enough.

Week 5: Books, Children & a Better Tomorrow

October 18-24, 2026

Theme Scripture: *“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”* Mark 10:14

Week's Big Idea: Stewardship means investing today in people and possibilities whose future we may never personally see.

There is something beautiful about giving to someone who can never repay you. There is something even more beautiful about investing in a future you may never live long enough to see. Dolly Parton's commitment to children's literacy through the Imagination Library is a powerful example. Her concern grew partly from the experience of her father, who could not read or write. What began as an effort to place books into the hands of children became a way of investing in generations beyond her own. Jesus placed children at the center of his ministry and reminded his followers that those whom society often considers least important are deeply important to God. This week we will consider stewardship not simply as maintaining what we have today, but as preparing a better tomorrow.

Sunday, October 18

Let the Children Come

Scripture: Mark 10:13-16

Reflection

People were bringing children to Jesus so that he might bless them, but the disciples tried to stop them. Perhaps they thought Jesus had more important things to do. There were adults waiting to hear him teach. There were sick people who needed healing. There were religious leaders asking questions. Children occupied very little social power in the ancient world, so perhaps the disciples simply assumed they belonged somewhere farther down the priority list.

Jesus strongly disagreed.

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them.”

Then Jesus took the children in his arms and blessed them.

There is something profoundly important happening here. Jesus is showing his followers what the priorities of God's kingdom look like. People who may appear unimportant according to the world's measurements are never unimportant to God.

That makes children a stewardship issue.

What kind of world are we creating for them? What kind of church are we leaving them? What kind of community will they inherit? What kind of environment will surround them? What opportunities will they have to learn, grow, worship, question, dream, and become the people God created them to be?

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library grew from a simple conviction that children should have access to books. A child receiving a book may seem like a small thing. But a book can open a world. A book can awaken imagination, create curiosity, strengthen a family, and help a child begin imagining possibilities beyond what they currently know.

Dolly has said, **“You can never get enough books into the hands of enough children.”**

That is stewardship thinking.

We give today because tomorrow matters.

We teach today because tomorrow matters.

We nurture children today because tomorrow matters.

Jesus does not tell the children to wait until they are older before they matter. He welcomes them now.

So should we.

Prayer

Jesus, You welcomed children when others tried to push them aside. Give us hearts that recognize the sacred worth of every child. Help us create churches, families, and communities where children are loved, protected, encouraged, and given opportunities to flourish. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Pray by name for the children and young people you know. Ask God to show you one practical way you can encourage or invest in a younger person this week.

Monday, October 19

Give Them Something to Dream About

Scripture: Joel 2:28

Reflection

The prophet Joel imagines a remarkable future in which God's Spirit is poured out upon everyone. Sons and daughters prophesy. Older people dream dreams. Young people see visions. Nobody is excluded from participating in what God is doing.

Children need room to dream.

They need adults who believe possibilities exist beyond what they can currently see. They need teachers who encourage curiosity, families who nurture imagination, churches that welcome questions, and communities willing to invest in their potential.

That is one reason Dolly Parton's commitment to books is so powerful. A book is more than paper and ink. A book tells a child that there is a world to explore. Through books, children can visit places they have never seen, meet people whose lives are different from their own, discover ideas they have never considered, and imagine becoming something they did not previously know was possible.

Dolly once said, **"I think books are very important. I think children should be encouraged to read."** That conviction became action. She did not simply say children should read. She helped put books into their hands.

That is the difference between wishing for a better future and practicing stewardship.

Stewardship asks what we are willing to do now so someone else can dream later.

A church can say children matter, but stewardship asks whether our resources demonstrate it.

A community can say education matters, but stewardship asks whether our priorities demonstrate it.

We can say young people are the future, but stewardship asks whether we are investing in them in the present.

Children need more than our advice about the future.

They need something to dream about.

Prayer

God of dreams and visions, awaken imagination in the children around us. Give them courage to dream about lives filled with purpose, compassion, creativity, and hope. Show us how to nurture those dreams rather than limiting them. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Give a child or young person something that encourages imagination today. It might be a book, art supplies, a conversation, an invitation to try something new, or simply your encouragement.

Tuesday, October 20

Someone Invested in You

Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:3-7

Reflection

Paul reminds Timothy that his faith did not begin with him. He speaks about the sincere faith that first lived in Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Timothy is standing on a foundation someone else helped build.

So are we.

None of us arrived where we are completely on our own. Someone taught us. Someone encouraged us. Someone opened a door. Someone gave us an opportunity. Someone answered our questions. Someone believed in us when we were uncertain about ourselves.

Perhaps it was a parent or grandparent. Perhaps it was a teacher. Perhaps it was a Sunday school teacher who has long since forgotten the lesson you still remember. Perhaps it was a coach, neighbor, pastor, friend, or relative.

Someone invested in you.

Dolly Parton has spoken often about the influence of her family, her upbringing in East Tennessee, and especially the people who encouraged her music from an early age. The gifts were hers, but other people helped create places where those gifts could grow.

