

## **Week 4, Introduction and Overview** **“There Is Profound Joy in Giving Freely and Generously”**

### **Introduction:**

This is the final week for this fall stewardship campaign. It is “Consecration Sunday,” when you will ask members of the congregation to bring their estimate of giving cards to place on the Altar table as an offering to God. Hopefully, this will be a service of re-commitment and joy.

Please note that I have included a brief consecration service in the Worship Resources file. Also, note that I have included two post-campaign resources at the bottom, below.

### **Preparation:**

I recommend continuing to include 1-2 persons in the worship service, who share how important their church is to them. You can have these volunteers speak live during the service or record them ahead of time and share the video during the service.

Be sure to include “**estimate of giving cards**” as inserts in the bulletin for those who forget to bring their estimate cards from home.

### **Ideas for Social Media**

I encourage the continued use of social media and your church website to promote the “Gratitude, Prayer, Re-commitment” series. You could continue to upload videos of persons sharing what they really like about their church.

Also, use Facebook and other social media this week to invite everyone to attend the Consecration service at the church during regular worship services.

### **Post Campaign Follow-Up**

#### **Evaluation**

There’s still a little bit of follow-up after Consecration Sunday. First, you should do an evaluation of the overall campaign with your staff and/or Stewardship Committee. Try to do this evaluation fairly soon, before new priorities began to take over and the campaign itself begins to slip into the fuzzy past. Clayton Smith suggests that you focus the evaluation around three questions<sup>1</sup>:

1. What went well?
2. What do we need to improve?
3. What new ideas do we have for next year?

<sup>1</sup> Clayton Smith, *Propel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 84.

## Letters

As soon as you can after Consecration Sunday, it is important to send parishioners, one of two different letters. I think that it doesn't hurt to send a letter to people who have a history of financially supporting your church, but who did not submit an estimate of giving card during the fall stewardship campaign. You never know. Perhaps they were out of town and forgot. Or, something else happened that caused them to forget to submit an estimate of giving card. I have attached a model letter below. Be sure to include another estimate of giving card with your letter.

### Letter to People Who Did Not Submit an Estimate of Giving Card:



[Date]

Your church letterhead

**Gratitude...Prayer...Re-commitment**

Dear Friends,

Our fall stewardship campaign recently concluded, with many church members coming forward to place their "estimate of giving" cards on the Altar during Consecration Sunday.

Our business administrator informs me that the response to our stewardship campaign was quite strong. This is good because our church's financial leaders seek to be good stewards of your contributions. Good stewardship begins with developing an accurate and realistic budget for the coming year. The estimate of giving cards provide essential figures that we need in order to craft a responsible budget.

If you have not yet provided an estimate of giving card for next year, I encourage you to complete and return the enclosed card. In advance, thanks for sending in your estimate card and thanks for your support of our church.

Yours in Christ's Service,

Note: There will be some people who will not submit an estimate of giving card, even after you have sent them a gentle reminder. I do not suggest sending any further reminders to those who still do not submit an estimate card. Some people are just opposed to making estimates of giving on principle. In my experience as a parish pastor, sometimes parishioners refused to complete an estimate of giving card, even though they were one of the church's largest contributors. For those who do not submit an estimate, you can always look back to see what they have typically contributed over the past years and use that figure in your budgeting process.

**Further Note:** If you have parishioners who have historically submitted estimate of giving cards, but did not do so this year, even after you reminded them, then something is going on, and you need to follow up with them directly.

**Letter of Thanks to Everyone Who Submitted an Estimate of Giving Card**



[Date]

Your church letterhead

**Gratitude...Prayer...Re-commitment**

Dear Friends,

**I am writing to say thanks for making an estimate of your financial giving to our church for 2016.** Our business administrator informs me that the response to our stewardship campaign was quite strong. This is good because our church's financial leaders seek to be good stewards of your contributions. The estimate of giving cards provide essential figures that we need in order to craft a responsible budget.

