Growing & Giving Together

Five Minutes with God: Stewardship Edition

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church

Growing and Giving Together

None of us is finished, but we're each making a good start.

This truth captures what I've seen over the past two and a half years of our Vestry's work to grow spiritually together. It's work with a longer history than you might think. According to the Episcopal Church's governing rules, the Vestry is responsible for the temporal (worldly) affairs of the church, while the clergy are responsible for spiritual affairs. But about 14 years ago, we decided to make St. Andrew's Vestry not just a board of directors but a parish ministry council, with each Vestry member representing a ministry commission. That has made our leaders deeply invested in the life and well-being of the parish. Then, in 2024, we took lay leadership up another notch by making spiritual growth a priority in the Vestry's work. Why? For two reasons. First, I believe that leaders of the church, the Body of Christ in this place, also need to be growing as followers of Jesus (if it was right for the apostles, it's probably right for us). Second, growing as a follower of Jesus is why we're all here at St. Andrew's, and our Vestry members should lead us in walking that path.

So, as part of their spiritual leadership, Vestry members have written the reflections for this Stewardship-Season edition of *Five Minutes With God*. Each day, you'll find a portion of the Scripture we'll hear the coming Sunday, along with a Vestry member's personal response. Although the authors are the people responsible for the temporal affairs of the church, you'll find that not one of the reflections makes a case for why the church needs your money. Some of them do deal with time, talent, and treasure, but the important point is this: Being a steward is about your life (not the church's budget), and it's about your *whole* life (not just your giving). A steward is someone to whom an owner entrusts management of something the owner holds precious. So, **what you're given to steward is … your whole life, because you and the life you live are precious in God's eyes and essential to God's purposes.**

I think you'll see that high doctrine of stewardship shining through the reflections that follow. Come along with your Vestry leaders on this journey of growing and giving our lives together.

Fr. John+

Meet the Contributors



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Monday, Oct. 12, 2026

Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him—and the gates shall not be closed: I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name. – Isaiah 45:1-4

This passage emphasizes God's sovereignty in using Cyrus to fulfill his plans. How has God used me to fulfill his plans? I think about our Outreach partnership with St. James Church. Years ago, I had recently started playing golf at Minor Park. One afternoon when I was on the practice range, an African American couple, Andrea and Leon, came up and introduced themselves. That could have been the end of it. But the Holy Spirit urged me to seek out Andrea, and we began to play golf together. As we played, we would talk about racial issues. One thing led to another; and as a result, Andrea and two of her friends from St. James came to St. Andrew's and met with the Vestry, sharing their stories. From there, the St. James partnership grew. Five years later, we are still partnering with the members of St. James, providing a monthly pantry as well as our Winter and Summer Free Store events. Realizing God's plans has been amazing. – Janet Kelley

Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2026

I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me, so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things. – Isaiah 45:5-7

As Harry Truman said, "The buck stops here." It also starts here. Like a good boss, God simply says, "I made you and create all the good and the challenges that occur in your life." It is so much easier to accept one "boss" who has clearly and concisely laid out his expectations and has given you the tools to succeed. The key tool is to believe in him and only in him. The question might be "What do you do with what he has given you?" With each rising sun, do you acknowledge the one God; and with each setting sun, do you thank him? – Ann Goodrich

Wednesday, Oct. 14, 2026

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the whole earth. Sing to the Lord and bless his Name; proclaim the good news of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations and his wonders among all peoples. For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; he is more to be feared than all gods. As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols; but it is the Lord who made the heavens. — Psalm 96:1-5

"Discomfort" is the first word that comes to mind as I reflect on this passage.

My relationship with God has always been deeply personal and private. I don't talk about my faith. In fact, I sometimes find myself uncomfortable around people who do. Maybe part of that is a fear of being judged. Is my faith strong enough? Do I know enough? Do I believe the right things?

And yet, Psalm 96 says: Sing. Tell. Declare.

A private relationship with God is valuable. But this passage makes me wonder whether I sometimes use that privacy as a shield. A shield protects us, and perhaps I've used mine to protect myself from judgment, vulnerability, or having to explain something I don't completely understand. But shields can also keep people out. And maybe, in protecting something that feels deeply personal, I've also kept others from seeing something that is important to who I am.