That is how stewardship often works.

We plant seeds in lives without knowing what they will become.

The Sunday school teacher may never know that the child sitting in the class will someday become a pastor.

The music teacher may never know that the student will someday inspire thousands of people.

The person who gives to a scholarship fund may never meet the student whose education becomes possible because of that gift.

We do not need to see the final result to make the investment worthwhile.

Someone invested in us.

Now it is our turn.

Prayer

Faithful God, thank You for the people who invested in my life. Thank You for teachers, family members, friends, mentors, and others who helped me become who I am. Give me opportunities to offer that same gift to another generation. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Write down the names of three people who invested in you when you were younger. Thank God for each of them. Then ask yourself, "Whose name might someday be on a list like this because I invested in them?"

Wednesday, October 21

Planting Trees We May Never Sit Under

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:6-9

Reflection

Paul describes ministry using the language of gardening. "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow." Paul understood something that every gardener eventually learns. You cannot force growth. You plant, water, nurture, and trust.

Stewardship often requires the same kind of patience.

We live in a culture that loves immediate results. We want to know how many people attended, how much money was raised, how quickly something grew, and whether our investment produced measurable results. But some of the most important things we do will not produce immediate results.

A child learning to read may not understand how important that gift will become.

A teenager encouraged by an older adult may not appreciate the conversation until years later.

A congregation investing in children's ministry may not know which seeds will grow.

A church making its buildings accessible may be preparing a welcome for people who have not arrived yet.

A community caring for the environment may be protecting something primarily for generations yet unborn.

Dolly Parton's investment in childhood literacy beautifully illustrates this kind of long term stewardship. A book placed in a child's hands today may influence choices, imagination, education, and opportunities years from now.

We plant.

Someone else waters.

God gives growth.

Faithful stewardship does not require us to control the outcome. It asks us to plant good seeds.

Prayer

Patient God, teach me to invest in things whose results I may never see. Give me faith to plant seeds of love, education, justice, compassion, and hope, trusting You with what those seeds may become. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Do one thing today that may benefit someone in the future rather than yourself in the present. Let it be an act of faith in a tomorrow you may never see.

Thursday, October 22

A Book Can Open a Door

Scripture: Proverbs 4:5-9

Reflection

Scripture repeatedly celebrates wisdom. Proverbs urges us to seek it, value it, and hold onto it. Wisdom cannot be reduced to education, but learning can become one of the doors through which wisdom enters our lives.

That is why literacy matters.

Reading gives people access to information, stories, history, ideas, Scripture, employment opportunities, and the ability to participate more fully in society. Helping

someone learn to read is not simply giving them a skill. It can help expand their possibilities.

Dolly Parton's passion for literacy was deeply personal because her father could not read or write. She has spoken lovingly of his intelligence and hard work while also recognizing how his lack of literacy limited him. Rather than allowing that story to end with regret, she transformed it into generosity.

That is one of the most beautiful things human beings can do with pain.

We can allow something difficult in our story to become compassion for someone else.

A person who experienced hunger can help feed others.

A person who experienced exclusion can build welcoming communities.

A person who struggled in school can mentor a struggling student.

A person who experienced grief can sit beside someone mourning.

A daughter who watched her father live without the ability to read can help put books into the hands of millions of children.

Grace has a remarkable ability to transform wounds into windows and limitations into invitations.

What difficult part of your story might become someone else's open door?

Prayer

God of wisdom, thank You for the gift of learning. Bless teachers, librarians, parents, mentors, and everyone who opens doors of knowledge for others. Take even the painful parts of our stories and transform them into compassion that creates opportunities for someone else. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Donate a book, support a literacy effort, read with a child, or encourage someone who is learning something new. Let your action become an investment in another person's possibilities.

Friday, October 23

Stewardship of Tomorrow

Scripture: Psalm 78:1-7

Reflection

Psalms 78 describes one generation telling the next generation about the works of God. The purpose is clear: "so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born."

What a remarkable phrase.

Children yet to be born.

Scripture asks us to think beyond ourselves.

That is stewardship.

We are temporary caretakers of things that will eventually belong to others. Churches are a perfect example. Every congregation inherited something from people who came before. Someone bought land. Someone built buildings. Someone taught children. Someone started ministries. Someone gave money. Someone prayed. Someone imagined a future congregation they would never meet.

We are living in somebody else's tomorrow.

Now we are responsible for somebody else's.

That changes the way we think about stewardship. We are not merely paying today's bills. We are asking what kind of church we are preparing for tomorrow.

Will it be welcoming?

Will it be accessible?

Will it be compassionate?

Will children have a place?

Will people who have been wounded by religion discover grace?

Will future generations inherit buildings that serve ministry rather than buildings that prevent it?

Will they inherit financial resources, or only financial obligations?

Will they inherit traditions that give life, or traditions they are afraid to change?

