

Weaving Stewardship into Worship Throughout the Church Year

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Sermon and Scripture Ideas

In the Old Testament, countless stories proclaim the generosity of God. This sets the stage for us to talk about our response to God's generosity.

- **Creation** begins with a generous act. God creates the world and gives humans plants, trees, fruit, and more. (Gen 1)
- God's promise to **Noah** after the flood includes a curious phrase: "just as I gave you green plants, I give you everything..." (Gen 9)
- The **Exodus** story is full of acts of generosity. God gives the Israelites freedom from bondage, a new home, and the law (10 Commandments).
- **Prophet** after prophet calls on Israel to remember God's generosity and respond faithfully because they have forgotten all that God has done for them.
- The **psalms** praise God's generous acts (e.g., blessings, salvation, life, hope). These personal petitions and praises could pair well with a worshipper sharing their own testimony in worship.

In the New Testament, we find the central message of the Gospels is that God gave God's only son to save us (**John 3:16**). Too often we wrongly assume that our people don't need to be reminded of the incredible act of love that such a gift embodies.

- In the Gospels, Jesus told more **parables** about money than any other topic (e.g., the Prodigal Son, the Rich Young Ruler, the Talents, the Widow's Offering). Jesus often warned his followers about the dangerous temptation of accumulating more and more wealth. (Parable of the Rich Fool, Luke 12)
- **Acts** tells the story of the generosity of the early church and their deep care for one another (Acts 2)
- **Paul's letters** contain great examples of generosity.
 - **1 Cor. 12** – stewardship of the body of Christ, the church, in its many diverse forms
 - **Eph. 4** – stewardship of gifts, vocation, and a life of faith

The **lectionary** can be your friend. The Foundation offers lectionary previews for year-round stewardship in our monthly Stewardship Newsletter. See "Additional Resources" below.)

Worship Theme Suggestions

- Advent/Christmas
 - **Patience and waiting** stand in opposition to the consumer-mindset of the world around us. We are bombarded with messages that emphasize instant gratification and products which promise to solve all our problems.
 - Advent can focus our attention on **giving away what is valuable to us** in order to help others. God sent a vulnerable baby Jesus into a dangerous world run by Herod. Joseph and Mary in their own ways risked their status and community ties to raise this child. The wise men traveled a great distance and brought precious gifts.
- Lent
 - Many worshippers choose to give something up for Lent (chocolate, meat, etc.). What might it look like to **give up something that stands between us and God**? Or conversely, to add a new practice during Lent, such as giving our time and talent in a special way during this season?
 - Lent is a season where we recall Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. **Generous giving is a sacrificial act.** We must forego something we enjoy as we instead focus on the work of God around us.
- Eastertide
 - Jesus' death and resurrection are a good opportunity to remind us of the **generous gifts** God has given us: The gift of God's only son, the gift of eternal life, the gift of salvation from the sin that ensnares us. God loves and gives to us unconditionally. How will we respond to such generous love?
 - Pentecost reminds us of the first spiritual gift the early church received: each worshipper was able to hear the good news in their own language. What **spiritual gifts** are present in your congregation? How might worshippers be invited to share the story of their gifts with one another?
- Ordinary Time (or any time of year)
 - Stewardship rightly includes **taking time for rest and keeping the sabbath** just as God rested on the seventh day. How does rest benefit us? The work of God on earth?
 - Stewardship also includes **caring for our bodies.** Personal well-being is a way to practice good stewardship of ourselves. Perhaps visiting the sick could be seen as a way to steward the health of the Body of Christ.
 - How do we **steward our collective stories** as God's people? A Legacy Sunday service might include telling stories of the church's history, members who have entered the Church Triumphant, and the legacies they created.

Suggestions for Creating Liturgy

There are numerous liturgy resources available that need not be listed here. For worship leaders, writing your own prayers and liturgy can be a way to experience God's generosity and deepen your well of creativity.

If we are to preach that God is generous, we must first believe it ourselves. This is just as true for our worship planning, prayers, and liturgy, too. By writing our own liturgy, we are speaking from the heart about trusting in God's provision in an anxious and hurting world.

One place to start is the psalms. Practice writing out a psalm, and then rewriting a few verses in your own words. How might you write it to reflect your congregation's context today? What would you add or change? This can be the inspiration for a call to worship, prayer of confession, or prayers of the people.

Another place to find inspiration involves one or more of the planned scripture readings for the day. In your own words, how would you offer a prayer that responds to this text? What can you give thanks for? What do you find yourself asking God for after reflecting on the text? This can lead to liturgy that ties into the sermon theme. Perhaps the liturgy that precedes the sermon lifts up questions and hopes that will be addressed in the sermon. The liturgy following the sermon could offer praises and responses that stem from the good news that was proclaimed.

Reimagining the Offering Time

The invitation to the offering can easily become a rote part of worship if we let it, especially if we are burdened by our own anxieties about money. Our reluctance in asking people to give can easily be spotted when the invitation is little more than, "God loves a cheerful giver. Will the ushers please come forward?"

If giving generously to God is a joy because we are experiencing the heart of God, then the offering time should reflect this. The invitation should make space for worshippers to feel this joy for themselves:

- Take time to share a recent story of how the church's mission and ministry is changing lives in the name of Jesus Christ
- Have a worshipper give a brief testimony about what giving to the church means to them
- Invite a family member of a worshipper who has died to share a story about what this congregation meant to their loved one

Involving Lay Leadership

- Invite church leaders to share testimonies regularly in worship, perhaps during the offering time mentioned above.
- Church leaders can lead the effort in inviting other members to share their stories, creating a regular schedule. Leaders can work with those members to ensure their message fits with the theme and time allotted for that particular service.
- Invite elders and deacons to assist in crafting worship liturgy. What would it look like for them to write their own prayers? Could a Sunday School class work together to create liturgy for worship?

Helping Worshippers Cultivate Their Own Practice of Generosity

- Educate: Offer a Generosity 101 class that helps individuals to reflect on their experiences with money, a theology of giving, barriers to generosity, and questions about tithing.
- Help connect worshippers deepen their understanding of generosity not only by emphasizing it throughout the different seasons of the year, but also by naming the different ways that we can practice being generous toward God and our neighbors. This could include the gifts of time, skills, stories (testimonies), spiritual gifts, and social capital/influence.
- If you don't do so already, invite worshippers to write down these gifts they intend to share to support the mission and ministry of the church on their commitment card or as a stand-alone offering that can be placed in the offering plate.
- Create space in worship to celebrate the different ways that God is generous to us: gifts of rest, our bodies, our minds, our faith. How do each of these present us with opportunities to connect with God through our own giving? Giving thanks for each of these gifts might look different in worship: prayer stations, celebration board with sticky notes, liturgical dance, or learning a new hymn.

Additional Stewardship Resources

- Sign up for our free monthly **Stewardship Newsletter** with articles on year-round stewardship, lectionary previews, ideas, best practices, and more:
<https://www.presbyterianfoundation.org/resources/newsletters/category/stewardship-ministry-news/>
- www.StewardshipNavigator.com
- Contact the Presbyterian Foundation for help or more information