Maybe the invitation for me isn't to become louder about my faith but simply to lower the shield a little and become less afraid of letting my faith be seen. — Scott Burditt

Thursday, Oct. 15, 2026

Oh, the majesty and magnificence of God's presence! Oh, the power and the splendor of his sanctuary! Ascribe to the Lord, you families of the peoples; ascribe to the Lord honor and power. Ascribe to the Lord the honor due his Name; bring offerings and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; let the whole earth tremble before him. — Psalm 96:6-9

We honor God in many ways. Our prayers honor God. Our presence at worship honors God. We honor him with the work of our hands when we obey his mandate to love our neighbors as ourselves. We also honor God with our money. Proverbs 3:9 tells us to honor God with our wealth. 2 Corinthians 9:7 tells us the Lord loves a cheerful giver. Sharing our bounty is a sacrifice that is pleasing to God (Hebrews 13:16). So, cheerfully bring your offerings and come into his courts! — Sara Welch

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our message of the Gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of people we proved to be among you for your sake. – 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

It's important that our faith isn't just about what we believe but also about how we live. True faith inspires our actions, and our love for others calls for hard work—a "labor of love," as this passage mentions. Sometimes, I can get caught up in believing the right things, but the power of the gospel is how we apply the Word in our daily lives. After all, the message of the gospel came "not in word only." When I do something for someone else without expecting anything in return, or simply out of the call to serve selflessly, it brings me hope that I am making the world a better place. Think about the steadfast hope that could endure if we all lived out our faith that way. – Tim Dodderidge

Saturday, Oct. 17, 2026

You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place where your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.
– 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

*The old song says, "They will know we are Christians by our love." I believe St. Andrew's lives this out by offering the Good News with joy amid suffering. Through the Outreach Commission, I have the opportunity to share God's gift of love to serve our neighbors in need. I will never forget the conversation I had when mentoring an Operation Breakthrough mom. She asked if I was ever homeless or used drugs—by the grace of God, I was able to say, "No." She then asked why **I** was mentoring her. The next week, this thirty-something mother, who was once homeless and is a recovering addict, made my heart smile as she*

told me that, earlier that week, she gave a less-fortunate homeless man her last dollar. The gift of the Holy Spirit was upon us that day, for we, who come from totally different backgrounds, shared God's gift of wisdom and love. — Karen Lundgren

Sunday, Oct. 18, 2026

The Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away. — Matthew 22:15-22

The Pharisees and the Herodians ask Jesus an either-or question, attempting to trick him into an answer that will alienate either his followers or the Jewish authorities. Instead, Jesus says it is right to give back to Caesar what is his but also right to continue to pursue the life Jesus is teaching them to live. As Christians today, we also must be aware of these decisions in our lives. Yes, it is OK to follow the laws and rules of our society, but we must frame them within our Christian teachings. We should focus our thought processes and decisions through the prism that Jesus has given us. Our responsibility is to know who it is that will determine our ultimate fate. — Tim Cranor

Weekly Wrap-Up

- *Noticing:* Looking back over my life this week, what image, word, or moment stays with me? Where was God in it?
- *Reflecting:* Which reading or reflection felt closest to my heart this week? Which one made me most uncomfortable?
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Monday, Oct. 19, 2026

Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the Lord. — Leviticus 19:1-2,15-16

I struggle with the Old Testament. I want historical context! As I've wrestled with this passage, I wonder if it is my desire not to "render an unjust judgment" that makes me ruminate. I want to see all the angles before I settle into an opinion. How tempting it is to put people into categories, such as the example here of poor vs. mighty. But, if we are intentional about a deeper understanding, what might we see in the gray? — Alisa Ramsey

Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2026

You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. — Leviticus 19:17-18

This quote from Leviticus is nearly identical to Jesus's teachings in the Gospels.