Dolly Parton's investment in children asks essentially the same question. What can we do now that will give someone else a better tomorrow?

Faithfulness is not preserving everything exactly as we received it.

Faithfulness is handing the next generation something worth receiving.

Prayer

God of every generation, thank You for those who prepared the way for us. Give us wisdom and courage as we prepare the way for those who will come after us. Help us leave behind a Church filled with grace, welcome, compassion, courage, and hope. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Imagine your church twenty years from now. Write down three things you hope the people worshiping there will be grateful your generation did for them.

Saturday, October 24

For People We May Never Meet

Scripture: Hebrews 11:13-16

Reflection

Hebrews describes people of faith who lived trusting promises they never fully saw fulfilled. They saw them from a distance and welcomed them. Their faith stretched beyond their own lifetimes.

That is a beautiful image for stewardship.

Some of the most faithful things we do are for people we will never meet.

The child who receives a book today may be an adult long after we are gone.

The tree planted today may shade people whose names we will never know.

The ministry we support may touch a family that has not yet moved into our community.

The church we strengthen may someday welcome someone who is not yet searching for it.

The acts of justice we undertake today may create opportunities for generations that come after us.

That is why stewardship requires imagination.

We have to imagine a world beyond ourselves.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is such a fitting symbol because every book sent to a child is an act of hope. It says that this child's imagination matters. This child's education matters. This child's future matters. We may not know what this child will become, but we believe their possibilities are worth investing in.

Dolly has said, **“I believe that any dream is possible if you've got enough nerve.”** Stewardship adds something to that idea. Sometimes another person's dream becomes possible because somebody else had enough love to invest in it.

Perhaps that is one of the greatest gifts we can leave behind.

Not our names on buildings.

Not monuments to ourselves.

Not evidence of everything we accumulated.

But people whose lives became fuller because we were generous.

Children who were given opportunities.

Communities that became stronger.

Churches that became more welcoming.

People who discovered that they mattered.

A world that became a little kinder because we were here.

The stewardship question for this week has been simple: **What are we willing to give today for people who will inhabit tomorrow?**

Maybe the answer is our money.

Maybe it is our time.

Maybe it is our buildings.

Maybe it is our knowledge.

Maybe it is our willingness to change.

Maybe it is our courage to plant something we will never see fully grown.

Whatever the gift, we give it in faith.

Because tomorrow belongs to God, but God has entrusted part of tomorrow to us.

Prayer

God of generations yet unborn, enlarge our vision beyond ourselves. Teach us to invest our lives in a future we may never personally see. Bless the children growing among us and the children who have not yet been born. May they inherit from us more compassion, more justice, more opportunity, more welcome, more wisdom, and more love. Give us the courage to plant seeds whose shade we may never enjoy and to build a Church whose doors remain open long after we are gone. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Complete these sentences in your journal: **“The future I hope to help create is...”** and **“One thing I can give today to help create that future is...”** Then choose one concrete investment of your time, resources, influence, or love that will benefit someone beyond yourself.

A Daily Devotional on Generosity, Stewardship, and the Life and Music of Dolly Parton

Week 6: Love Is Something You Do

October 25-31, 2026

Theme Scripture: *“Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”* 1 John 3:18

Week's Big Idea: Love is more than something we feel or say. Love feeds, teaches, welcomes, advocates, gives, and shows up.

Dolly Parton's generosity offers a fitting illustration of the message found in 1 John. Love becomes most powerful when it takes physical form. It becomes a book in a child's hands, help for a family facing disaster, support for a community in need, or an opportunity given to someone who might otherwise have been overlooked. Christian stewardship asks us to make the same movement from sentiment to action. We certainly need words of love, but eventually love has to become something we do.

Sunday, October 25

Love Is a Verb

Scripture: 1 John 3:16-18

Reflection

We use the word love so often that it can begin to lose its power. We love our families. We love our friends. We love our church. We love our country. We love certain foods, movies, songs, and vacation destinations. We can even say we love people we have never met. But John refuses to allow Christian love to remain simply a feeling or a word. He writes, “Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”

John points directly to Jesus. We know what love is because Jesus laid down his life for us. Christian love is therefore not merely something we feel. Love gives itself away.

That is what makes Dolly Parton's generosity so interesting. She could have spent her life singing about love and left it there. Instead, some of the compassion expressed through her music became tangible through her philanthropy. Children received books. Communities received help. People facing difficult circumstances discovered that someone cared enough to act.

Dolly once said, **“I think everybody should be allowed to be who they are and to love who they love.”** Love begins with recognizing the dignity of another person. Christian love takes another step and asks what that dignity requires from us.

If I love hungry people, perhaps I should help feed them. If I love children, perhaps I should invest in their future. If I love lonely people, perhaps I should spend time with them. If I love people who have been rejected, perhaps I should help create communities where they are welcomed. If I love people suffering under injustice, perhaps I should be willing to speak.

Love becomes visible.