I am deeply grateful for your financial support of our church and your commitment to our continued ministry in the future. Your financial support has helped us to make a real difference in the lives of persons—both inside and outside of our congregation. I look forward to next year. I can't wait to see where Christ will lead us, as his disciples.

Once again, I am so grateful for your financial support of our church. Thank you.

Yours in Christ's Service,

## **Week 4 –Worship Resources**

### **Suggestions for the Altar**

For Consecration Sunday, I recommend decorating the Altar with pictures and objects symbolic of the ministries that your church does. I realize that this is similar to my part of my suggestions for Week 2. So, to the degree possible, I would strive to add new symbols of your ministries. This could have the additional benefit of helping your congregation realize how much they really do in ministry. In most churches, I don't think the typical parishioner fully comprehends all that their church does in ministry.

I would also caution against crowding or “over-decorating” the Altar for this service . Be sure to leave plenty of room for congregants to place their estimate of giving cards.

### **Preparation before the Service**

There are several important things to do in preparation for the service:

1. Remember to insert estimate of giving cards in the bulletin, along with an envelope for privacy, for those persons have forgotten to bring their estimate card with them. Also, make sure that every pew has pencils or pens for completing the estimate cards.
2. Although most persons will be able to walk their estimate cards up to the Altar. Alert your ushers to watch for persons who may not be able walk their cards to the Altar. As with Week 3, I am thinking of persons who have mobility challenges or perhaps parents who have young children in the service with them.
3. Make sure that your church musicians have prepared some soft, meditative music to play as people are completing their estimate cards and bringing them up to the Altar.

### **Opening Prayer**

O Generous God, be present with us during this Consecration Service. Help us to remember with gratitude all of those who came before us in this church. Help us also to look towards the future; make us open to new ministries which you call us to undertake. Open our eyes and help us to envision the many ways in which we can transform the world through the ministries that you give us. As we complete our estimate of giving cards and place them on your Altar, send your Holy Spirit to inspire us with joyful and generous hearts. All of this we pray in the name in Christ's name. Amen.

### **Offertory Prayer**

O Gracious God, as we lift up these financial offerings today, move within our hearts and help us to feel the joy of giving, which the widow must have experienced in the Temple, in front of Jesus and his disciples. In his name, Amen.

## Children's Time

### Objects:

1. Fill a huge bowl with child friendly candy.
- 2.

### Outline:

1. "Today boys and girls, I want us to talk some more about giving to others.
2. "How do you think God wants us to feel, when we give to others?" (Let the children process this question and encourage them to share their ideas.)
3. "Well in the Bible, it says this about how God wants us to feel. It says that 'God loves a cheerful giver.' [2 Corinthians 9:7c] In other words, when we give something to someone else, God wants us to feel joyful. And, God wants the person who receives to also feel joyful.
4. "So, this morning, I want us to try giving joyfully."
5. Show the children the bag of candy.
6. "I'm going to give each of you some candy, but this candy is not for you. Before you get some candy, I want you to spread out and give this candy to some of the adults here in the sanctuary. And, I want you to watch to see if giving them some candy will make them smile and be happy."
7. Distribute the candy and let the children spread out. When they have given away all of their candy. Have them come back and sit with you. Give them some candy to eat. Take a piece of candy yourself and join with the children as you sit and eat candy together.
8. Ask them, "How did the adults react when you offered them candy? To you think it made them happy to receive the candy?" Let them respond.
9. "How about you? Did it make you happy to give the candy to the adults and watch them smile?" Let them respond.
10. "O.K. Well, that's what God wants when we give to others. God wants us to be filled with joy, when we give."
11. Close with a prayer of blessing.

## The Consecration of Estimate of Giving Cards

Before the consecration begins, give the congregation instructions and remind them of two things:

1. Making an estimate of giving for next year is completely voluntary. They are not required to lift up an estimate card today if they are not yet prepared to make and estimate, or if they disagree with making an estimate in principle.
2. For those who wish, an usher can come and take their estimate card, placed in the envelope, up to the Altar. Have them raise their hands, if they would like assistance from the ushers.