In Matthew, the Pharisees asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was. He told them, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (22:37-40)

In the 1,400 or so years from Moses to Jesus, God makes it clear that loving him and your neighbor as yourself are the cornerstone commandments. — Ben Gloe

Wednesday, Oct. 21, 2026

Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor lingered in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seats of the scornful! Their delight is in the law of the Lord, and they meditate on his law day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither; everything they do shall prosper. It is not so with the wicked; they are like chaff which the wind blows away. Therefore, the wicked

shall not stand upright when judgment comes, nor the sinner in the council of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked is doomed. — Psalm 1

"Like a tree planted by streams of water...." One of the methods for centering prayer is to imagine a river flowing by and around you. You silence your thoughts, worries, and words by imagining them floating by on the water.

Have you ever seen the roots of sycamore trees reaching down the banks into the river as you float by in your canoe? Nature is more than a metaphor. You can see it, touch it, feel it, and care for it. — Ann Holliday

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2026

You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, but though we had already suffered and been shamefully maltreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. — 1 Thessalonians 2:1-4

Building up the early church was arduous for Paul and his trusted companions. They were run out of town, imprisoned, even flogged. Yet, God's plan is steadfast against the adversaries. Spreading the Gospel has always required courage; and this passage reminds me to pray for the grace to endure internal and external opposition. It calls for self-reflection: Are my motives pure and God-centered? Do I dilute my convictions in the face of unpopular reaction? Truly, Paul encourages the young upstart Thessalonians to minister to each other and face the inevitable challenges with courage given by God. It's no different today; if we are about God's will, then our mission can thrive. — Paul Wurth

Friday, Oct. 23, 2026

As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us. — 1 Thessalonians 2:5-8

Paul talks of stewardship in this passage not as giving, but rather stewardship in its fullest sense—how we choose to spend ourselves. He reminds the Thessalonians that his earlier ministry to them was not done in exchange for adoration or praise, but for Christ Jesus and the sharing of his message. Verse 8 summarizes it beautifully: Giving of ourselves to others comes from love—from Paul's love of the church in Thessaloniki, from Jesus' love for us, and from our love of our community and the wider world. – Ann Woodyard

Saturday, Oct. 24, 2026

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked Jesus a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." – Matthew 22:34-40

When confronted with what the Pharisees hope will be a self-springing trap, Jesus disarms it with one of the most basic and grounding principles, not only in Christianity but in all of life. He answers that love is the binding force in all that we do, both love of God and love of those traveling in this world with us.

We are all familiar with "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39) and its cousin, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12), but there is a reason that the latter is called the Golden Rule. I have used it countless times in trying to raise my children. I find it easy to say but hard to practice when trying to interact with those around me, especially when driving.

I would consider Matthew 22:39 to be a critical bedrock value for all of society. Without it, the foundation of civilized behavior begins to crumble. When you think about how loving neighbor comes in second to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart," it should indicate how closely the two are linked. We must love God and love those around us who share his treasures, both here on earth and afterwards. – Caleb Jackson

Sunday, Oct. 25, 2026

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them, "How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"'? If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions. – Matthew 22:41-46

"No one was able to give him an answer." The Pharisees had heard about all the signs and wonders that Jesus was doing but weren't able to commit to him. They were stuck, overvaluing their cultural and religious positions that gave them a measure of power or authority. As Christians, we believe Jesus was (and is) the Messiah. I am often challenged in my life to reflect on what that means for how I live, how I spend my time, how I serve other people, and the financial choices I make. "What do you think of the Messiah?" It is an expansive question, worthy of our reflection during this stewardship season. – Carolyn Johnson

Weekly Wrap-Up

- *Noticing:* Looking back over my life this week, what image, word, or moment stays with me? Where was God in it?
- *Reflecting:* Which reading or reflection felt closest to my heart this week? Which one made me most uncomfortable?
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Notes

Monday, Oct. 26, 2026

I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen." — Revelation 7:9-12

This reading pictures white-robed believers of all types in one place and with one shared goal: to praise and worship God, sitting on the throne from which he rules the cosmos, and his son, Jesus. The image of this throng from all over the world—from different cultures, races, and nations—makes it clear that God's "chosen" people are not limited to one city, country, race, or church denomination. Despite their differences, they acknowledge the power of God over their lives and accept God's grace and salvation through the sacrifice of his Lamb, Jesus Christ. The symbolism of the white robes, representing righteousness, and the palms, signaling victory, made it clear this group of righteous people have fended off the temptations of earthly life and have stayed true to God as their ruler.