That is stewardship because God has placed things in our hands that can become expressions of love. Our money can love. Our time can love. Our voices can love. Our buildings can love. Our influence can love. Our choices can love.

Love is not merely something we believe.

Love is something we do.

Prayer

God of love, keep my faith from becoming only words. Teach me to love as Jesus loved, with compassion that becomes action. Use my hands, voice, resources, time, and life to make Your love visible to others. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Choose one person you love and intentionally turn that love into action today. Do something specific that communicates, "You matter to me."

Monday, October 26

Love Feeds

Scripture: Matthew 14:13-21

Reflection

Jesus looks at a hungry crowd and refuses to treat their hunger as someone else's problem. When the disciples suggest sending the people away to find food, Jesus answers, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

The disciples immediately begin calculating what they lack. They have only five loaves and two fish. Jesus begins with what they have.

That pattern keeps appearing in Scripture. Human beings see scarcity. Jesus sees possibility.

Love feeds.

That sounds simple, but feeding people is deeply spiritual. Hunger makes theological arguments seem rather unimportant. A person wondering where the next meal will come from needs more than our good intentions.

Dolly Parton's generosity has often followed this practical pattern. When people are hurting, the question becomes what can actually be done to help. That is compassion with work clothes on.

Churches understand this instinct. We collect food. We prepare meals. We support food pantries. We respond when families experience emergencies. Those ministries matter because Jesus cared about physical needs.

But there is another question Christians should eventually ask. Why are our neighbors hungry?

Love feeds the person standing before us today. Justice asks why that person keeps returning hungry tomorrow.

We do not have to choose between the two.

We can give someone bread and ask why bread is inaccessible.

We can provide emergency assistance and ask why families working hard still cannot make ends meet.

We can respond to immediate suffering while also working toward a community where fewer people suffer unnecessarily.

Jesus told the disciples, "You give them something to eat."

He still does.

Prayer

Jesus, You saw hungry people and cared about their physical needs. Give me that same compassion. Bless those who are hungry today and show me how I can help. Give us wisdom to address both immediate needs and the conditions that cause unnecessary suffering. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Give food or financial support to a hunger ministry today. Then spend a few minutes learning about one underlying cause of hunger in your community.

Tuesday, October 27

Love Welcomes

Scripture: Romans 15:7

Reflection

Paul gives the Church a wonderfully simple command: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."

Welcome is an act of stewardship.

We usually think about stewardship in terms of things we own, but we are also stewards of spaces. We are stewards of tables, buildings, congregations, communities, and relationships. We decide whether those spaces will be guarded or opened.

Jesus consistently opened space around himself for people others pushed aside. Children came close. Lepers came close. Women came close. Tax collectors came close. People carrying shame came close. People asking difficult questions came close.

That tells us something about God.

God keeps making room.

Dolly Parton's public persona has often carried a similar spirit of welcome. Her humor and warmth have helped her connect with people across generations, backgrounds, regions, and differences. She once said, "**I love everybody, and I hope everybody loves me.**" There is something wonderfully uncomplicated about that aspiration.

The Church should be a place where people experience that kind of expansive welcome, not because everyone agrees about everything, but because every person bears the image of God.

Stewardship therefore asks us to consider how we use the spaces entrusted to us. Does our church building communicate welcome? Can people with disabilities participate fully? Do visitors know where to go? Do children know they belong? Do people who have experienced rejection elsewhere sense that there is a place for them? Are we protecting a clubhouse for ourselves, or tending a table God intends to share?

Hospitality is generosity.

Every time we make room for another person, love becomes something we do.

Prayer

Welcoming God, thank You for making room for me. Teach me to extend that same grace to others. Help our homes, churches, tables, and hearts become places where people experience dignity, belonging, and love. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Notice someone who might feel outside the circle today. Make an intentional effort to welcome, include, or encourage them.

Wednesday, October 28

Love Shows Up

Scripture: Romans 12:9-15

Reflection

Paul tells Christians to “rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” Sometimes the greatest gift we can give another person is simply our presence.

We often underestimate presence because it does not feel productive. We want to fix things. We want to find the right words. We want to make the pain disappear.

Sometimes we cannot.

There are illnesses we cannot cure. There are deaths we cannot undo. There are relationships we cannot repair. There are circumstances where no sentence will make everything better.

Love still has something to give.

Love shows up.

It sits beside the hospital bed.

It attends the funeral.

It makes the phone call.

It brings the casserole.

It listens to the same story again.

It remembers the anniversary everyone else forgot.

It stays when staying is uncomfortable.

Dolly Parton's music has connected so deeply with people partly because she has never been afraid of ordinary human emotions. Her songs tell stories about love, heartbreak, family, poverty, dreams, disappointment, and hope. She understands that people need to know someone else recognizes what they are experiencing.

That is a form of generosity.

Attention is a gift.

Presence is a gift.

Listening is a gift.

Time is a gift.

You do not always need the perfect words.

Sometimes love simply pulls up a chair.