After the instructions have been given. Have the church musicians play some meditative music, as people come forward with their estimate cards, as they are ready. When everyone has placed their cards on the Altar, lead them in the following consecration.

**Leader:** Today we remember all the people who came before us in this church. We remember and give thanks for their work and sacrifices to establish this church and build it up, as a community of faith and a beacon, proclaiming God's love.

**People:** **As we give thanks for those who came before us, we also re-commit ourselves to the financial support of this church.**

**Leader:** God also asks us to support our church through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and our witness.

**People:** **With joy and thanksgiving, we re-commit ourselves to supporting our church through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and our witness.**

Pastor (Lifts hands, palms down, over the estimate of giving cards on the Altar)

“Please unite your heart with mine in prayer:

“O Gracious God, we ask that you send your Holy Spirit to consecrate these estimate of giving cards and bless all who gather here for this service. Through your Spirit, help us to experience a transformation in our lives and a joy in our hearts, as we re-commit ourselves to the financial support of this church, which we love so much.

“Guide and strengthen our community of faith. Help us to proclaim the Good News of your love.  
 Where there is darkness, help us to bring your light.  
 Where there is suffering, help us to bring your mercy.  
 Where there is injustice, help us to establish your justice.  
 Where there is hopelessness, help us to bring your hope.  
 Where there is hatred, help us to bring your love.  
 Where there is war and violence, help us to bring your peace.

Through these financial commitments and through our other commitments, grant that our church may be a transformative force in the world. In Christ's name, we pray.

**People: Amen.**

## **The Proclamation: “There Is Profound Joy in Giving Freely and Generously”**

### **Suggested Scripture and Sermon Title:**

Mark 12:41-44

“What the Widow Knew”

### **Theme:**

“There Is Profound Joy in Giving Freely and Generously”

### **Scripture Analysis**

This is Consecration Sunday, the final week in this fall stewardship campaign. The text for this Proclamation is Mark 12:41-44, the story of the “Widow’s Offering.”

In this story, Jesus and his disciples visit the great Temple in Jerusalem. In the Temple, they go to the “Court of the Women” where the Temple treasury is located. It is at the Treasury that people stop to make financial offerings to God by dropping their contributions in one of 13 treasury chests, called Shofars.

Jesus and his disciples sit down, across from where the Shofar-chests are located. This was usually a good place for to people-watch. Frequently, rich members of society would make a grand show as they deposited large sums of money in a treasury chest. However, as the various rich people came and deposited their offerings, a poor widow meekly crept up to the treasury and deposited two small copper coins. Taken together, the two coin were worth about one penny—they were practically worthless in the Hebrew economy.

However, as Jesus watches what happens, he turns to his disciples and says, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury.”

We can imagine that Jesus’ disciples were initially perplexed by his observation. Surely, Jesus had witnessed the vast sums of money which the wealthy had already placed in the treasury.

Jesus responds by observing, “For all of them [the rich] have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

I believe that there is an enigmatic aspect to this story. It’s not clear at all why the widow would give all that she had to the Temple treasury. We never learn her motivation. Instead, Jesus simply points out that proportionately she has given more than all of those rich people who made large donations in terms of absolute currency.

Some scriptural interpreters have suggested that in this story Jesus is attacking the religious system that taught this woman she was obligated to offer her small sum. However, I’m not persuaded by this interpretation, even though there are plenty of scripture passages where Jesus speaks out against economic injustice. Instead, I think that there is another explanation.



To make my case for an alternative motivation, we need to begin by reflecting on the “psychology of giving.” When we reflect for a moment, it’s not hard to identify several motivations that people may have for giving:

1. Out of a sense of duty, obligation, or guilt.
2. To honor or glorify themselves or another person.
3. Out of a sense of gratitude for all that God has given them
4. Because they believe that their gift will make a real, transformational difference in the world

I would suggest that there is a fifth reason that people actually provides a better example of the widow’s motivation: Sometimes people give because of the joy they receive in the act of giving. When we give with a free and generous heart, then we can experience a deep joy in the very act of giving. This joy is not restricted to only those who give out of wealth. Even those with much less resources can experience the joy of giving.