I find these images comforting in a time when the world seems to be boiling with battles for wealth, power, and control, inspired by greed and differences in race, culture, religion, and political alignment. I pray for God's presence and support in my life as I focus on my acceptance of God's salvation and his dominion over me. Rather than being distracted by the secular pressures of everyday living, I am inspired to be more intentional about seeing and praising the beauty and joy that come from being a faithful believer. — Jewel Scott

Tuesday, Oct. 27, 2026

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." — Revelation 7:13-17

Given that our sins are greater than the number of the hairs on our head, what are our responsibilities to God? Should we only give money? How many ways can we serve him? Are we to bring others to God? Of course. Are we just to bring other Christians to St. Andrew's? Or are we also to bring people of other faiths and of no faith to Christianity? Yes, we do have that responsibility. Is it easy? Of course not. But those who make it through the "great ordeal" will have had help and guidance from others—like us. – Steve Miller

Wednesday, Oct. 28, 2026

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall ever be in my mouth. I will glory in the Lord; let the humble hear and rejoice. Proclaim with me the greatness of the Lord; let us exalt his Name together. I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me out of all my terror. Look upon him and be radiant, and let not your faces be ashamed. I called in my affliction, and the Lord heard me and saved me from all my troubles. – Psalm 34:1-6

Blessing the Lord "at all times" is hard, perhaps hardest when we experience the loss of a loved one. I know, as I lost my sister Nancy this past year.

I often have the honor of serving as an Altar Guild sacristan for St. Andrew's funerals; and since I have no duties during a funeral, I find myself quietly sitting in the nave listening to the homilies and to the Burial Rite. Each time I listen, I am reminded of God's healing love—a perfect love that casts away all doubts, fears, and anxiety and promises us eternal life.

That healing love, that hope of eternal life, gives me comfort; and for that, I will continue to bless the Lord even in the most difficult of times. – Janet Kelley

Thursday, Oct. 29, 2026

The angel of the Lord encompasses those who fear him, and he will deliver them. Taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are they who trust in him! Fear the Lord, you that are his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. The young lions lack and suffer hunger, but those who seek the Lord lack nothing that is good. The Lord ransoms the life of his servants, and none will be punished who trust in him. – Psalm 34:7-10,22

Psalms are songs from the heart. David is excited to proclaim the glories he has experienced loving and following God. He has faced a hungry lion, and God has seen him through that trial. He has tasted a sweet, perfect love of God and wants you, too, to experience that joy. Don't be afraid to write your own psalm about what God has given you. If you only share it with God, that is good enough. Or go sing it in a field or from a mountaintop. Alleluia! Amen. – Ann Goodrich

Friday, Oct. 30, 2026

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. — 1 John 3:1-3

The idea that God loves me just as I am is surprisingly difficult for me to accept. I grew up believing, at least in some ways, that love was conditional—that you earned it by being good enough, doing the right things, or meeting someone's expectations. It's hard to let go of that and believe there is a love I don't have to earn.

Maybe that's why the words "what we will be has not yet been revealed" speak to me. I know I'm a work in progress. There are parts of myself I'm proud of and others I'm still working on. I understand some things about my faith, and I still question plenty. For much of my life, I think I've seen those unfinished parts as things I needed to fix to be good enough.

But perhaps this passage is telling me something different. I can be unfinished and still be loved. God's love isn't waiting for some better version of me. He loves me now, while continuing to shape who I am becoming. — Scott Burditt

Saturday, Oct. 31, 2026

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." — Matthew 5:1-6

The original language of the New Testament, including the Sermon on the Mount, was Greek, a language most of us neither speak nor understand. Sometimes that deficit can prevent us from grasping a passage's meaning.