Prayer

God who is always present, teach me the ministry of showing up. Help me resist the need to fix every problem or explain every pain. Give me patience to listen, courage to stay, and compassion to share another person's burden. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Think of someone going through a difficult season. Call them, visit them, send a note, or simply let them know you are thinking about them. Do not try to fix anything. Just be present.

Thursday, October 29

Love Speaks

Scripture: Proverbs 31:8-9

Reflection

Scripture tells us, "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute." There are moments when love requires more than kindness. Love requires a voice.

We sometimes separate compassion and justice as though they were competing ideas. Compassion cares for the person who is hurting. Justice asks why they were hurt and whether something can be changed so others are not hurt in the same way.

Both are expressions of love.

If someone keeps falling into a dangerous hole, compassion helps them climb out. Justice asks why nobody has put a fence around the hole.

If families continually need emergency assistance, compassion helps them survive today. Justice asks what conditions keep creating the emergency.

If someone is excluded, compassion sits beside them. Justice asks why they were excluded.

Dolly Parton has often used her public voice carefully, emphasizing kindness, dignity, and respect for people. Her generosity reminds us that influence itself is something we steward.

Most of us will never have Dolly's platform, but we still have influence.

We have conversations.

We participate in organizations.

We serve on committees.

We vote.

We make decisions.

We shape churches.

We influence families.

We can speak when someone is treated cruelly.

We can challenge language that diminishes another person's humanity.

We can advocate for people whose voices are ignored.

Sometimes love whispers words of comfort.

Sometimes love speaks loudly enough to be heard.

Prayer

God of justice, give me wisdom to know when silence is compassionate and when silence becomes indifference. Give me courage to speak for dignity, fairness, mercy, and truth. May my voice always be guided by love. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Think about one situation where someone else's voice is easily ignored. Consider one appropriate way you can listen to them, amplify their concerns, or advocate alongside them.

Friday, October 30

Charity and Justice

Scripture: Isaiah 58:6-10

Reflection

Isaiah offers a powerful picture of the worship God desires. God calls people to loosen the chains of injustice, set the oppressed free, share food with the hungry, provide shelter to those without it, and clothe those in need.

Notice how charity and justice appear together.

Feed the hungry.

Break the chains.

Help the person suffering today.

Change what keeps producing suffering tomorrow.

Christian generosity needs both.

Charity without justice can become an endless cycle of treating symptoms. Justice without compassion can become abstract and forget the person who needs help right now.

Jesus calls us toward both.

Dolly Parton's philanthropy provides an interesting example. Giving books to children is an act of generosity. Encouraging literacy also addresses something deeper by giving children tools that can expand their opportunities throughout life. The gift meets an immediate need while investing in a different future.

That is a helpful model for Christian stewardship.

We should keep feeding people.

We should keep providing emergency assistance.

We should keep visiting the lonely.

We should keep helping families in crisis.

And we should also ask harder questions about why those needs exist.

The goal of Christian generosity is not to create permanent dependence on our generosity. The goal is human flourishing.

We want hungry people fed.

We want homeless people housed.

We want children educated.

We want sick people cared for.

We want lonely people surrounded by community.

We want people who have been excluded welcomed.

We want every person to have the opportunity to live with dignity.

Love helps.

Love also asks why help was needed.

Prayer

God of compassion and justice, keep me from choosing between helping people and changing the conditions that hurt them. Give me a heart tender enough to respond to immediate suffering and courageous enough to ask difficult questions about its causes. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Choose one ministry or cause you support. Ask two questions about it: **“How does this help people right now?”** and **“How might we help reduce the need for this ministry in the future?”**

Saturday, October 31

Make Love Visible

Scripture: Matthew 5:14-16

Reflection

Jesus tells his followers, "You are the light of the world." Then he says something important about that light. People are supposed to see it through our good deeds.

Faith becomes visible.

Love becomes visible.

Grace becomes visible.

That brings us to the end of a week built around John's instruction: "Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."

Dolly Parton's generosity has become part of her public legacy because people can point to tangible things that resulted from it. Books went into children's hands. Communities received help. Educational opportunities were created. People facing hardship received support. Compassion took form.

That is a beautiful challenge for the Church.

If we disappeared from our community tomorrow, would anyone outside our congregation notice?

Would hungry people notice?

Would children notice?

Would struggling families notice?

Would lonely people notice?

Would people who have felt rejected by religion notice?

Would the wider community say, "Something loving is missing"?

That may be one of the most important stewardship questions we can ask.

The Church is not here merely to maintain itself.

We are here to embody Christ.

Our buildings are tools for love.

Our budgets are tools for love.

Our programs are tools for love.

Our worship prepares us for love.

Our theology should lead us toward love.

Our stewardship makes love possible.

Dolly once said, **“If you see someone without a smile, give them yours.”** Perhaps that simple idea summarizes this week. Do not merely wish they had a smile. Give them yours.

Do not merely wish hungry people had food. Feed someone.