I believe that the widow in the story knew about this joy. So, even though she had very little to give, she gave it all because of the joy that she experienced.

Further, in giving all that she had, the widow demonstrated the depth of her faith. Surely, in her faith, she must have trusted that God would provide for her in her absolute poverty.

### **Potential Sermon Illustrations**

The best sermon illustrations for this week are stories that you, as the pastor, can share with the congregation about times when you were filled with joy to give someone a present. Try to recall a time when you just couldn’t wait to give someone a gift.

For instance, in my own life, I remember one Christmas long ago, when my son was still very young. We decided to surprise his mother with a bicycle. My son had already received a new bicycle for his November birthday. He and I were now able to go for bicycle rides together. However, his mother did not have a bicycle. So, he wanted to surprise with a bicycle at Christmas so that she could join us on bicycle rides.

Taking care to keep this a secret from my wife, I purchased her a new birthday. We arranged with family friends to store the bike in their apartment because, as my son pointed out, it was really hard to hide something as big as a bicycle under the Christmas tree. Our friends had gone to Oregon for the Christmas holidays, but they left the keys their apartment with me.

On Christmas Day, we got up and unwrapped all of the gifts under the tree. We had a lovely Christmas brunch. Then, we told my wife that we were going to go for a walk, just to check on our friends “empty” apartment. We walked on a bike trail to the apartment, and claimed the bicycle from the apartment.

To this day, I still remember walking the bicycle back, along the bike path, with my son. We were both so excited. We knew that his mother would be completely surprised—and delighted. When we neared our house, I took out a red bow and stuck it on handlebars. We were

so excited, we were giggling and laughing. We were so excited, and we couldn't wait to give her the new bike.

When we got back to our home, I waited with the bike, standing behind a bush. My son excitedly ran up the steps to our house, giggling uncontrollably. He fetched his mother with the words, "Dad needs to show you something outside." My wife put on her coat and walked out to the sidewalk, where my son and I excitedly screamed out, "Surprise!!" My wife was appropriately surprised and delighted, as my son excitedly jumped up and down and talked about how they could ride together. Then, she started shedding tears of joy; we knew she would. Finally, we all got on our bikes and went for a short ride together.

Here's a second illustration that I heard at some point from a preacher. It's not my story, but I can't remember where I heard it:

It seems that a certain church had an elderly parishioner who was cared for in an assisted living facility. Every month, the church's pastor would pay a pastoral call on the elderly woman. At the end of the pastoral call, just after the pastor had lifted up a prayer with the parishioner, she would always hand over an envelope with a substantial amount of money for her church.

When the pastor returned to the church office and opened the envelope, the amount of the donation seemed astronomical in comparison with what the pastor thought the elderly woman could afford. For many months the pastor struggled with whether it was ethical to accept such a large donation from an elderly parishioner who had significant medical bills and seemingly limited financial resources.

After careful deliberation, the pastor decided that the ethical course of action was to stop accepting such seemingly large financial donations from the elderly parishioner. So, on the next pastoral call, when the parishioner offered another envelope, the pastor refused to accept it, suggesting that perhaps the parishioner could use it to pay for things that she needed. As the pastor stood, ready to leave, the parishioner offered her gift several times. Each time, the pastor politely, but firmly, refused to accept the donation.

Finally, the elderly woman, with tears streaming down her face, said: "Look, Pastor, I have been a member of our church since I was a young girl. I have always loved and supported my church. When I was able, I was involved in so many different activities in the church. Just about all of my friends are also in that congregation. My church has always been very important to me, and over the years, my activity in that church has brought me so much joy.

"Now, I am elderly. I struggle with many ailments, and I am frequently in a great deal of pain. I can no longer get out and about. It's been years since I was last in my church. I cannot volunteer in the church the way I used to do. Please accept this financial gift for the church. It's one of the few things that I can do that brings so much joy."

Giving to our church should be a thing of great joy. As clergy leaders, we need to help our parishioners find a way to reclaim giving as joyful.