Take the word "meek" in "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." Today, that word implies weakness, submission, or even cowardice. The original Greek word that the NRSV translates as "meek" was praus*. Some Bible scholars say a more accurate translation of* praus *would be "gentle and humble" rather than meek.*

Think how much closer to the Kingdom of God we will be when the gentle and the humble take their rightful place as stewards of the earth. — Sara Welch

Sunday, Nov. 1, 2026 (All Saints' Day)

Jesus continued teaching his disciples on the mountain, saying, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." – Matthew 5:7-12

This portion of the Beatitudes should inspire us because it's a direct calling for how we should live our daily lives. The guidance is clear: Be merciful, be pure in heart, endure hardships. Doing right to others may seem simple, but it's challenging especially when we're being wronged ourselves. When someone is rude to me or treats me poorly, my immediate response is to treat them the same way. "Isn't that what they deserve?" I tell myself. But Jesus teaches us that we shouldn't stoop to their level because seeking vengeance only accelerates the cycle of hurt. If we opt for peace instead, we become the peacemakers this passage talks about—and Jesus tells us a great reward awaits us. – Tim Dodderidge

Weekly Wrap-Up

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Notes

Notes

Monday, Nov. 2, 2026

Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her and is found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her. One who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty, for she will be found sitting at the gate. — Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-14

Recently, when listening to the news, I began feeling depressed and that my faith life was slipping. I tried to reconnect with God, but I didn't hear him. A friend suggested that every morning I should ask God to walk by my side. Once this became a ritual, I realized that even in the most desperate situations, God is there to guide me about actions that would make a difference. Most of those actions are prayers. Today, I pray for the families who live on the margins, for victims of violence, and for those who live in war-torn countries—that they will feel the presence of God who is walking beside them. — Karen Lundgren

Tuesday, Nov. 3, 2026

To fix one's thought on wisdom is perfect understanding, and one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care, because she goes about seeking those worthy of her, and she graciously appears to them in their paths and meets them in every thought. — Wisdom of Solomon 6:15-16

Almost everyone spends their time on earth seeking wisdom. It is a never-ending quest that comes to us one insight at a time. As we gain wisdom, we begin to gain an understanding of who we are and how we fit into the lives that God is opening up before us. That in turn brings us a sense of peace and helps guide us as we walk our earthly path. — Tim Cranor

Wednesday, Nov. 4, 2026

The beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction, and concern for instruction is love of her, and love of her is the keeping of her laws, and giving heed to her laws is assurance of immortality, and immortality brings one near to God; so, the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom. — Wisdom of Solomon 6:17-20

In the days of new parenthood, as we adjusted to our new roles, a frequently used phrase around our house was, "It's our first time, too." Saying it out loud was a reminder to give ourselves grace in hard moments. That phrase has stuck with me and developed deeper meaning over the past few years—the understanding that we're all just learning as we go. This Scripture passage is a

reminder of the value of the pursuit of wisdom. We don't have to know it all. We can demonstrate our commitment to God by continuing the path of learning. – Alisa Ramsey

Thursday, Nov. 5, 2026

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. – 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

As Paul stated in First Corinthians, "Death is swallowed up in victory" (15:54). We don't need to fear death, and we don't need to fear the future. God knows what you need. He'll provide what you need; and when the end of this time comes, those of us who love him will look toward the future instead of looking toward the past. – Ben Gloe

Friday, Nov. 6, 2026

This we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore, encourage one another with these words. – 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

Sunrises in the winter help keep me facing Godward—my senses aware, waiting for the loud command or the trumpet call. One morning last winter, on the way to the 8 a.m. service, I noticed the sunrise. The sky was grey, pale pink, and purple with a band of lemon yellow on the horizon.

As I absorbed the moment, God spoke to me and said, "Are you coming?"

"Yes," I said. "Where?"

"Have faith," he said. I nodded. – Ann Holliday

Saturday, Nov. 7, 2026

Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept." – Matthew 25:1-5

This passage always reminds me that life is lived in God's time. We all become aware at some age that "we know not the day nor the hour" relating to our mortality. Added to this mystery is the challenge always to be prepared for God's plans to change. I'm reminded of packing for a trip—do I throw in a few extra articles of clothing in case my flight gets cancelled? Once I accept my role in God's plan, it pays dividends to understand fully what is required of me. I know I'll be human and occasionally "fall asleep" on the job. Yet, my responsibility and role never expire. I must have enough oil to last the entire night. — Paul Wurth

Sunday, Nov. 8, 2026

Jesus continued his teaching, saying, "But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! There will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." — Matthew 25:6-13

Despite the anachronisms and other issues in this passage, I can't read it without thinking of resource management (my career) and the concept of a planning horizon. The silly party girls are focused on the immediate good times, on just getting in the door for the party—they might be pre-gaming a little too hard. The wise ones are prepared to wait for the main event to start. They don't have to run out for an extra six-pack when the host arrives, missing their window in the process.