Do not merely wish lonely people had friends. Sit beside someone.

Do not merely wish children had opportunities. Invest in them.

Do not merely wish people felt welcome. Open the door.

Do not merely wish the world were more just. Use your voice.

Do not merely talk about love.

Make love visible.

Prayer

God of extravagant love, thank You for loving us not only with words but through Jesus Christ. Take our faith and give it hands. Take our compassion and give it courage. Take our resources and give them purpose. Take our church and make it a living expression of Your love. May hungry people be fed, lonely people find community, children discover opportunity, suffering people receive compassion, excluded people find welcome, and those burdened by injustice discover companions willing to stand beside them. Teach us to love in action and in truth so that our neighbors can see something of Jesus through the way we live. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Complete these sentences in your journal: **“Love becomes visible when I...”** and **“One way I can make God's love visible this week is...”** Then choose one specific action. Do not leave it as an intention. Put it on your calendar and do it.

Week 7: I Will Always Love You

October 25-31, 2026

Theme Scripture: *"As I have loved you, so you must love one another."* John 13:34

Week's Big Idea: Generosity does not begin with what God wants from us. It begins with what God has already given to us.

We have spent six weeks talking about generosity through the life, music, and example of Dolly Parton. We have talked about discovering true wealth, allowing compassion to interrupt us, using the gifts we have, making sure there is enough to share, investing in future generations, and turning love into action. Now we come to the foundation underneath everything else. Before stewardship is about our love for God, it begins with God's love for us. Before we give, God gives. Before we love, God loves. Before we respond, grace has already arrived. Dolly Parton's *I Will Always Love You* provides the perfect title for our final week because Christian stewardship ultimately begins with the promise of a love that will not let us go.

Sunday, October 25

Love Comes First

Scripture: 1 John 4:7-12, 19

Reflection

"We love because he first loved us." Those may be among the most important words we can hear when talking about stewardship. Christianity does not begin with something God demands from us. It begins with something God gives to us. God loves first.

Sometimes religion gets that backward. We can make faith sound as though God is standing at a distance waiting for us to prove ourselves. We imagine that if we pray enough, believe enough, serve enough, give enough, or behave well enough, then perhaps God will love us. But the Gospel tells the story in the opposite direction. God does not love us because we have earned it. God loves because love is who God is.

That changes everything about generosity. If stewardship begins with obligation, giving can feel like another bill. If stewardship begins with grace, giving becomes gratitude. We are not trying to purchase God's favor. We are responding to love we have already received.

Dolly Parton's *I Will Always Love You* has endured because its title expresses something almost everyone longs to hear. We want to know there is a love that remains. Human love can be complicated. Relationships change. People disappoint us.

Sometimes people leave. Yet the Gospel announces a love deeper than all of those uncertainties. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Imagine beginning every day with that assurance. Before you accomplish anything, God loves you. Before you prove anything, God loves you. Before you give anything, God loves you. Before you get everything right, God loves you. When we know we are loved, we become freer to love. When we know we have received grace, we become freer to give grace. When we stop trying to earn our worth, we become freer to use our lives for others. Love comes first. Everything else is response.

Prayer

God of everlasting love, thank You for loving me before I ever knew how to love You. Free me from believing that I must earn Your grace. Let the security of Your love open my heart toward others so that my generosity becomes a joyful response to everything I have already received. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Before asking anything of God today, spend several quiet minutes simply receiving God's love. Repeat slowly, **"I love because God first loved me."**

Monday, October 26

Grace First

Scripture: Ephesians 2:4-10

Reflection

Paul says that we are saved by grace. Grace means gift. It is something received rather than earned. That makes Christianity fundamentally a story about generosity. God gives life, creation, mercy, forgiveness, Christ, the Spirit, and grace. We spend our entire lives receiving. Stewardship is what happens when people who have received so much begin asking what they can give.

Dolly Parton's life provides an interesting illustration. She has often spoken with gratitude about her family, her upbringing, her faith, the people who encouraged her, and the opportunities that came into her life. Her success certainly involved enormous talent and hard work, but gratitude recognizes that none of us creates ourselves.

Every one of us is the recipient of gifts we did not earn. Someone cared for us when we were helpless. Someone taught us. Someone encouraged us. Someone forgave us. Someone gave us another chance. Someone believed in us. Someone loved us. Even the ability to work hard is a gift made possible by life, ability, opportunity, and countless circumstances beyond our control.

Gratitude changes the way we hold everything. Instead of saying, “Look what I earned,” gratitude whispers, “Look what I have received.” That does not diminish our work or accomplishments. It simply places them within grace.

Dolly once said, **“I always count my blessings more than I count my money.”** That is a wonderful stewardship practice. Count your blessings. You may discover that you have received far more than you realized. Then ask what all those blessings make possible.