We are all stewards of our own resources. We can spend them for immediate gratification, or we can save, invest, or share them. This parable shows the value of watching over our resources so they're available when opportunity arrives. — Ann Woodyard

Weekly Wrap-Up

- *Noticing:* Looking back over my life this week, what image, word, or moment stays with me? Where was God in it?
- *Reflecting:* Which reading or reflection felt closest to my heart this week? Which one made me most uncomfortable?
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Notes

Notes

Monday, Nov. 9, 2026

Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is at hand; the Lord has prepared a sacrifice, he has consecrated his guests. At that time, I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs, those who say in their hearts, "The Lord will not do good nor will he do harm." Their wealth shall be plundered and their houses laid waste. Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them; though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them. – Zephaniah 1:7,12-13

I'm tempted to be silent and simply let this scripture speak for itself.

Zephaniah is writing at a time when God's people have either abandoned their worship of him for idols or have become lazy in their worship, believing that nothing will happen to them as a result. Zephaniah foreshadows the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ by noting that God has prepared his sacrifice. His command to be silent suggests that God will not hear our excuses for failing to prioritize God over other desires or commitments, our bragging about our piety and wealth, or our pleas for second chances. Rather, the God who created light will shine his light into every heart to find those who have taken his grace for granted. The destruction of their wealth and belongings will be a reminder that God measures us by our acceptance of his gift of consecration through his sacrifice, not by our earthly wealth.

We often hear that we cannot take our things with us when we travel on to the next phase of eternity. Zephaniah's message is a reminder that not only will our things be left behind but they also will have contributed nothing to God's view of us. The only thing of value in our eternal life will be our faithfulness in following God and accepting his grace through Jesus Christ. Although it may be tempting to put faith and its demands on the back burner, or to waffle in acknowledging that God's way is the only way, he will know what is truly in our hearts and judge us accordingly. – Jewel Scott

Tuesday, Nov. 10, 2026

The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter, the warrior cries aloud there. That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements. I will bring such distress upon people that they shall walk like the blind; because they have sinned against the Lord, their blood shall be poured out like dust and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them

on the day of the Lord's wrath; in the fire of his passion, the whole earth shall be consumed; for a full, a terrible end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth. – Zephaniah 1:14-18

Well, this is an especially dark and gloom-filled message, isn't it? I suppose this ancient text can be seen as a "stewardship" passage because of this statement: "neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them." This was true for the prophet's audience in the seventh-century BCE and is still true for us today. The Israelites held in captivity in Babylon were not having a good time. They had faith but had not been faithful. May our lives be faithful, stretching out to God and to others with open hands. – Carolyn Johnson

Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2026

Lord, you have been our refuge from one generation to another. Before the mountains were brought forth, or the land and the earth were born, from age to age you are God. You turn us back to the dust and say, "Go back, O child of earth." For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past and like a watch in the night. You sweep us away like a dream; we fade away suddenly like the grass. In the morning it is green and flourishes; in the evening it is dried up and withered. For we consume away in your displeasure; we are afraid because of your wrathful indignation. Our iniquities you have set before you, and our secret sins in the light of your countenance. So, teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. – Psalm 90:1-8, 12

The ephemerality of man is uncomfortable. Death is hard to talk about, usually avoided; and we often go to great lengths to deny its inevitability. Even when it is necessary to talk about death, it still feels almost taboo.

The casualness of this passage may be somewhat jarring. Most of the reading talks about how we are just a blip in time to God; a moment that passes like any other from one day to the next. It states that our only constant in this life is God's presence and oversight, which will outlast us. But what brings me an odd sense of comfort is the last line. By asking God to teach us to know that our time is limited, that line is telling us to acknowledge and embrace our mortality so that our life is not wasted. God will be here for us, so let us use our time wisely.