Prayer

God of grace, thank You for gifts I could never earn and blessings I too easily overlook. Teach me to live with gratitude rather than entitlement. Let everything I have received become an opportunity to bless someone else. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Make a list of ten things you have received that money could never purchase. Thank God for each one. Then choose one blessing you can somehow pass along to someone else.

Tuesday, October 27

Give From Joy, Not Guilt

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

Reflection

Paul says something that every church should remember when talking about money: “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion.” Christian giving should never depend upon manipulation. Guilt may produce a gift, but grace produces generosity.

Paul says that “God loves a cheerful giver.” That does not mean we have to grin while writing a check. It means generosity can flow from freedom rather than fear. We give because we believe in something. We give because we are grateful. We give because ministry matters. We give because hungry people matter. We give because children matter. We give because lonely people matter. We give because worship matters. We give because creating a welcoming church matters. We give because the future matters. We give because love matters.

Dolly Parton's philanthropy is compelling partly because it is connected to things she genuinely cares about. Children's literacy mattered because of her father's experience. Her home community mattered because it formed her. Helping people in crisis mattered

because people mattered. That is joyful generosity. Find what you love, and generosity begins to make sense.

Perhaps the Church has sometimes asked the wrong stewardship question. We ask, "How much should I give?" Paul pushes us deeper. What has God placed in your heart? What do you love enough to invest in? What kind of world do you want your resources to help create? Giving should never simply be about keeping an institution alive. Giving is about participating in something alive.

Prayer

Generous God, free me from guilt driven giving. Teach me the joy of generosity. Help me see my gifts as participation in Your work of compassion, welcome, justice, healing, and hope. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Instead of asking, "How much am I supposed to give?" ask, "**What do I love enough to invest in?**" Sit with that question today and allow your answer to guide your generosity.

Wednesday, October 28

Sow Generously

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Reflection

Paul uses the image of planting seeds. "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." A seed looks small. Put it in your hand and it does not seem capable of much. Plant it, and something changes. That is generosity.

A gift may seem small when it leaves your hand, but you cannot always know what it will become. A book placed in a child's hands may become a lifelong love of reading. A scholarship may become an education. A meal may become hope during a terrible week. A church's welcome may become the first step toward healing for someone who thought God had rejected them. A contribution to ministry may become a hospital visit, children's lesson, worship service, community program, or moment of grace you will never personally witness.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a wonderful picture of seed planting. A book is sent to a child, and nobody knows exactly what that particular book will accomplish. The point is to keep planting.

That is what faith does. We plant without controlling the harvest. We give without knowing every outcome. We love without knowing whether love will be returned. We serve without always seeing results. Paul reminds us that God is the one who produces the harvest. Our responsibility is to sow. So we sow kindness, generosity, welcome, compassion, justice, and hope. We may never know which seed changes a life.

Prayer

God of the harvest, take the seeds I plant through my generosity and use them in ways I cannot imagine. Keep me faithful when I cannot see immediate results. Give me courage to sow generously and trust You with the harvest. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Do one small generous thing today without worrying about whether it seems significant. Think of it as planting a seed and leave the results with God.

Thursday, October 29

Generosity Creates Thanksgiving

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:10-15

Reflection

Paul describes an extraordinary chain reaction. God provides, people give, needs are met, and thanksgiving rises to God. Generosity creates gratitude.

Think about the last time someone helped you unexpectedly. Perhaps someone brought food when you were sick. Perhaps someone paid for something you could not afford. Perhaps someone visited when you were lonely. Perhaps someone simply showed up at the right moment. There is a particular feeling that accompanies unexpected generosity. You feel remembered. You feel seen. You feel loved.

That is one reason generosity has spiritual power. A gift can become a message that says, "You matter. You are not alone. Someone sees you. Someone cares." Dolly Parton's generosity has carried that message into many different settings. Whether through books for children or assistance for communities experiencing hardship, the gift says something beyond its monetary value. You matter enough for someone to care.

That should be one of the great messages of the Church. When we feed someone, we are saying, "You matter." When we welcome someone, we are saying, "You matter." When we visit someone, we are saying, "You matter." When we invest in children, we are saying, "Your future matters." When we give toward the ministry of the Church, we are helping create places where that message can continue being spoken.

Generosity becomes thanksgiving because people glimpse grace through one another. Perhaps someone who receives our generosity will someday become generous to someone else. Grace has a way of multiplying.

Prayer

God of every good gift, thank You for the people whose generosity has reminded me that I matter. Let my generosity carry that same message to others. May everything I give ultimately produce gratitude, hope, and love. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Remember one act of generosity someone showed you in the past. If possible, thank that person today. Then honor their generosity by doing something generous for someone else.

Friday, October 30

As I Have Loved You

Scripture: John 13:34-35

Reflection

On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment: "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." The most important words may be "as I have loved you." Jesus does not simply tell his disciples to try harder to love. He gives them a pattern. Look at how I have loved you. I washed your feet. I ate with you. I welcomed you. I forgave you. I taught you. I challenged you. I stayed with you. I gave myself for you. Now love one another like that.