We are all guilty of waiting for a more convenient time to change our behaviors. The sage philosopher J. Wellington Wimpy once said, "I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today." The reference may be lost on younger generations, but we understand the meaning: I promise to take responsibility for my actions later, if I can just get what I need now. Today's reading says we need

to acknowledge our limited time and prioritize our actions now. God is all around us, supporting us, for all time; but during our brief moment on this planet, we must own it. – Caleb Jackson

Thursday, Nov. 12, 2026

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. – 1 Thessalonians 5:1-5

Should we always be ready for the Second Coming? Of course, and we must not let temptation overtake us for the moment. Paul says we can only be saved through God's grace and that the only thing we may brag about is our relationship with Christ.

But what can we also do to advance Christ's kingdom?

Yes, I give financially and have been increasing the amount yearly. But I also provide work to formerly incarcerated felons, as well as homeless persons (one through St. Andrew's). Through the Facilities Commission, the church has helped give a start to several people in poverty. In addition, there are many ways you can find the blessing of volunteering at St. Andrew's or with local nonprofits. Please do not stop with a one-hour service on Sunday mornings. – Steve Miller

Friday, Nov. 13, 2026

So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore, encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing. – 1 Thessalonians 5:6-11

This reading asks believers to encourage one another, emphasizing the importance of faith, hope, and love. This is easy to do in church when we are among friends but difficult to do when we encounter a stranger. Several years ago, I was asked to serve as the treasurer for the Kansas City unit of Church Women United, "a racially, culturally, and theologically inclusive Christian

women's movement." I had never been to a meeting, and the only person in the group whom I knew was the woman who made the ask. The Holy Spirit encouraged me to take a leap of faith, and I said yes. The membership is primarily African American women from inner-city churches. These women are incredible; their faith is unwavering. They give generously of their time and resources to many agencies throughout the city. They share their joys and concerns; and when asked how they are, they respond, "I am blessed." I love these women and the time I share with them. Sharing your faith with strangers is difficult, but joy comes in meeting different believers. – Janet Kelley

Saturday, Nov. 14, 2026

Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven will be as when a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time, the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'" – Matthew 25:14-23

I can't sing or draw. So, what talents do I have? I can volunteer to do a job and see that it gets done. I can't leave dishes in the sink overnight or have an unmade bed, but I'm not sure whether these qualify as talents. God has given me a specific amount of time, and I have a "talent" for packing more into a period of time than I probably should, which frustrates my husband. Like the servants who doubled their talents, we can strive to make the Master proud of us. God wants us to use our own talents to the best of our ability, and he promises to let us enter into his joy. What talents has God given you? What are you doing with them? – Ann Goodrich

Sunday, Nov. 15, 2026

Jesus continued his teaching, saying "Then the slave who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return, I would have received what was my own with interest. So, take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" — Matthew 25:24-30

There have been plenty of times in my life when I've had an idea, felt called to do something, or had an opportunity in front of me, and then I started thinking about all the reasons not to do it. What if I fail? What if I'm wrong? What will people think?

I can convince myself that I'm simply being cautious or thoughtful. But when I'm really honest with myself, sometimes I'm just afraid.

God has entrusted me with talents, relationships, resources, and opportunities. Yet my fear of failure can keep me from using them fully. I protect myself from the possibility of failure, but in doing so, I also protect myself from what might happen if I actually tried.

That's when fear stops protecting me and starts holding me hostage.

I don't think God expects me to succeed at everything. But maybe he expects me to trust him enough to use what I've been given, take the risk, and let go of what happens next. — Scott Burditt

Weekly Wrap-Up

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- *Reflecting:* Which reading or reflection felt closest to my heart this week? Which one made me most uncomfortable?
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Notes

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Monday, Nov. 16, 2026

For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice. – Ezekiel 34:11-16

In this passage, God steps in to act as "shepherd" over his flock. He offers us plenty of leadership lessons as he outlines a different leadership model—not one of control and dominance but one of compassionate, selfless service. God's vision of a leader is someone who empowers others, not someone who seizes power for themselves. It's someone who shepherds the lost, not someone who lets the flock scatter. The best leaders I've ever known—coaches, bosses, teachers, and pastors—didn't just think about their needs; they looked after the whole flock. They put themselves down to lift others up. That's the sort of leadership God calls us to, and it pushes me to be a better leader in my own life. – Tim Dodderidge

Tuesday, Nov. 17, 2026

Therefore, thus says the Lord God: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken. – Ezekiel 34:20-24

How easy it is for me to be the fat sheep! At one time, I was perhaps a true example of a "Karen" who rarely donated money or volunteered outside my children's school. When my children were in middle school and "didn't need me anymore," God directed me to give of my time to those in need. Seventeen years ago, I started volunteering at Gordon Parks Elementary, where I began to see

the plight of the underserved children of Kansas City—the hunger, the lack of safety, the instability. There isn't a day I don't leave the school with my heart full of joy and gratitude for the way God's gift of love is received there. The reading from Ezekiel highlights God's role as a caring shepherd, but it also holds us accountable for how we treat others. — Karen Lundgren

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2026

Come, let us sing to the Lord; let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving and raise a loud shout to him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the caverns of the earth, and the heights of the hills are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands have molded the dry land. Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, and kneel before the Lord our Maker. For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice! — Psalm 95:1-7

If we could mold a cup that never overflowed, we could begin to express our love and appreciation for all that God has given us and all the ways that God has blessed us. That cup does not exist. Instead, we must give him our thanks and praises daily, acknowledging that he has given us more than we deserve. We will never be able to thank him enough for what we have been given. — Tim Cranor

Thursday, Nov. 19, 2026

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. — Ephesians 1:15-19

Reading this introduction to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, I can't help but think of the number of encouraging texts I've exchanged in the past few months following the birth of our son. No, I'm not comparing days with a newborn to Paul's time in prison but rather imagining him weary and physically isolated. As Paul prays for the Ephesians, I'm reminded of the "thinking of you" messages from my village of moms that got me through those first few weeks and the similar notes I was able to send. There is immense value in a common purpose and having others on the journey with us. — Alisa Ramsey

Friday, Nov. 20, 2026

God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. — Ephesians 1:20-23

Paul sees the risen Christ wielding nothing less than God's own authority, outranking all other "authority and power and dominion" on earth. I think it's interesting that Paul wrote so much of the New Testament, considering his past as a Pharisee. It's wild to think that one of the religious authorities Jesus was criticizing, a man who persecuted and locked up Jesus' followers, a Roman citizen walking to Damascus to put more Christians in jail—this man would end up becoming one of the most influential people in Christian history based on the power he experienced when he finally met Christ himself. — Ben Gloe

Saturday, Nov. 21, 2026

Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'" — Matthew 25:31-40

Last summer on my lunch break, I walked down the street toward a favorite coffee shop. As I turned the corner, I saw a man sprawled out on the sidewalk, disheveled, wearing a yellow T-shirt and too many pairs of pants. I averted my eyes and walked on, feeling a little scared and also not wanting to disturb him. I was halfway down the block before I turned and went back. What could I do to help this man? He had very likely passed out from drugs and dehydration. I

called the Downtown CID—my colleagues. They checked on him and called an ambulance. I did not wait for the ambulance but went back to work, wondering how our social connections and systems had become so broken … and wondering, was I doing enough to care for my neighbors? – Ann Holliday

Sunday, Nov. 22, 2026

Jesus continued his teaching, saying, "Then the king will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life." – Matthew 25:41-46

Biblical scholars point to this passage as Christ's stern condemnation of indifference to human suffering. As Christians, we acknowledge the sin of indifference in our General Confession – forgive us for what we have done and left undone. Jesus made this personal: "You did not do it to me." There is human suffering all around me, yet it is easy to navigate around it. I find myself taking the path of least resistance at times, feeling good that part of my pledge goes to outreach ministries and thus touches the lives of the less fortunate. Passive is better than indifferent, isn't it? Perhaps, but not by much, as this passage indicates. I should be more accountable and literally show up to tend to the least of my brothers and sisters. – Paul Wurth

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