Stewardship belongs inside that commandment because love inevitably gives. Love gives attention, time, forgiveness, resources, second chances, and ultimately itself.

Dolly Parton's generosity gives us a cultural illustration, but Jesus gives us the Christian foundation. We do not practice generosity because Dolly Parton is generous. We practice generosity because Jesus is.

The question therefore becomes much larger than money. What would our church look like if every decision began with the words, "As I have loved you"? How would we use our building? How would we spend our money? How would we welcome strangers? How would we treat people with whom we disagree? How would we care for children? How would we respond to poverty? How would we accompany people who are grieving? How would we treat someone who has been told they do not belong?

Jesus says the world should be able to recognize his disciples by the way they love one another. That means love is our witness, and generosity is one of the ways people see it.

Prayer

Jesus, You have shown us what love looks like. Teach us to love as You have loved us. Shape our priorities, relationships, resources, and church around Your example. May people recognize something of You in the way we treat one another. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

Read John 13:34 slowly several times. Then ask, **“What would change in my life if I loved someone today as Christ has loved me?”** Choose one specific response and put it into action.

Saturday, October 31

What Might God's Love Accomplish Through Us?

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:11-12

Reflection

We have reached the end of our journey. We began seven weeks ago with a little coat made from scraps. The world could look at that coat and see poverty, but Dolly saw love. That became our first lesson about stewardship. Value cannot always be measured in dollars.

From there we traveled the road with the Good Samaritan and discovered that generosity is willing to be interrupted. We learned from Paul that every person has gifts worth sharing. We gathered manna in the wilderness and discovered God's vision of enough. We placed books into children's hands and imagined a future we may never see. We listened to John remind us that love must become action. Now we arrive at the heart of everything: love. Not our love for God first, but God's love for us. Grace comes first. Love comes first. God gives first. Everything else is response.

Dolly Parton's most famous song title gives us a beautiful phrase for this final day, *I Will Always Love You*. Without borrowing the song's story or lyrics, those words point us toward something even deeper than human affection. Scripture tells us that God's love is everlasting. Paul declares that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God revealed in Christ.

That is where Christian generosity begins. We are loved extravagantly and completely. We are loved before we deserve it. We are loved when we succeed and when we fail. We are loved when we have much and when we have little. We are loved. So perhaps

the final question of a stewardship series should not be, **“How much does the church need from you?”** There is a better question: **“Because we have been loved extravagantly, what kind of people do we want to become?”**

Do we want to become people who hold tightly to everything we have, or people whose hands remain open? Do we want to become a church concerned primarily with maintaining ourselves, or a church willing to pour ourselves into our community? Do we want our buildings merely preserved, or do we want them filled with ministry? Do we want our resources protected, or do we want them producing compassion, welcome, justice, worship, learning, healing, and hope? Do we want people merely to know what we believe, or do we want them also to experience how deeply we love?

Dolly once said, **“If your actions create a legacy that inspires others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, then you are an excellent leader.”** Perhaps we can adapt the question behind those words for ourselves. What kind of legacy will our generosity create?

Someday another generation will worship where we worshiped. Someone else will inherit what we built. Someone else will continue the ministries we began. Someone else will tell the stories of what this congregation meant to its community. What do we hope they will say?

I hope they will say we loved. We loved God and one another. We loved children and our neighbors. We loved people who were struggling. We loved people who were different from us. We loved people who had been pushed aside. We loved people who walked through our doors uncertain whether there was a place for them. Because we loved, we gave. We gave our money, time, talents, buildings, voices, compassion, and ourselves.

That is stewardship. As this devotional series ends, perhaps there is only one question left to carry with us: **What might God's love accomplish through us?**

Prayer

God of extravagant and everlasting love, everything begins with You. Before we gave, You gave. Before we loved, You loved. Before we reached toward You, Your grace was already reaching toward us. Thank You for every blessing You have placed into our hands and every opportunity You have given us to share those blessings with others. Free us from fear and scarcity. Make us generous in spirit, compassion, welcome, forgiveness, justice, resources, and our lives.

Take our church and everything You have entrusted to us. Take our buildings, finances, talents, experiences, voices, dreams, and future. Use them for Your purposes. Feed people through us. Welcome people through us. Teach children through us. Comfort the grieving through us. Encourage the discouraged through us. Stand beside the forgotten through us. Work for justice through us. Let people who have wondered whether there

is a place for them discover through us that Your table still has room. May the generosity of our lives become thanksgiving to You, and may generations yet to come inherit from us a community overflowing with faith, hope, generosity, and love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Spiritual Practice

For the final practice of this series, spend time prayerfully completing these three sentences: **“Because God has loved me extravagantly, I want to become...”** **“Because God has blessed me generously, I am willing to give...”** **“Through our church, I hope God's love will accomplish...”** Keep your answers and bring them with you into worship. Allow them to become more than words on a page. Let them become a commitment about the kind of person, and the kind of church, you want to help create.